

# SEC Football Media Days

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## Coach Gary Pinkel

Missouri



KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by University of Missouri head coach Gary Pinkel.

COACH PINKEL: Good afternoon, everybody. Appreciate you being here. It's amazing how you turn around, you're flying back after your Bowl game and thinking you've got so many months, it seems like an eternity, until you play again, and here we are walking in here, getting after it. First of all, I'd just like to thank Commissioner Slive for all he did. I feel so fortunate that I got three years to watch his leadership and sit in meetings with him and see how he deals with people and the great things, and I'd heard so many things prior to coming to the SEC about the kind of man he is, the kind of leader he is. We lost a great man. He did a phenomenal job, and I'm just happy that I could be a part of it a little bit. I think Greg Sankey was certainly my vote the day it happened, and I think we'll do a great job also. I just thought it was important that I mention that. We just kind of do what we do at Mizzou right now. We're doing what we always do. We analyze our program, absolutely everything we do, yearly, every detail. We try to get better about 5 percent a year. We're not going to change a lot of things because what we do works, but we always try to stay on the cutting edge to improve as a football program, and that's no different than now. So we focus on what we call Mizzou Made. And Mizzou Made is the player development. It's developing them as young men, and I have a great responsibility to do that, when they leave me and how they grow and mature as young men, to develop them as students. Our APR ranking has been one of the best in the nation over the years. It's been very high on a consistent basis. Last five years, we've graduated 92 percent of our seniors, so the academic responsibility that we have. And then the football responsibility of strength, speed, quickness development, mental toughness development, and we have a plan and system in place for all those things, and that's what we do, and that's Mizzou Made. We think we do it as good as anybody in the country. That's what we're doing. I'm a process guy, process football program. Learned that from the great Don James. And we're working very hard now, and our players are working out as we speak and attending class and so on and so forth. So here we go.

**Q. Is the way you recruit and develop players, is that by design or necessity in terms of, when your**

**recruiting rankings come out, you guys are never really up there high, but at the end of the year, you've won these back-to-back East championships in a tough conference?**

COACH PINKEL: We don't look at stars, never have, in our evaluation. It's never come up in our system that we use. Our system is designed to check out people for the kind of people that they are, try to get very competitive people, try to bring students in your program that want to excel. And they have to have size and speed, especially speed, potential. They don't really have to be great football players. We can teach them how to be great football players. And I thank you on that. I mean, a lot of our rankings aren't that high. We were fifth in number of players drafted last year. In first round draft choices we've been, in the last seven years, I think, top five in the nation, so we're doing something right. But I think it's a matter of we choose who we want to choose, and it's our player development program, the things that we do when we get them. I believe in what we do, and we just kind of focus on ourselves and the process and work very, very hard.

**Q. You guys have won the division the last two years, but you don't hear a lot of buzz about it, as in can Mizzou three-peat. You guys were picked pretty low the last two years. Seemed like you're picked in the middle of the pack. What are your feelings about that? Do you feel you guys aren't getting the respect you've earned?**

COACH PINKEL: I think it probably bothers my players a little bit more than me. I don't really talk about that. I don't really go there. I'll tell you how you get respect is graduating your players, developing our students into young men, and winning football games. That's how you get respect. You want more respect, do it at a better level and win at a higher level. I just know this, we're proud to be part of the SEC. It's a great league, man. You've got to buckle it up and go play and deliver every Saturday. Remarkably competitive. You earn all those things, and that's the way I was taught, and that's the way I handle our football program.

**Q. Coach, last year you all finished 13th in total offense, 8th in rushing, and 10th in passing. How do you expect to improve the offensive side to make sure the numbers go up after going to the SEC title game back to back years?**

COACH PINKEL: I think last year we adjusted a little bit too because our defense probably played the best defense we've played since we've been in the league. We adjusted a little bit. We're real smart about -- try to be smart about what we did as far as the time on the clock, as far as not turning the ball over, things like that. I think we certainly have to improve. We need more consistency. There's no question about that. I think that Maty Mauk, he's 14-4 as a starter. He's remarkably good under pressure. We need more consistency from him. He knows that. This will be his second year starting this year. But there's also the receiving corps, the offensive line, running backs, everybody else that has their role in being successful. So we're working hard and know that we certainly want to improve on that and get better.

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

COACH PINKEL: Honestly, we didn't really talk about it at all recruiting-wise. I don't know -- first of all, I think the most important thing is -- and I've been a proponent of this for several years and got criticized quite a bit. We're doing the right things for our student-athletes, for our students. All of them, men and women in the Power Five, obviously, financially, we can do it. We're doing the right things to help them. They can't go home and work three months and then come back. They don't do that anymore, none of the men or women or the students that we have. They work on -- they go to school, and they do their sport. So this allows them to get some more money in the right way, and most importantly, I think it's the right way. How the different formulas for coming up with cost of attendance, I think that will be reviewed the next year or two. But I think we don't forget the reason why we did this was to help the student-athletes. I think it's a huge plus for them.

**Q. I know with Alabama, Alabama has a lot of depth along the defensive line and has a big rotation there, but going into the SEC Championship game last year, how much did you guys focus on two players in particular, 90 and 86, Jarran Reed and A'Shawn Robinson? And just overall, what's your opinion of them as players?**

COACH PINKEL: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the very, very end of that.

**Q. Just overall, going along with how much you focused on them going into the game, what's your overall opinion of them?**

COACH PINKEL: They're obviously great players. They're very competitive. When you play a team like Alabama, you've got to focus on everybody. You expect to do that when you're playing in that game.

They did a great job against us and certainly a great group of players.

**Q. Coach, Markus Golden and Shane Ray were two intense pass rushers last season. Of course, they're now in the National Football League. This team returns Kentrell Brothers, a very instinctive linebacker. Just talk about the impact he's made from spring to right now.**

COACH PINKEL: Kentrell is really a heck of an athlete. He's from Oklahoma. He came in to us, and I've watched him mature over the years. He can run. He's quick. He's competitive. He's a great athlete. I thought he had an exceptional year a year ago, and I think now what he can do is take his game, and that's the challenge, take it to a much, much higher level. Charles Harris is a guy that we have also on our defensive line, defensive end that's a young player, but I think he has potential to be like some of the guys you've talked about. We've been known to have a lot of high level defensive linemen, and I think that will continue. Fortunately or unfortunately, we lost Harold Brantley -- I think that would have been one of the best players in the SEC, and therefore in the nation -- when he got in a car accident. The good news is he's going to be fine, most importantly. The good news is he can -- all that being in a car wreck, he had a lot of injuries, they can all heal, and he can come back and accomplish all his goals, and we'll get him back next year. But that also puts some -- we have to make some adjustments there, understanding we're losing a great player. Everybody's got to do that. That could happen the third game of the season. It could happen to anybody in our league.

**Q. A couple things. One is you have been able to reload on the defensive line. How's that going? Secondly, what has Maty Mauk worked on during the off-season to kind of improve his consistency?**

COACH PINKEL: Talk about defensive line, Craig Kulgowski, our defensive line coach, has done an outstanding job. What we're doing is training players and fundamentally getting better and keep working and sliding them in. I just mentioned a couple of other names of players that I think will have a chance to come in and compete and do a great job. Josh Augusta is another player that played that will be a junior this year, Ricky Hatley and others. That will be a challenge for us. I think at quarterbacks, you're always trying to make your game better. I think certainly people -- we all know this, that the people around the quarterbacks play at a high level, it helps your quarterback better. But I think what Maty's doing, we need more consistency out of the position. He understands that. As I mentioned before, he's a pressure pack player. He plays very well under pressure. But the consistency of having an offense

that produces, I think, requires consistency from that position. He's just worked very, very hard, all fundamentals, film study, defensive recognition, and timing with his players, and that's what he's working very hard to do.

**Q. Gary, regarding Harold, first of all, how are his spirits? And then who fills his leadership void?**

COACH PINKEL: First of all, his spirits are he's doing good. He has his moments. Henry Josey a couple of years ago kind of went through the same thing, similar type thing. But there's a guy, great athlete, phenomenal leadership, as you mentioned. He kind of took it over there when Shane and Mark and some of those other guys left. So that will be a loss, but we have to work around that. But Harold will -- Harold is going to be okay. He's going to have his moments. He anticipated being an All-American this year and worked that hard to do and wanted to help us win. It's just going to put on -- we're going to be on pause for a while. So we have to help him. We do that at Mizzou. He's part of our family. We reach down and pick him up and put our arm around him and help him through it. He'll develop. And the great thing is he's going to be okay, number one. He can be 100 percent healthy, number two. And he can accomplish all his goals and graduate. But we'll help him through it as he goes.

**Q. Coach Pinkel, you're going to be bringing in a guy this fall in Terry Beckner Jr., who's going to have a lot of attention on him. And a few years ago, Dorial Green-Beckham was kind of in that situation too. How big of a challenge is it for the coach to try to manage expectations, especially of fans, when you bring in a guy that's so highly touted, that they are going to want to see big things from him right from the get go?**

COACH PINKEL: Certainly with Harold's injury, Terry's name has come up quite a bit, as far as being able to come in and play right away. As you well, he was one the top defensive lineman in the nation last year out of East St. Louis High School. One thing about him, he doesn't get caught up in a lot of stuff. It's kind of nice. The shining light is not really him. I think he's a little bit shy that way. I just think we have to get him to focus on becoming a better player and keep his priorities right. I think you always try to do that. You try to help kids. Priorities and humility is hugely important for success, and those are things we try to instill in our players.

**Q. Coach, you guys are playing your second game at Arkansas State. They don't get a lot of SEC teams going in there. I know St. Louis tried to get that game moved, their sports commission. How did that game come about? How do you feel about playing a Sunbelt team on the road?**

COACH PINKEL: First of all, Arkansas State is a really

good football team and a really good program. When we made the transition scheduling-wise, we were down to the end in trying to establish a schedule. It's very difficult because so many people so far in advance do things. That was the deal. That was the only deal we could get. We thought we'd be able to move it to St. Louis possibly. We thought, at the end of the day, that's what would happen, but they don't want to do that. We would not normally do that, but that's what we had to do in order to get the game, and by the way, they're obviously a very, very good football team also. But that's the reasoning behind it.

**Q. Why do you think Maty Mauk struggled so much last year against Georgia?**

COACH PINKEL: Against Georgia? First of all, I think Georgia did a real good job. You turn the ball over five times, and it's going to be difficult to win a football game. So I don't think you necessarily blame Maty Mauk. I got to get my players to play better. You're not going to win any games when you turn the ball over five times.

**Q. Coach, how much personal satisfaction do you take in seeing a young coach like Alex Grinch move up to becoming a defensive coordinator at a Power Five school, and how do you think he'll do at Washington State?**

COACH PINKEL: Alex Grinch coached our safeties a year ago, young coach, and got hired at Washington State to be defensive coordinator there. It didn't surprise me. Very, very sharp guy. I think that without a doubt he'll do a great job. Now, I'm an old Washington Husky, so I don't know if I want him doing that great a job. But from the standpoint of he has a remarkable future. I've lost very few coaches since I've been at Missouri. Every one I've lost has been for professional advancement, and I think we'll do a great, great job.

**Q. Coaches, I know you guys transitioned to the SEC, but the Kansas-Missouri game was absolutely huge every year. Now they have a nine-game conference schedule they have to play. You guys are now playing Arkansas and trying to start that border war. How bad do the fans want the Kansas-Missouri game back? And what's the possibility?**

COACH PINKEL: I don't think there's any question the fans want it back. It's one of the longest rivalries in college football. As you well know, when we moved it into Kansas City, Arrowhead Stadium, we've had some phenomenal games down there. Hopefully, sometime down the road we can get it in the beginning part of the season when both teams have good records, play in the early part of September, and get that thing going again. We've got to find a way -- I think both fans would love it, and I think that maybe down the road that will



happen.

**Q. Gary, when the predictions are coming out tomorrow from the media, are you kind of hoping they pick you third or fourth or fifth?**

COACH PINKEL: Honestly, I don't know where we've been picked since I've been here. I don't want to disturb anybody here, but honestly, anybody that knows me, I don't ever read newspapers, ever. I don't do that, about our football team. Chad Moller keeps me in tune of what's happening out there, but I have no idea. If you picked us first or third or fourth or fifth, it would have no impact on me at all. Just being honest with you.

**Q. Just an FYI, you guys were picked sixth two years ago and fourth last year.**

COACH PINKEL: Is that right? That upsets me.

**Q. You did a lot better than that. Hey, you've got a center who started 40 straight games. How big is that just to have a guy who started 40 games? Also at a key position like that.**

COACH PINKEL: Evan Boehm, he was a national recruit out of Kansas City. I knew him when he was 13 years old. His father is a high school football coach there. He's done a great job. You're a coach's son, you've just been a part of football your whole life. So he comes in with great leadership skills, gung ho, competitive, and that's the way he is. He had a phenomenal career thus far. It's hard to believe that this is his fourth year now. He started every game since he's been here. I thought he played at a very, very high level a year ago, and I think he's on Rimington watch list right now, and he should be. What he wants to do now is just take his game to a whole different level. That's hard to do. It's hard to get there. But I think he's worked very hard to get that done.

**Q. Coach, Chase Abbington, the JuCo transfer, what does he bring to the table as far as taking carries away and getting some rest for Russell in the backfield?**

COACH PINKEL: We have Ish Witter back there also. Morgan Steward is a great player out of Kansas City with injury problems. We're going to get him back there too. Chase is finishing up class right now, but he's obviously a tremendous athlete. He's out of St. Louis and a guy with great athleticism. He's got size. He's a real big running back from our standpoint. I think he can be a real plus for us, if he takes care of his academics.

**Q. Coach, your game with Arkansas is going to be on Friday again. Looks like that might be a traditional thing where they schedule it for**

**Saturday but keep moving it to Friday. Is that a game you like playing on Friday of that Thanksgiving weekend?**

COACH PINKEL: It worked out well last year in terms of the timing. You make an adjustment during the week for it, coming off a Saturday game generally. I don't know if it will continue to be on Friday. I know that he's done a great job building that program, and I think it's going to become -- we talk about the Kansas rivalry, it's historic from the Big Eight and the Big 12, but certainly I think the Arkansas, them just being adjacent states to one another, I think that it could really turn into a great, great rivalry. It would be nice if it was that big of a game that it was always on Fridays. That would be great with me.

**Q. Coach, can you talk about where your facilities are at now, where you think they were when you got in the league, and how did you decide what you needed compared to other schools? Was there studies of what other SEC schools were doing? That kind of thing.**

COACH PINKEL: I think that's critically important. When we came to the league four years ago, that was one thing they asked me my opinions on going into the SEC. My whole thing is, if you're not committed to building and doing the right things, then don't get in the league because they'll just swallow you up. So we put a whole east side addition on since then. We have now we're working on getting a football complex in the south end of our end zone of our stadium. And there's several other things that we're doing. I kid our alumni saying that, when you drive by in Columbia, it's a great university. We've got some great facilities. But if you don't see a crane up, there's something wrong. You've got to always see cranes. So at the time, I gave them Mike Alden's phone number to call him if they didn't see any cranes. Now I'm going to give them Mack Rhoades. We've got to always be building. That's the way the league is, and that's also the exciting thing about the league.