

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Jim McElwain

Florida

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Introducing the 2015 SEC Coach of the Year, Jim McElwain. Jim?

COACH McELWAIN: We're back. How is everybody doing? All right? Well, first and foremost, you know what? Welcome, guys. Welcome to the start of another season, and should be an a lot of fun. I know how excited we are to kind of get started, to build on what happened last year, let you know how proud I am of those guys and how they held themselves to a little higher standard.

Really took pride in giving themselves an opportunity to get to Atlanta, and I was really excited for not only our players, but our organization, just to be able to experience that event, because that is one of the greatest events there is, and it was a lot of fun.

And yet very disappointed in how we finished. Not something that we're proud of, and not something that, you know, I take very lightly. Yet, at the same time, it was an opportunity for us to kind of learn. And really, as you go through life, the piece of learning is what it's all about. And by no means can you ever be satisfied, can you ever be -- well, you know what, we exceeded expectations, so let's call it good. That wasn't good.

And learning from that, it will be interesting to see how this year's team responds. We lost some really, really fine players, and I'm excited for them to, you know, move on into the National Football League and get that opportunity to achieve a dream, and yet excited when those guys graduated as well, walking across that stage. That's the most important stage there is.

You know, the three guys you'll get a chance to visit with that are here, two of those, Marcus Maye and Jarrad Davis, chose to come back to school. You know what? I was really excited about that, because they are great leaders. David Sharpe on offense. They had an opportunity to visit with him. Probably the most experienced of any of our players that are returning on the offensive side of the ball with arguably, probably, the most starts.

With that, this should be a lot of fun. Really looking forward to it. Looking forward to see what this team's all about. I've been excited the way our older guys



have grabbed these younger guys. You know? We're able to get 12 of them in at mid-year, which was great. Had an opportunity to go through spring practice. That really helped us.

And then, you know, the 12 new guys that joined us here in mid-June, just seeing how our older guys have helped those guys along, is something that I'm happy to see. And going into year two, you know what, things are good at the University of Florida, and that's the way it should be.

So, with that, love to take some questions.

MODERATOR: If you have a question, please raise your hand.

Q. Coach, what about Luke Del Rio makes it obvious to you that he's a coach's son, and what has your interaction, if any, been with Jack?

COACH McELWAIN: Sure. I got to say this. All four guys we have in that quarterback room I'm really excited about. Luke being one of them who obviously was with us last year, so his familiarity with what we're doing.

I've known Luke a long time. I think he was an eighth grader when he came to camp in Alabama. Obviously, Jack, when they were in Colorado, he's a guy that we stayed in touch with a lot, and so, you know what, I'm excited to see us at that position. And the way Luke is, and Austin, both have kind of elevated the guys around them. It will be fun here during two-a-days to see who takes that step, but, you know, as far as your other question, I had a brief stint with the Raiders, so I'm kind of a Raiders fan and I'm excited for Jack.

Q. When you're looking at this offensive line, everybody always says they want to get five, their best five out there. Is there -- are you trying to get to like a level of eight?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah. In -- obviously our offensive line play has got to get better. That's something we've already talked about and, Pat, you and I have already talked about it already, and yet those three true freshman that played last year had an opportunity to kind of learn under fire, and I'll be excited to see what they learned as we get back.

You know, ideally, what we'd like to be able to do is be ten, where you had, you know, kind of backups at each one of those spots. Whether we get there or not, I'm not sure. Usually in a rotation of nine is ideal. And you got to have versatility at the center spot, and that's something we got to make sure we have as well.

Q. Hey, Coach, I notice all the Nick Saban assistants to get SEC jobs are always in the other division. Is that by coincidence, or is that kind of by design? And what do you think it will take for one of you guys to beat him, and do you guys ever talk about that amongst yourselves?

COACH McELWAIN: I know what an honor it was to work for Coach, what I was able to learn when I was at the University of Alabama. And I was excited to be able to play him. I know this, I'll be excited to play him again this year, because I know it's in Atlanta.

Q. Coach, you talked about your quarterback room previously. It's very interesting that you have two transfers, two freshman. There's a nice dynamic there. What's the difference as a coach when you're recruiting a high school kid as opposed to bringing in a transfer? One player looking a year or two down the road versus one that needs to help you right away?

COACH McELWAIN: I think the key there is having that right mix. Obviously in Austin Appleby, someone who played in big games, he's played in big stadiums, having started in the Big Ten. That's something that's invaluable. You know, in Luke's case, familiarity he had kind of with what we do offensively, I think is good.

The key is to see that competition, and what those guys do to give of themselves, to help those two younger guys in Kyle Trask and Feleipe Franks, how they help them develop. That's what has been kind of fun, is to see some veterans who know how to study a game plan, know how to study install. Kind of from that standpoint help those younger guys come along. Here's the good thing. We've really got good arm talent. I'm excited about being able to stretch the field vertically. Should be a lot of fun.

Q. Considering the way your place kicking transpired last year --

COACH McELWAIN: Are you going come kick for us?

Q. You got a guy now --

COACH McELWAIN: We'll see. I don't think the guy has ever kicked in a game. But we'll find out.

Q. That's what I was wondering. I know you were happy to see what happened in the spring, but do you think it can transfer over to when the lights are really on, what you saw?

COACH McELWAIN: You know, that's going to be interesting. I know this. I was excited to see he was able to buckle his chinstrap. That was awesome. And to see that happen, you know what, that's a step in the right direction. Obviously, he's got a very strong leg, talking about Eddy.

And, you know, Jorge Powell, who will be back, that actually got hurt in the LSU game a year ago, taking over the kicking duties, he's back to being healthy. We'll talk about that same piece. Johnny Townsend really did a great job for us as a punter, on the hidden yardage, the field position, pinning guys down inside the ten. I thought he did an outstanding job of giving the opponent long fields.

So, you know, that's a group that, you know, we'll see. And yet I got total faith in the kickers, and they are a lot of fun to be around, too.

Q. Coach, Nick Saban took a chance on you, bringing you in from Fresno State to run an offense, and of course did very well with that. A couple of national championships. Of course now you're with Florida, had a ten-win season last year. What are some of the things that you value from being around Coach Saban, whether was in the film room, on the field, in telephone conversations? How much did you really value that experience?

COACH McELWAIN: You know, as you go through this, I've been very fortunate. I've been round a lot of great head coaches and guys I've been able to take a lot of things from. Coach, you know, he only asked a couple of things, is work hard and be complete in what you do.

If you think about it, all of us kind of live by that. We have a pretty good chance to be successful. That's something I'll always take.

And yet, when I was head off to Colorado State, he pointed something out. He said: Whatever you do, you got to do it your way. You got to be you. You can't be someone else. And I think that's a piece that I probably tried to take with me, and, you know, because he's one of the best and a guy that I consider, you know, a friend, and a guy that I can lean on at any time.

Q. I'm so sorry, I'm going to ask you another Saban question.

COACH McELWAIN: That's okay.

Q. At this point in his career, what do you think continues to drive him and how much longer do you think he can keep doing it?

COACH McELWAIN: I think he can go forever. He's -- that's just the way he's wired. And I haven't seen one thing, when we were around each other that week of

the SEC Championship game, I didn't see one less bounce in his step, anything like that. And, you know what? He's -- the guy's something special.

Q. Hi, Coach. Can you give us some clarification as to the status on Treon Harris and Antonio Callaway, please?

COACH McELWAIN: Yes, absolutely. They are back on campus, using the academic center and working out, and yet nothing has been resolved yet. And there really isn't -- there isn't a time table on it. So that's about what it is right now.

Q. Coach, what -- how do you regulate players' conduct on Twitter and social media, and do you see any benefit to players being on Twitter, or is it more of a necessary evil that the coaches have to deal with?

COACH McELWAIN: You know, that's a great question. And yet, you know, I'm kind of one of these guys that might -- somewhere there was a history book, and I can't remember -- they talked something about freedom of speech. Something about that. And, you know, I'm not big on censoring, but what I'm into is big on education. And yet, you know, each one of us -- and today that's how a lot of people communicate.

Now, I think the key here is the education piece, understanding you have a choice to use it to affect your brain in a positive way or sometimes maybe say whoop. But you don't get any do-overs. That's part of the education piece.

Look, I'm not here to censor our guys. I'm here to help them. I'm here to educate them. And maybe I'm not doing the greatest job with all of them, and yet at the same time, you know what, growing up is hard and you got to learn some things. And in that case, I think, overall our guys have been pretty darn good.

Q. Florida State handed out some state championship rings after they beat all of the teams in Florida on their schedule. Is that something that you knew anything about? And if your team is able to beat all of the teams in Florida this year, are you going to hand out state championship rings?

COACH McELWAIN: You know, I mean, they won it. So why won't you. That's a hell of a deal. But I don't really get that jacked up in that stuff. I got too much to worry about with our guys. And yet I know what a great job they do up there and what a great program they have. You know, Jimbo has done an outstanding job when he took over changing that thing and winning a bunch of ball games. So I don't know whether our administration has it in our budget to do that. I don't know.

Q. You have been a part of a couple of championship teams, obviously. Did you feel you had a championship team last year when you started out 10-1, and what is the difference between how a championship team might have finished that season and how you guys finished it out?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah, you know, that's kind of an interesting question. I've been kind of driven since I was a little shaver to figure out a way to win. And it didn't matter what we were going to -- what we were participating in, whether it was basketball, Little League Baseball, you know, or whatever it was.

And I think the championship piece, it's not something you can really just go and talk about. It's something that you have to live every single day in the development of getting a little bit better. And, for us, you know, having an opportunity to play in that game was huge, because, you know, I think it was a class of guys in the University of Florida history that might have been the first one to miss Atlanta since the games begun, you know, since they started playing that SEC Championship game. And, I don't know, you guys will have to look it up, but it would have been pretty close.

And, you know, there's something about being at a place and the expectation to be successful, and yet understanding what it takes to be successful is a different deal. I think we learned a lot of lessons, and yet we've got a bunch of new guys. In fact, I think the happiest people on our campus are the people that are going to sell programs because there's a whole bunch of new jerseys out there, and that will be a lot of fun for people to figure out who they are.

Q. Kirby Smart, now the head coach at Georgia, your biggest rival in the SEC. I'm sure you guys had a lot of fun in Alabama. Have you had a chance to reach out to Kirby since he got the job, and how much are you looking forward to that game at Georgia now?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah. I think you may have to check with Tennessee on that one, as far as the biggest rival, but, you know, it's fun. I know this. I'm so excited for Kirby. He's one heck of a ball coach. He's a great guy. He's going to do it the right way. It's a place obviously near and dear to him, being a native there, obviously playing there, all of the things that go into it. And long and well deserved.

And I'm excited for him. And we'll get together and laugh about some stories, and that's always fun. And yet it doesn't matter. When you kind of blow the whistle, you know, it's your guys against their guys and see who comes out.

But I do know this. Well deserved. He'll do a great job. That is a great job. I think everybody that's ever kind of talked, you know, has always thought that University of Georgia job was outstanding. And, you know what, he's put his time in and deserves it.

Q. What allowed you all to be so successful against Chad Kelly last year, and what makes him a special quarterback coming into this season?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah. That guy is really a good player. He's got a great understanding of their system and what they're trying to do. He's very competitive. You can just -- when you watch the tape and you're there live, the guy's always competing and knows exactly what they want him to do. And he now having another year under his belt is just going to be that much more successful at it.

You know, that's one of those things. You know, we have a pretty decent defense, and yet sometimes I've been on both sides of those, and it's hard. And yet they're obviously a great football team. They got great players. I mean, you can see that. So, I think he affects the people the way it needs to happen.

Q. Once again, Coach, having a lot of guys returning on defense, but aside from Jarrad Davis at linebacker, who is somebody else that you guys are grooming up for that role?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah. You know, I like -- Alex Anzalone is coming back. I think you're talking about our linebacker core. Is that what you're hitting on? We have a lot of young guys. A couple of those that came in during the spring, they'll see a lot of time. Not a lot of people talk about Daniel McMillian. He had a great year for us last year both in certain specialty group situations and special teams.

We're going have to count on some of the new names to come in there and give us some valuable time. They're learning from two great guys in Jarrad Davis and Alex Anzalone.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Demarcus Robinson and his -- you know, the journey he went through from some of the issues that he had to now where he's at with the Kansas City Chiefs. What kind of maturity have you seen from him and growth? What do you expect to see from him as an NFL player, and do you think he can carry some of the things he learned from you guys as he begins his NFL career?

COACH McELWAIN: Yeah. There's no doubt. You're talking about an unbelievably talented guy that's very competitive. He's a guy that wants to do what's right, you know. And, you know what, he will -- he'll really have a really good career. I think he made the right

decision. We talked about it. I think it was time and, sure enough, somebody jumped on it. And they saw something that we all knew; that he's a heck of a player.

MODERATOR: All right. Coach, we appreciate your time.

COACH McELWAIN: All right. Thanks, guys. Have a wonderful couple days.