

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 12, 2016

Butch Jones

Tennessee coach

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: To begin the afternoon, our next coach is Butch Jones.

COACH JONES: Well, thank you, Commissioner. It's great to see everyone again. As we always talk about, SEC Media Days are always the kickoff to the start of the football season, and obviously everybody is very, very excited about that.

But I think it's very important. I want to start today off and talk about one of the greatest coaches of all time, regardless of the sport, and that's Tennessee's very own Coach Pat Summitt. And I'm very, very grateful for the time that I was able to spend with her. We spent a lot of time together just talking about everything, and we talk about coaching is creating change, changing young adults, and she was able to do that and I'm very blessed and fortunate.

Every day I start my morning off, I look outside my window and I look down at her statue. And so I wanted to make sure I spoke about that, because she's near and dear to all of our hearts. And everything is about excellence and leaving a legacy, and she definitely did that.

I don't want to overlook all of the hard work and all of the effort by our coaches and our staff, our players the past few years. We talk about everything having a compound effect, everything adds up and becoming 1 percent better each and every day.

And everything, like I said, adds up and it gets to a point where your program gets in an opportunity like we have to be able to compete week in and week out. We're going to continue to build the Tennessee football program for sustained success.

And I say that, sustained success. Right now we're experiencing all-time records, as Commissioner just spoke about, in terms of community service, academics, everything that we do about representing ourselves, graduation rates and now starting to win on the football field.

Three individuals that are representing the University of Tennessee today, not only are they great representatives for the state of Tennessee, the



University of Tennessee or VolNation, but I think they're great representatives for the Southeastern Conference and for all of collegiate football. And I think they're great stories, and I really encourage you to get around these three young men, because I think they're some of the finest young men in the country.

It starts with Joshua Dobbs. I believe we all know his story. Cameron Sutton and Jalen Reeves-Maybin and these three individuals have really been the catalyst. We had three days to assemble a signing class the first year. We spoke about them, about getting Tennessee football back to relevance, and they've really been the foundation piece for us.

In terms of our football program, over the last 18 games, we're 13-5. And the amazing thing, when you look at it of being 13-5 over the last 18 games, is those five losses have come by a combined total of 25 points.

So what are we doing to take the next step as a football program? And we talk about learning how to finish games, learning how to close games out. We talked about clutch plays, making critical plays at critical moments of the game, and we showed everyone examples.

You look at all of the great players. Why are they great players? Because they make a play when it matters the most to lead their team to victory, so we really talked about that.

The key for us is starting fast and finishing strong. Our first seven opponents have a combined win record of almost 70 wins, and they've all seven of those opponents participated in bowl games. So, for us, we have to start fast.

We really haven't had an unusual calendar that I think will be a challenge in and of itself for our football program in terms of we have seven days of training camp. And you say, How can you have seven days? Well, I'm talking about training camp in terms of just football. The way our academic calendar is structured and lays out is we have summer school, we have seven days, and then we start the fall semester.

So we have to make sure we do a great job, that we're ready to go and we take advantage of those seven

days, and we also do a great job of finishing strong academically with summer school combined with training camp.

This year, probably the most experience in terms of playing experience that we've had since we've been at Tennessee. But the unusual thing is we still only have 11 seniors in our football program. And that's very, very unusual.

So, we have to continue to build depth. We have to continue to build experience. And how you build that is through playing time, through recruiting and through growth and development.

In terms of the coaching staff, we have two new additions to our coaching staff. We have a new defensive coordinator in Bob Shoop. Bob has done a great job of coming in. We've really reaped the benefits since he joined our staff. He's done a great job of building the relationships that it takes to be extremely successful with not only our defensive players but everyone in our football family and our football program.

And then Larry Scott, who coaches our tight ends and also be our special teams coordinator, has done a great job, just like Bob, of really establishing relationships. It's new energy. It's new ideas. They've been great additions to our football family. We're excited to open up on the SEC Network on Thursday night. That's an opportunity that we look forward to and we understand the importance of the magnitude any chance you get an opportunity to perform on national television, let alone the SEC Network.

And I'm going to do something that I've never done before, but I'd like to wish my mom a happy birthday. She's a regular on the SEC Network. She's at home right now watching it, and she turns 79 years old today. So, Mom, I love you, and happy birthday.

And I'll answer any questions you all may have.

Q. Hey, Coach, this -- there's not a lot of quarterback experience in the league this year. How much does Josh Dobbs give you guys an advantage going into the season since he does have that experience?

COACH JONES: I can't say enough about Joshua Dobbs. And I think, when you look at the definition of a student-athlete, it starts with Josh Dobbs. When you look at engineering, you look at his curriculum. You look at the time demands that's placed on him from an academic workload and then being the starting quarterback at the University of Tennessee, we always talk about the quarterback at the University of Tennessee, that's a global position, and he's done a

great job.

But you look at community service, you look at the giving of his time. And his game has continued to progress. I still remember, we were talking about it on the plane ride here, as a true freshman and his freshman year we played the University of Florida, and he didn't even make the travel squad. And I believe two games later he's a starting quarterback playing against Auburn.

And, you know, the speed differential was monumental. You could see that. And I thought, you know, the way he competed, it really showed his competitive character and just his growth and his development over time, and, as we all know, you can't put a price tag on experience, that's invaluable. So, to have him leading our offense and being a captain and leading our football program is very comforting as a head coach.

Q. Hey, Coach. Hey, with all of the starters you got back, and the way you guys closed last season with all of those wins, I'm pretty sure you'll be a heavy favorite to win the East. How do you feel about being in that role? Do you feel that's where you should be in the fourth year? And what would it mean to get back to Atlanta? It's been since '07 for Tennessee.

COACH JONES: Well, first of all, you get snapped back in reality right away. We're excited to get here, and we board the bus, and Coach Sumlin changed buses with us, so we had no air conditioning. So it was about 100, 110 degrees on the ride over there. That's a reality check right away.

But you want those expectations. I think it's a compliment to everyone in our program of how far we've come. It's not where you start, it's where you finish. But I think it is a compliment in how we've grown and developed this football program.

I talked about in the introductory part of the speech as a compound effect and being better each and every day. We have to learn from our experiences last year. And as we know, it's a week-to-week season.

The other thing, I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, because I heard yesterday that, in all of the years of the Southeastern Conference, that the team that they picked to be the champion, we've only been right five times. So, we have to control -- we can control, and that's working to be a better football team and football program every day.

Q. Coach, you talked about being able to finish the deal, finish the job. And part of that is having a receiver that can work that chemistry with Joshua

Dobbs. Who are some of the guys in that receiver corps that Dobbs feels comfortable with getting that ball to an open space?

COACH JONES: You bring up a great point. Everyone wants to talk about the quarterback, but sometimes playing winning football at the quarterback position is a by-product to the players around him. We've had the unfortunate circumstances the last couple of years to be decimated by injuries at the wide receiver position. So, one of the keys for us in moving forward and continuing to gain those 25 points is having a healthy receiving corps.

And our players have worked exceptionally hard. Josh Malone is a young man who we really felt, by the end of the year, was doing some really good things for us. He's provided some stability to that position, but great momentum in the summer. We're excited about him. Preston Williams is another young man. Josh Smith has played a lot of football for us, and he's had some clutch plays for us that's helped us win football games in the past. He also helps in the leadership of that position.

We're going to have to rely on some true freshman. And we talk about the constant evolution of our football program, we talk about being nine strong, empower the position and nine strong interpositionally, and that's a position where some of our older players are going to have to do a great job of leading the younger players because we will have to play some true freshman at that position.

Q. Coach, I'd like to ask about Alvin Kamara. What went into the evaluation, because Alvin was a guy who was sort of getting a second chance at Tennessee? How has he responded to that, and what are your expectations this year?

COACH JONES: I think the thing that really defines Alvin Kamara, he was voted a team captain by his peers. Alvin was one of those individuals, when he came to Knoxville, all he did was be quiet and work. And he earned the respect of his peers immediately by his work ethic.

He'll tell you he learned so much from his previous stops, his previous experiences. And he's really applied that to the biggest game, and that's the game of life. He's been a mentor. He's been one of the leaders in the locker room of getting around our younger players and being a great spokesperson for our program and coaching staff. We all know he's an extremely talented and very gifted running back. He's been one of our leaders, and it's been great to see. He's a big part of what we built at Tennessee, and we expect him to have a great year for us.

Q. I've had a chance to go up to Bristol to check out the facility. I know a lot of football fans are looking for the Battle of Bristol in Week 2 and your coaches up in the press box. How confident are you that when the ball is kicked it's going to be just another football game and you can coach it accordingly?

COACH JONES: Good question. We're very confident. Our administrative staff led by Chris Spognardi has done a great job. They are up there almost every week working with the representatives from Bristol Motor Speedway. They've done a good job taking our input. It is a home game for us, all of the logistics that go into it.

The most amazing thing today I think is the scoreboard that's already been placed over the track. It's something that if you haven't seen, go online and read about it, because it's magnificent. But it will be different. Everything is about communication and the sight lines with everything. So, again, where the coaches' booth is, all of that communication part of it, I think it will be a challenge. But this has been a number of years in the making, and there's a lot of people doing their due diligence behind the scenes.

Q. You talked about 13-5, the last 18 games and total of 25 points, an average of five points per game. What do you have to do to finish some of these games? When you look at Florida, it's been so long since you guys have beaten Florida. The last two years, especially last year, you felt you should have won that football game. Are you guys excited? Any emphasis on that football game, and how do you close out these games and get to the next level?

COACH JONES: You always have to learn from the previous experiences and past experiences. It's something we spoke about ever since we started that offseason program and just what does it take in pointing defining moments out in the game. But when we talk about leadership, we always talk about it's better to be a player-coached team than a coach-coached team.

Some of our team meetings have been very, very dynamic. And I'll tell you a story in the spring is I had Jalen Reeves-Maybin come to my office. He said, Coach, I've put together a video, and I'd like to show our football team. And usually I want to proof the video, but I had so much faith and confidence in him, I said okay, go ahead. So he walks up to the team and put together a 25-point video on his own.

But the thing about leadership is leaders eat last. The first thing he did is he showed clips from different games of himself, whether it was a missed tackle,

whether it was a missed communication, a missed fundamental in coverage, and it started with him. Then he proceeded to go through all of the critical plays -- offense, defense and special teams. And a football play can come down to two to three plays that mean the difference between winning and losing, and you never know which play it's going to be. That play could be in the first quarter. You just never know. That's why you play every play like it's your last. That's some of the educational things.

We'll do some things to try to create some competitive situations in training camp just like we did this spring and having these individuals embrace the moment when the game is on the line. Why is LeBron James LeBron James? We all saw Game 7. The great players step it up and they take it over. That's what we've been talking about. Sometimes you have an opportunity to end the game. It may be a sack, it may be a first down, it may be one or two extra yards to keep the clock running, so we really try to point those out.

Q. Coach, can you talk about, because there is so much hype and so much expectation, have you leaned on anybody, any other coaches or anybody, just to say, give me a little advice how to handle this?

COACH JONES: Yeah. I think the first thing it stems is from your personal experiences. And I've been very blessed and fortunate as assistant starting at West Virginia to be a part of some teams that had a lot of expectations. So I've seen that firsthand.

And then, you know, maybe not the stage that we're on, but Central Michigan and University of Cincinnati, the expectations were very high with our football team. I think you rely on your past experiences.

And then you do, you have friends in the profession. You have friends maybe in different sports. Erik Spoelstra is a good friend of mine that I lean a lot on. We talk about leadership. We talk about how to handle expectations, the consistency in your approach.

But, again, our players have been remarkable. They have not looked up. They have not blinked, and they've just been focused on their own self-determination, becoming a better football player and becoming a better football team. That's really what you can do.

That's why you come to the University of Tennessee. That's why you coach at the University of Tennessee. You want those expectations. But like I said, Team 120 has not played one down. We're responsible for what we create on a daily basis. And that's kind of been our theme, is control the controllables.

Q. Coach, they talk about having to finish strong, but for you guys, it seems that the toughest part of your schedule is early on. You got Florida, Georgia, Texas A&M and Alabama all very early in the season. So, what is the key to navigating through that very difficult stretch early on to put together a successful year?

COACH JONES: Well, the first thing, which we spoke about early, is starting fast. But I think also the teams that end up competing for championships in November are the teams that can handle the natural adversities that a long football season brings about. There's going to have adversity at some point in time this season come about. How do we handle it? How does our leadership handle it?

We define adversities as a football team. We talked in a team meeting one day, let's talk about the adversities that can occur in a long football season and then just within a football game. Okay, how do we respond? I think it's just having a workmanlike approach, never being too high, never being too down.

And I think that's hard at times. I've said it. I thought the biggest -- everyone points to what one game changed your season last year, and I know the Georgia game was a great win, but I still to this day feel it was the Arkansas game. And our kids were at a crossroad and everyone could hear the negative noise, they could hear the clutter and the distractions. And when we took the team picture on Monday, and I thought that's where our leadership -- that's really where our competitive character showed through, and you just mentioned how we finished the season. So, I think it's keeping everything in perspective and keeping a consistency and approach week in and week out.

Q. Coach, how does your staff monitor what players say or do on Twitter or social media? And do you see a benefit to players being on those sites, or is it more a necessary evil that the coaches have to deal with?

COACH JONES: Well, I'm living proof, because I'm finding out in the Jones' household. I have three children, and their phone is always attached to their hands. And this is a society that has grown up now where you broadcast your emotions over social media.

So, we do a lot in terms of education, educating our players with our Fourth-and-1 program, you know, once you push send, there's no getting it back. So, you know, I don't believe in just taking it away from them, but we do -- we try to -- we do monitor it in terms of -- because everything is a teaching tool. Everything is a learning experience. So we look at that.

But I think more, we invest in terms of the educational

process of what it is and what it stands for, and it's a tremendous opportunity. It's a tremendous platform to sell your personal brand, to sell your teammates, to sell your program, to sell academics, all that goes into it, and I think it's always the one-second rule. In one second your life can change. So, before you push send, you better make sure that it's something your family would approve of. So, it's constant education, but we do monitor it just so we can make those educational situations as they present themselves.

Q. Jalen Reeves-Maybin and Alvin Kamara, those guys have spoken out on public issues in the past with everything going on in society. Do you support those guys when they do that, and what kind of advice do you give them when they decide to speak out? Do you think it's important for athletes to use the platform to enact change?

COACH JONES: It's all about freedom of speech, and, you know, they are very emotional young men and they have strong beliefs in what they believe in. And I think as long as it's done for the betterment, it's done to better society, it's betterment, you know, to help everyone.

And for us at the University of Tennessee, these are role models. Our players are role models and they impact a lot of peep in our community. So, as long as it's an opportunity to make things better or to be able to present a perspective that's very positive, I have no problem with that.

Q. Coach, when you look at the SEC, they have a lot of the creases on defense, especially the defensive line, games are won at the line of scrimmage. We know about Derek Barnett. What has Shy Tuttle done going into his sophomore year of trying to get better not just in the weight room but also starting the game play of how to defend the line?

COACH JONES: Shy Tuttle is an individual who played for us. Unfortunately his season was taken from him in a season-ending injury against Georgia. He worked very hard to getting himself back to playing form.

Shy is a young man that will be about 50 percent to 75 percent training camp. We'll see how that goes. The exciting thing is he starts the running process next week. But he studied a ton of film. Shy is very explosive, does a great job with the use of his hands.

And as we know, it's a defensive-line activated league. Every great defense stems with winning the line of scrimmage battle up front, and you have to be able to do that especially at the defensive tackle position, especially having a three technique that can win a one-on-one matchup in the pass rush game.

Shy has proven that he can do that for us. It's getting him back to health and he's worked very hard on that, and he's going to be a welcome addition back because that is a position where we still have limited depth in our football program.

Q. We know Tennessee just recently reached a settlement and we touched on social issues. I'm curious as to your stance on sexual assault and how you'll handle it going forward with your team?

COACH JONES: Well, we don't look at it as something of the past or something that's been settled. Everything is a teaching unit. These are very, very serious issues that surround every college campus, they surround society today, and we'll continue to educate our players on the importance of it. We've brought in 70-plus speakers. We've been very proactive with that.

But you're talking to an individual who has grown up in a law enforcement household, so I understand the importance of that, but this is something that's very, very serious that, you know, is a part of society. And it's our job as coaches to continue to educate them. And it's a big part of our educational package at the University of Tennessee.

Q. Butch, you've had two back-to-back top five recruiting classes. Do you feel the pressure this year to take it, this program, up a notch, considering you've blown some late leads and hadn't finished off game? Is there a pressure for you like we have got to get it done this year because have the new manpower now?

COACH JONES: No, not at all. The expectations will never be greater than what we place on ourselves internally. And I think, when you look back, it's like I told our coaching staff when we broke for summer vacation, you need to enjoy this.

You know, when we took over this football program, I think everyone understands what was in place. And so, you know, it's a tribute to them, it's a tribute to our staff. It's a tribute to our players. So I said we're going to sit back and we're going to work hard. We're going to work to be a better football program.

But sometimes, too, you need to sit back and say, you know what? I'm not talking about complacency. You'll never see complacency in our building. But sometimes we live in an instant gratification society and we want things right now, and we need to continue to go back to the compound effect of building it.

And we're building it for sustained success. We're not building it for quick fixes where you have one or two

successful years then all of a sudden you're struggling again. This program is going to be etched in stone and concrete to where it maintains sustainable success, and that's in the recruitment process. That's finding the right fit for your program. That's constantly reinventing yourself.

COACH JONES: Thank you. Looking forward to seeing everyone throughout the course of the year.

One of the exercises our coaching staff and players do when we come to camp is everyone has to reinvent themselves, what's a better version of them, how are we a better version of each other than we were last year. And that's how you continue to grow and elevate and never become complacent.

So, to me, I love it. That's what you work for. You want high expectations. You want high standards. I remember standing up here at the podium three short years ago, and the room was half filled and nobody was talking about Tennessee football. So, I'd rather have -- that's why you coach. That's why you play, is to be in a program like the University of Tennessee where everybody is talking about you. That's what you work for. Now it's what you do with that opportunity.

Q. What does it mean for your team to have guys decide to come back for their senior season like Cameron Sutton and Jalen Reeves-Maybin?

COACH JONES: It means everything, and thank you for asking that question. And by the way, you did a great job. It means everything. It defines on what we stand for. And they had some difficult decisions, but, first of all, Cameron Sutton wanted to get his college degree and Jalen Reeves-Maybin wanted to work towards his master's degree.

But Jalen Reeves-Maybin spoke in front from the team when we had a team meeting. And I think you're starting to see the dynamics of our football family and how close this football team is. He stood up and he said he made a pact to his mother and he had a dream growing up that he would leave a legacy at the University of Tennessee. And he said, I have not left a legacy. I have done nothing yet in my career at the University of Tennessee, and I have one more year to get it done.

And I think when you have that type of leadership -- and Cam Sutton, what can I say about him as well. And Alvin Kamara. He had an opportunity to leave as well. And I think when you have individuals come back, that speaks volumes that they believe in your football program and they believe in their teammates and they love representing our university and our institution and our state.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Thank you, Coach Jones, for your time.