

# SEC Football Media Days

Tuesday, July 14, 2015

**Steve Spurrier**

South Carolina



KEVIN TRAINOR: At this time, we're joined by the head coach of the South Carolina Gamecocks, Coach Steve Spurrier. We'll ask Coach to make an opening comment, and then we'll take your questions. Coach?

COACH SPURRIER: Thanks, Kevin. A lot of familiar faces out there after a lot of years coming to this event. I figured a bunch of you guys would have retired by now. [ Laughter ]. Just kidding. Good to be here. Good to be back. We've got a good team at South Carolina ready to go this year. We had a little bit of a struggle in the middle of last season. As most of you know, we lost four out of five in the middle of the year, and it looked like we were definitely heading for a losing season, but really proud of the team, the players, everyone involved with the team. We won three of the last four. Somehow or another, won a game down in The Swamp, very fortunate, and then beat Miami in a Bowl game. So we got rejuvenated. We got new life. We were 7-6, same as Tennessee and the same as Arkansas, and I think they're sort of celebrating big seasons last year. So we were celebrating also. We were doing some cartwheels and high fiving after that Independence Bowl game because it was a year that could have gone real south, and guys hung in there and somehow or another found a way to win the game. Got a new coach, John Hoke. John was with me in Florida in 2001, 14 years ago. We led the SEC in total defense and in scoring defense that year. That year was really one of the best teams we had in the 12 years I was there. Only played two close games and lost both of them, lost to Auburn and Tennessee, finished third in the nation, won the Orange Bowl. And that was a disappointing year because that team could have done a little bit better. Anyway, after that year, I decided to go pro. I went to the NFL, and John Hoke went to the NFL. I lasted two years, and John Hoke lasted 13. So he's a lot smarter, better coach than I am. Yeah, he lasted 13 years. He's been with some really, really sharp defensive coaches, Lovie Smith, head coach of the Bucs, Rod Marinelli, the coordinator of the Dallas Cowboys, and we know what Cowboys turned their defense around in one year. Arkansas turned theirs around in one year. You can get a lot better on defense. We've got good coaches at South Carolina, but for whatever reason last year, we did not play well defensively. Probably more my fault than anybody's. So we made a few changes in bringing in John Hoke to coordinate, along with Lorenzo Ward,

has gone very smoothly during spring ball and preseason, but we've got to do it on the field. So we're anxious and eagerly awaiting preseason practice. Players report August 3rd, and we play September 3rd, the Thursday night ESPN game in Charlotte against North Carolina Tar Heels. So we're looking forward to doing that. We've got some new defensive players. We'll have a new quarterback. Got a lot of new players across the board. But we're hoping to return to where we were the prior three years, a top ten team. We believe we have a fighting chance to do that. I know the critics are out there, and that's why they're called critics. They criticize every chance they get, and we gave them some chances to criticize us last year, which is okay. That's part of our sport. But we're really looking forward to this year. We're sort of anxious and eager to see what we can do. We brought three players up here with us, I guess will be in here eventually. Pharoh Cooper. We call him the South Carolina Pharoh, not the American Pharaoh, South Carolina Pharoh. But he's a really good player. He can play receiver, shotgun, quarterback, throw, run. He's really an All-American type player. Skai Moore, our linebacker, is here. Most valuable player in the Independence Bowl. He'll be a three-year starter at linebacker for us. And our kicker, Elliott Fry. Maybe one of the best kickers we've ever had in South Carolina. Maybe the best. He's a clutch kid. He's kicked many a good field goal to help us win some ball games. So you'll hear from them later. Okay. Any questions?

**Q. Good morning, Coach. How has the specific cost of attendance offered by your school affected your program and your recruiting?**

COACH SPURRIER: I guess we'll find out in February when they sign. Commitment-wise, we've got a few, probably normal around the country. But we're a little bit above the average, I think. We're right around \$4,200 and so forth. So we've learned that whatever it is, it is. We're not going to argue or cry about it. If some schools can give a little bit more, so be it. Supposedly, the federal government regulates this. The chief financial officer at each school sets the number, and that's just the way it is. Let's go play ball. We're not going to worry about it. We're going to get our athletes that \$4,209, I think is what it was. So we'll live with it.

**Q. How do you feel about your quarterback**

**situation going into fall camp? Do you feel like it's resolved as far as the starter?**

COACH SPURRIER: No, it hasn't been resolved. We've had three quarterbacks that rotated around during spring practice, and statistically in the spring game, they're very even. Percentage-wise, about the same, yards, touchdowns, all that. So we're going to keep competing during preseason practice. We've got a month before the first game. So we should be able to figure out who can play the best. Connor Mitch, good player. Perry Orth, Michael Scarnecchia. And we've got a freshman kid, Lorenzo Nunez, excellent runner, pretty good passer also. I know you can't get four ready to play, but we'll have maybe some plays for Lorenzo Nunez and the other guys. I've been a coach to play two quarterbacks. I think you all know that. And you can win with two. There's nothing in the rule book that says you have to have one. So if we do play more than one, it will be because both of them are about the same ability-wise.

**Q. Steve, how close do you come to walking away at the end of last year? And how much did the Miami game rejuvenate you?**

COACH SPURRIER: It rejuvenated us. I don't know how close I came to walking away, but when you lose four out of five, and three of them we had a two-touchdown lead with four minutes to play, 13 points against Missouri with about 4:30 or 5:00; and Kentucky and Tennessee, 14-point leads. We didn't stay on the field offensively, and then, of course, we didn't stop them on defense. Those were some tough losses. I was watching Dustin Johnson interviewed on the Golf Channel the other day, and they said, Dustin, after you three-putted at Chambers Bay, you didn't come to the trophy presentation. Why weren't you there? Gee, the guy just three-putted from 12 feet. He just said, I needed to get away. But he's back, and he feels good. I think he's got a wonderful chance to win it. After we sort of blew a game, or you can say Tennessee beat us, but we couldn't hold on to a 14-point lead with a little over four minutes, yeah, I felt like getting away a minute. I was quickly at the press conference and left. So hopefully, people can understand, some losses are tougher than others, especially when you have a good lead and you can't hold it. But we're rejuvenated with the end, with the Bowl game, 7-6, huge win for our program, for me, for all of us. And getting John Hoke there is, I think, going to really be helpful. We've got good coaches, but for whatever reason, we just didn't communicate. We can play a lot better defensively, and I think everybody's going to see that this year. So that's given all of us, I think, an extra life there at South Carolina.

**Q. Coach, you talked about the quarterbacks trying to get into the preparation of this battle. You had a**

**lot of good ones in your time, especially Rex Grossman, Doug Johnson, of course, Jesse Palmer. Great was, of course, South Carolina's Connor Shaw and Dylan Thompson. But in the last couple of seasons, you've started to become more balanced. What's made that happen?**

COACH SPURRIER: About running the ball more?

**Q. Yes, about running the ball more, about being balanced totally.**

COACH SPURRIER: Well, we have excellent runners. We've got a pretty good running scheme, offensive line and so forth. We need to stay on the field. I think we all know the offense that can stay on the field a long time really helps your defense and helps you win the game. I was asked recently at a booster club, how come you seem to run all the time on first down now? My answer was we need to stay on the field. If we're going to win, we've got to stay out there and not only drive for touchdowns, but we've got to consume some clock. I was watching a replay on the SEC Network, they showed our game with Clemson of I think it was 2013. Clemson only had seven plays, I think, right toward the end of the first half. So we were able to stay out there and made seven out of eight third-down conversions. When you can do those things, that's as good as three quick touchdowns if you can keep the other team on the sideline. So that's sort of our best way to try to win. If you've got a defense that can get the ball right back immediately, you can go out there and fire three passes. If you don't hit anything, so what, you'll get it back in a minute. But we weren't quite like that.

**Q. Coach, I know this is a sad subject, but the murders in Charleston, how did they affect you? You've always been adamant about bringing that confederate flag down. Your reaction when they finally did?**

COACH SPURRIER: Well, it was a tragedy, obviously, nine innocent people to be killed like that. I applaud our Governor for setting the initiative to remove the flag, and obviously it was received very well by just about everyone in our state and around the country. Obviously, all of us in college sports, we know the importance of equality, race relations, everybody getting along. So certainly, I think all the coaches all over -- I know all over South Carolina was happy and glad to see the flag come down.

**Q. Coach Spurrier, I was just curious, you've had some pretty impactful games with Missouri the last couple years, some tight games. Are they becoming something of a rival for you guys? Do you feel like they're the team to beat in the SEC East after winning the titles the last two years?**

COACH SPURRIER: A little bit, I guess. I really like

Coach Pinkel. He and Mark Richt have been there in the conference the longest, and I think Les Miles and I are the third longest at ten years apiece at our school. So we've showed some longevity at our school, especially Coach Pinkel. They do a super job, Missouri. I really think they maximize the talent that they have there. Their defense plays hard, tough, aggressive, gets a bunch of turnovers, and their offense does enough to win a whole bunch of ball games. For those guys to go 7-1 two years in a row and win the East, it's wonderful. It's a wonderful accomplishment for Missouri. We have that little trophy, what we call the Battle of Columbias, and they got it last year. They scored two at the end on us. But it's a nice little rivalry. We've only been playing them for three years. So it's not historic or anything like that.

**Q. Coach, top recruits come in with a ton of hype each year, and you're obviously familiar with this having dealt with Jadeveon Clowney. How did you go about handling the outside noise with Jadeveon, particularly when he was a freshman? Is there a problem handling the top recruit in the country?**

COACH SPURRIER: You handle them a little differently. As Coach John Wooden used to say, he treats everybody the way they deserve to be treated. Every now and then, I'll tell the player, are we going to have to put you on the Clowney program? But no, he was fine. He was fine most of the time. He had some little nagging injuries that prevented running after practice, things of that nature, but he was such a marvelous athlete, he really -- when the ball was snapped, he was the best. Sometimes you have a different program, but as long as they produce during the ball games, I think all the teammates understand that, hey, he's going to be there when the ball game starts and go from there.

**Q. There's been some situations here in the past few weeks in college football, for example, the Florida State University where they've been having issues with some of the players off the field. What do you do as a coach to make sure that your players and the guys you recruit stay out of those bad situations?**

COACH SPURRIER: Somebody asked me earlier, Coach, you all haven't had any problems in some time at South Carolina. What are you doing differently? I've always had a rule as a coach that, if you ever hit a girl, you're finished. We've lost two at South Carolina. Fortunately, they were not star players. If it they were star players, it would have gone all over the country. So we quietly got them to transfer or leave or what have you. So our players know, if they ever hit a girl, they're not going to play at South Carolina. And we enforce that rule. Other than that, we've probably had

our share of little things here and there, but nothing too bad. Most of our problems have not been starters or star players. So it doesn't hit the player too much.

**Q. Steve, this is your 26th year as a college head coach. How have you kept your sanity and your health to last this long? And how do you evaluate yourself at the end of every year to say, okay, I'm going to go another year?**

COACH SPURRIER: Same way you sports writers do it, I think [laughter]. Yeah, I really think the program I own helps to hang around a long time. Somebody said, why are you still coaching? I said, well, I forgot to get fired, and I'm not going to cheat. That's about the way you lose your job. You get fired for losing or you cheat, and then they get somebody else. So I've not done any of those to any extent big time, I guess. But I do get away probably more in the off-season than a lot of coaches. I know I workout more during the season than most all coaches. And I've got excellent assistant coaches. It's not near as stressful as maybe some people make it out to be. And I've got about my whole family right there in Columbia, so there's not a pull to be around grandkids all over the place as much. Just one daughter lives in Panama city, Amy. She came to every game last year. But the big thing is we're winning. That's the big thing. We're winning, and it's fun. And we still have never won an SEC. Nobody gives us a chance this year, which is good. Stranger things have happened. We still have lofty goals. But we need to return to being a top ten team. I don't think we're too far away from returning to that.

**Q. Connor Mitch, your starter going into practice at quarterback, with a first year starter at quarterback, is it hard to develop that leadership like you need, say, a seasoned player over the years like Connor Shaw?**

COACH SPURRIER: We don't have a starter going into preseason practice. He may go out there with the first bunch, but it's pretty much wide open. If Connor Mitch is the best, and he easily could be, he'll be the starter. We believe in letting every player earn it and go from there. Second part of the question, what was it?

**Q. Leadership.**

COACH SPURRIER: Developing leadership. Leaders are always players who play a lot and lead by example. You've got to play a lot and play well, then you've got a chance to be a leader. That's just sort of my opinion. We've had some backup guys who like to scream and yell in the locker room, and I tell his assistant coach, tell him nobody's listening to him. You've got to tone it down a little bit. You have to be a good player. You have to be a good player and say, come on, let's go, guys.

**Q. I'm not trying to advocate anything here, but 70 years old, do you allow yourself to think of an exit strategy? Do you think three more years? Five more years? Twenty more years?**

COACH SPURRIER: Well, like I told people, I breezed right through age 60, breezed right through 65, and I'm going to try my best to breeze right on through 70. I can still remember just about everything. So mentally, I think I'm the same as I was. We got two people running for president, I think Hillary and Donald Trump are both 69, I believe. Coach K at Duke, he's still doing pretty good at, I think 69 also. So the age really doesn't mean a lot. The number on your years is not what's important. It's whether you can function physically, emotionally, mentally, get your team ready to play. That's what's important. We've got some goals there that we've not hit yet. That retirement thing, I don't think I'd be very good at it. I can go to the beach and stay four or five days, and, hey, let's get on out of here. We've been here long enough. None of us know how long we're going to be here. None of us know. All of us coaches, we all hope to coach a long time. We've got some coaches in our league may go to the NFL someday. There's no guarantee they're going to be at this school the way some of those NFL teams can offer \$15 million, \$20 million a year to a coach. If one of them offered Coach Saban, it would make that \$7.2 million look paltry to him probably, and they easily could. Those guys have a lot of money up there, as we all know. There's no guarantee. Kevin Sumlin had a chance to go to the pros two or three years ago. None of us know exactly how long we'll be coaching at places. In fact, Danny Sheridan. Danny's not here, is he? I wish he did the odds on every coach being there four years from now, set the odds on it. I don't know if you'd bet on that, but it would be something fun to bet on, wouldn't it? Who would be here four years from now? I don't know. Just something to think about. What I'm trying to say is you don't know what's going to happen down the road.

**Q. A lot of programs are plugging in quarterbacks, transfer quarterbacks. What do you think of that concept, and why have you kind of stayed away from that?**

COACH SPURRIER: We think we've recruited some pretty good quarterbacks, and we think they're very capable of playing well for us. When you bring one in from somewhere else, you're sort of telling the guys you got, we don't think you're very good, I would imagine. But now if a guy is really a superstar and you've got a chance to get one, that may be different. I don't know. We've got a safety coming in that played at Kansas last year, Isaiah. He's on campus now. So we do bring in some players at other positions in that category, but we've not done a quarterback.

**Q. Coach, I'm interested in an answer you gave Pat Dooley. You said, you don't know how close you came to walking away last year. Did you tell anybody that --**

COACH SPURRIER: Listen, you ever lost four out of five, you had a chance to win, and two of them by two touchdowns? You've never lost the way we were losing. It wears on you a little bit. You need something to pick you back up. Obviously, the Bowl game, all the recruits coming. When the recruits sign on, they're sort of looking you in the eye and saying, Coach, you know I'm signing on to play for you, don't you? That's what they're sort of saying. It's tough. It's tough to walk away from these guys. Now, if we go bad and they need a new coach there, then I'd be the first one to say, you need a new coach here. But right now I think the fans still like me there. I think all the records and so forth that we have there are still pretty good. Somebody told me the other day I'm the youngest coach in the SEC that's won four straight Bowl games. Did you know that? Youngest coach to have done that right now. You all knew that, didn't you? Okay. Just a little something.

**Q. Coach, how do you think that you've evolved in your 25 or so years as a football coach? And also, how's your golf game?**

COACH SPURRIER: Golf game's not near what it used to be. Haven't played quite as much this year for some reason. But I think we run the ball a lot more than we used to, a little bit more conservative for whatever reason. Very seldom do we throw 45, 55 times a game. Unless we get behind early. Really, we didn't get behind a lot early. Texas A&M, now, they had a field day on us that first game last year. We gave up almost 800 yards and 39 first downs and so forth. That was the only one that we got really clobbered pretty much. But anyway, it's a little more conservative probably.

**Q. Steve, you were in the conference the same time as Kenny Stabler who just recently passed. Just wondering what your recollections of him were.**

COACH SPURRIER: Yeah, Kenny -- actually, I think his -- what was his last year? '67 or '68, something like that? My last year was actually '66. He was one of the all time best and probably made his mark more as a pro, a little bit like Joe Namath. Namath was an excellent quarterback at Alabama, but his big years, Super Bowl years were in the NFL. Kenny's probably one of the best to ever play at NFL quarterback, no question about it. I was sad to read about that.

**Q. You always seem a little bit more excited when you beat Georgia. Why is that?**

COACH SPURRIER: I don't think -- you didn't see me after the Miami game, Independence Bowl? I think that was the most fired up all of us were because we went

from losers to winners. When you go into a game 6-6, there's a lot on it. Just to change the subject a little bit, I've learned a lot better appreciation for all the Bowl games. I really have. Everybody can't play in the SEC Championship game. Only two teams can get there. Teams can have winning records or even 6-6 with a chance to have a winning record, a chance to win a Bowl game, and when you watch the team that wins celebrate, you watch Wisconsin in Capital One, the Gators in that Birmingham Bowl, and us in Independence, I'll tell you, it's a thrill to win that last game. I like the four-team playoff certainly, but there is a place for all these Bowl games. There's a place because somebody's going to be very, very happy when that last one's over.

**Q. Nobody's really -- not too many people are arguing against the transfer rule relating to domestic violence, but do you also worry that, until other conferences or unless other conferences adopt the standard, that there's a bit of a competitive disadvantage potentially?**

COACH SPURRIER: I've heard some coaches say that. I guess potentially it could be a little bit. But the SEC has their rules, and we live by them. Our rules are different on that satellite camp issue also, where a lot of Big Ten teams come into the South, into Texas, into Florida, and set up a camp and so forth. SEC rules are against that also. Yeah, you could be, but I don't know. We all got 85 scholarships. We all got a chance to get 85 players. Try to train them, coach them, develop them, be the best you can be. So that's just the way it is.