

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday July 13, 2016

Barry Odom

Missouri coach

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Our next coach is from the University of Missouri, Barry Odom.

I'll leave the notes for a moment and say, if you have an opportunity, one of the special things you'll see on video is the moment that Barry was introduced as Missouri's next head coach to the team. And the excitement and joy shown by his team now I think speaks volumes about who he is and how young people respond to his leadership. So, Barry, your first opportunity at SEC Media Days.

COACH ODOM: Hey, guys. Good afternoon. Very excited and thankful to be spending the afternoon with you all. I got home late last night and walked in -- I've got two sons, and they were sitting there and they were watching -- on the network, they were watching Commissioner Sankey introduce guys, and one of them got nervous. He said, Dad, what's he going to say about you? You don't even have a record yet. I said, Yeah. I don't know, we'll see.

So, I hope that I have the opportunity to be here many, many times. And I'm thankful for Commissioner Sankey and the SEC staff for the great hospitality that they've shown and the work that they do to put on this event, and thank you, guys, for the work that you do promoting the game of football and our student-athletes. I know I'm probably not the most gracious guy to work with to the local media, but I appreciate you and thanks for all of the work that you guys do.

I look at all of the many things with having the chance to lead a program. And if you look at life in general, it's about opportunity. It's about making an opportunity for yourself. It's about making opportunities for student-athletes, creating opportunities, and then what are you going to do with those opportunities.

And one was presented with me. I got the job December 4th, and just looking at last year, you know, there are things that you learn and you live through and you go through that make you a better person, and 2015 at the University of Missouri, our football program, we worked -- we did not meet our expectations, and that's something we're working daily on, making sure that we don't revisit those.



We're doing everything we can to make sure that our football team's singular focus on moving forward and being the best that we can be in 2016.

I've addressed it every time I've had the opportunity to speak. There are things that happened on our campus, that as you look back and you go through it as an educator and as a coach and as a teacher, you learn a tremendous amount. And the ability that I've been awarded now and created with the opportunities that I have on building true trusting relationships with our team, it's something that is so dear to me on making sure that I provide them with an opportunity to be successful.

University of Missouri changed my life in the late '90s when I was a student-athlete there. It gave me an opportunity and platform to change my life course history. And that's something that every day, when I drive into work, I don't forget. I know that I've got an opportunity now to lead an athletic program, to lead a football team and a university and the state. I've got an opportunity to change lives of 120 kids a year. And that is what is really, really special to me, to have the opportunity to do that.

I look at the guy that -- those at my desk before me, Gary Pinkel, and he gave me so many opportunities over the years. I was a high school coach, and he hired me as a graduate assistant. I worked for him for 12 years and left, went to the University of Memphis, and then he hired me back. He left on being the winningest coach in Missouri history. And before that he was the winningest coach at Toledo and before that he was a great offensive coordinator at Washington.

So he left a tremendous foundation for me to build on and to make sure things were in place for me to take that program, University of Missouri, and take it to new levels and new heights.

I'm excited every day. When I do go to work, there hasn't been a day or week that's been by -- since I was a former student-athlete there, that a former player hasn't stopped by and checked in to see how things were going. And, to me, to have the ability to lead and represent those guys mean more than anything in the world. Because there's a lot of guys there before me that put in a lot of sweat equity making Missouri what it

is.

I feel really strongly about the opportunity leading our program. We have great student-athletes with us today. Michael Scherer is a starting linebacker. He's three hours away from getting his finance degree. He's played a lot of football and a lot of snaps, and he's a great kid. Sean Culkin is a tight end who's a senior and is going to have a tremendous year. He's got his degree in finance. And Charles Harris is a defensive end that's a junior that's worked his way into being one of the premier defensive ends in the country.

And all three are great representatives of the program. They've got the ability and the skill set to be tremendous players. But more importantly than that, they're going to do a great job in our campus. They're going to do a great job in society on making sure that they make a difference in the right way. And I was speaking earlier, I take great pride and ownership in having the ability to spend time with our kids and spend time with our student-athletes on making a difference, on making sure that everything that we're doing, that we address social issues, that we address making them and helping them and providing them the opportunity to be the best football player that they can be.

The energy and excitement and enthusiasm that we have about our program, I'm anxious every day to work with the staff that we've got. We've got staff change on both sides of the ball. Our offensive coordinator is a guy I've known for a number of years, Josh Heupel, and he's done a great job since January leading and guiding that side of the ball. And DeMontie Cross on defense. He and I were student-athletes together at Missouri, and he was most recent at TCU. Both of those guys, it's important that they get the opportunity to put their stamp on their side of the ball.

The thing about our football team is since January 18th they've expressed a great willingness to work. They've done everything that -- we provided them a roadmap, and they've done the driving on trying to do everything that we can to make sure that in 52 days that we're the best football team that we can be.

So, that's where we're at from a program standpoint. I know that there's a lot that has gone on at Missouri. I feel very, very strongly about the leadership of our football program, because I'm surrounded by great people. And there's plenty of things that I'm going to do wrong, and these guys are going to make me right. And that makes it working together as a family and a group and as a unit. It's really, really enjoyable for me.

You look at the game of football, and it's one of the most special things in American society. You get a

group of guys, 120 guys, plus your staff. They've got the opportunity to work together to get as good as you can get. It doesn't matter where the person's from, what their name is. You get to go represent something bigger than yourselves. And every day of the week I'm reminded of that; that I got the opportunity to lead the University of Missouri.

So, I'll open it up for questions now, and thanks for spending some time with us.

Q. There isn't a coach in this conference that had more hands-on experience in dealing with a crisis of social conscience, I suppose, last year at Missouri. I'm wondering with the renewed problems that cropped up in the last few weeks if you've had additional conversations with your team and team leaders. In regards to what happened in Missouri last year, the stance they took, were you proud of the way the kids dealt with that? Did you understand the way they felt, and did that resolution come to -- come to a certain conclusion because of maybe how together they were as a team and how much they trusted the coaching staff?

COACH ODOM: Well, I think the thing that you look at, for me, as a coach and a teacher, everything that I want to do is make sure that I've got such a great relationship with our team that if there are an instance that comes up, that they feel comfortable coming in the door, walking in the door and let's sit down together as a team and as family and address those and find out, let's get the facts before we make any movements or statements about anything. Let's make sure that we gather the facts and work together to come up what is best not only for the individual, but the University of Missouri and our athletic program.

And really we maybe lose sight that they are not just football players, we've got to realize -- I got to do a great job on teaching and educating our kids, my kids, that it is -- without question you've got the opportunity to be an ambassador for the University of Missouri. And we've all grown together, moving forward as a football program with our relationships, we've all become a lot tighter together on the way that we approach society issues.

I think if you look at the things that have happened in America in the last two weeks, there's still ongoing discussions that we have every day with what's going on, and I think that's important for me. I treat the kids just like I do my kids at home, and I'm going to treat them fairly and honestly and I want them to have a relationship that we can sit down and talk through a lot of those issues to make sure that it's not a fair judgment to me to put anything on -- I haven't walked

through his shoes. He hasn't walked through mine. Let's get together, share ideas, share our philosophies and our beliefs and make sure that we've got all of the facts before we do anything from there.

Q. Just wondering your reaction to having to come up here today shortly after you find out -- it becomes public that Mack Rhoades is leaving and if you have any concerns about the administrative stability at Missouri.

COACH ODOM: Well, the thing that -- Mack and I got together last night and had long discussions, and I feel, you know, everybody -- I talked earlier about having opportunities. And, you know, he's got an opportunity that he thought was best for him, and I know that I'm very, very excited about the University of Missouri. I'm excited about what I've got in place from my staff from a football program standpoint.

I absolutely know that we'll get a great director of athletics in there and the things that we've done in the last eight months are going to set us up for the next 20 years. And University of Missouri's been around since 1839, and it's going to be around a long, long time. I'm really, really excited about the direction our football program is going and really look forward to getting 2016 started here in 52 days.

Q. You've been around an awful lot of great defensive ends. Does Charles Harris bring something that maybe one of those other guys -- you've seen in them when you were coaching with them?

COACH ODOM: Yeah. The thing that -- University of Missouri has got a long run of great defensive linemen, and it started with Justin Smith back he and I were teammates, and then Larry Smith coached him and then moved into Coach Pinkel, and every year it kind of continues to progress.

And Charles is one of the next great ones, in my opinion. If you come and watch us practice on Tuesday afternoon, it looks like it's game day and it's fourth and one. I think that sets him apart. He's got an inner drive and demeanor that he wants to be the best.

He also realizes that, as all those guys do up front, they've got a tremendous responsibility on trying to carry that torch on the guys that were playing the position before him, and that means a lot to him. I'm excited about that group that we have on our team and, you know, it's our job as coaches to make sure that they play better this year than they did last year. And that's the approach we've got to take with it.

Q. Obviously, offense was a big struggle last year. How do you feel about the offense going into the

season and how tough did that make it on the defense last season?

COACH ODOM: I'm excited about the offensive staff that we have. I'm excited -- as coaches, you're teachers. For us, and I always thought this coaching defensive football, you've got to make sure you take the skill set of the players that you have that's on your roster and what you recruit, too, and design their offense and defense around their strengths. Don't ask them to do something they can't do.

Offensively, we've got to be creative enough schematically to make sure that we're doing everything we can to give our kids a chance and to put them in position, ask them to go make a play that they can by a formation, by a shift, by a motion. Let's give ourselves a chance offensively to play within the skill set of guys that we have.

Defensively, it's the same thing. We've got more guys returning on the defensive side than the offensive side. But last year, and I love experience coming back, but it's our job as coaches, they got to play better than they did last year. And that's a tremendous responsibility and opportunity for us to be a really good football team.

Q. Going back to the conversation with Mack last night, did he say when he was planning on announcing it? And then as a guy that's very familiar with Missouri, what should Mizzou look for in a new athletic director?

COACH ODOM: He and I talked a lot last night just about opportunities in life and in general. And we've worked through a bunch of things in the last eight months together, and not sure on the -- they're trying to work on the timing of it all that -- I don't need to get into that.

But the direction and leadership of Missouri, I look forward to representing Mizzou. I look forward to representing and leading our football program and our athletic department, and we're going to go find a great one. I look forward to being involved with that and helping if they want my help.

Mizzou is a special place and has been a really great place for a long time. And the future for our program and our university is really bright. You know, we need someone in that role that is looking forward to having a great vision on taking us to a new level of success.

Q. I was just curious, first of all, were you blindsided by the news that Mack was leaving? How much did it catch you off guard? Or did you have some warning in the last couple weeks this might be happening? Also, in your position, when the guy who hires you leaves, how does that affect

your feeling with your job?

COACH ODOM: I mean, in any line of work, in college athletics, as you guys know, there's going to be change. I found out last night and didn't have any clue before then. I respect Mack calling me and having the conversation. I don't know, maybe hadn't been there long enough, now I'm not worried about it, about the football program and my situation. I'm very confident in the job that I'm going to do and our football staff.

I know I got a group of guys coming back that are anxious and excited about getting the 2016 season started. And when I have the opportunity to tell people about the University of Missouri and get them on campus and show them my feelings towards the place, Mizzou is in a really good spot.

Q. What went through your head when the team reacted like they did when you were named head coach in front of them?

COACH ODOM: Well, there's a few things. As you'll learn over the years, there's few things that you're going to remember forever in your life, and it was such a great feeling. I have a hard time putting that into words because of the emotion that went into the process of getting the head coaching job and then also realizing that I had a chance to change those guys and have the chance to change their lives forever.

And it's important for me. The most important thing is building really true, trusting relationships. And those guys, it's important for me to do everything right for them, because they want to have success, and I've got the chance to do that.

Q. Coach Odom, this program in Missouri, back-to-back years, we're talking 2013 and 2014, SEC East champions, a lot of that was done through a mixture of James Franklin and Maty Mauk at quarterback. Now that Mauk has gotten his feet wet, what are some things that you've seen from him that he's starting to earn the trust of the team and also the coaching staff in 2016?

COACH ODOM: I look at the quarterback position in any level, if you're talking Pop Warner, if you're talking NFL football, if you've got a great quarterback, then you're going to be in position to win a lot of games. And our quarterbacks with he and Marvin Zanders, with Drew Lock you're speaking of and Marvin, they've done a tremendous job since January on taking ownership of running the offense, on learning the new system that Coach Heupel's put in.

And both of them have a great skill set, and I look forward -- if you saw Drew walk in the door today, he's got some confidence about himself, which is great. Marvin does as well. And you need that at that spot.

And also I know it's important for the other ten guys around them to play really well. Because if you do that, then that makes the quarterback's job a lot easier.

But moving forward with those guys, they're -- you know, they are being trained really well. They are excited about having the chance to lead our team and our program and they've got the idea and mindset that they want to be the best.

Q. To go back to what you were saying about the demonstrations on campus last season, what's your observation been of the atmosphere on campus since then, specifically with regard to racial relations on campus?

COACH ODOM: We look at the University of Missouri and our campus in whole, and it's a great educational setting and institution. I think the relationships in our campus community, as always, we're working on, as society is, to improve. You always want to get better. You always want to do everything you can to make it the best place it can be.

There's plenty of communication going on. We want Mizzou to be the best. We want it to be the best journalism school, the best business school. I want it to be the best football program in America. You work every day to make sure you do everything you can to control everything you can to make it the best. That's going on on campus and in the football program as well.

Q. Coach, what kind of relationship do you anticipate having with Coach Pinkel this coming season with you as a first-time coach and him stepping away from the profession?

COACH ODOM: It's a unique situation with Coach, he and I having a relationship that we do, he still being in Columbia. Got such great respect for him. But also, on the other side of that, he wants to help when he can, how he can, but he also said a number of times: I need to give you some space. And I respect that.

And, you know, I know that I'm not afraid to pick up the phone and call him. He's always welcome and he's done a great deal for that university and our football program and for college football.

Q. Good afternoon, Coach. You guys played Kansas for many years, the Border War, one of those biggest rivals. When you left the Big 12 to come to the SEC, that game ended. A lot of big fans of that game, a lot of Mizzou fans that really want that game back. Have you felt any pressure to make that game happen? Is that something in your future plans?

COACH ODOM: Just geographically, that rivalry over

the years, hundreds of years, became a great one. It's something for me being a former student-athlete you always look forward to that. And coaching in the game was something in the year 2007 when both teams were highly ranked. And it's an atmosphere that our student-athletes, if you ask any of them, that was part of the team during that time, that's one of their greatest memories.

I think it's important that we look to build experiences for student-athletes that they have a chance to play in a game like that, a rivalry game like that, that really means something that they can carry with them forever.

Obviously the scheduling is done so many years out. There's always got to be some communication. If I get a vote, I know which way I'll vote. And look forward to hopefully someday that game getting back on schedule.

Q. Coach, I read that no one currently with the athletic department is going the ESPYs tonight. Why is that?

COACH ODOM: The communication that they reached out to our athletic department, it wasn't done through me. I didn't -- my singular focus is on the 2016 team moving us forward as good as we could get. The communication went not through my office, it was worked on on last year's team, so they're -- not anybody that is on our team this year would be there.

Q. You obviously were at Missouri when it was in the Big 12, now back with them in the SEC. How did that conference switch affect the program, just the way it works?

COACH ODOM: Yeah. I think if you look, it's undeniable the best conference in America. I was at Missouri during the change when we were changing conferences and then left to Memphis. You know, you go back and the brand of the SEC is recognized nationally and probably worldwide as such a special conference. And you feel that the ownership that the Missourians have on representing Missouri the right way in the best conference.

Q. Specifically, with Mack heading out, what does that do to the next phase of stadium reconstruction? Where are you at with that right now?

COACH ODOM: Yeah. We've got some great plans on breaking ground on that construction. If it gets held up because of this, it won't be for long because the plan that's in place that I've set with him over the last couple of months, we spent a lot of time on getting things ready to go. And so obviously out of respect on who the new hire will be, we'll get that okay, and then excited about building some facilities at Mizzou that

leads us into the next 15 years of great success.

Q. A couple quick questions about players. Number one, Chris Black and the role that you see him, Alabama transfer, and you mentioned Marvin Zanders a minute ago, are you going to try to play Marvin and Drew a little bit during the game too?

COACH ODOM: When Chris stepped in in January and went through spring practice with us as an inside slot receiver, you know, productive as spring went on, he developed the habits of playing that position in our offense and has taken over a guy that has some experience, you know, guys will tend to look at him as a leader in a leadership role. He's played meaningful snaps in games, and he's got a skill set that he can help us and look forward to his development again for the next month before we kick off and expect him to have a really good year for us.

With the quarterbacks, with Drew and with Marvin, both of them are -- their skills have improved. We've done a good job. Josh has done a good job on giving those guys the platform to be a really good quarterback with your steps, your fundamentals, the preparation that goes into it. And Marvin's trained as a quarterback, and both of those guys are going to continue to play there and see how it goes.

Q. Hey, Coach. Hope you're not nervous. You sure don't seem like it. I'm just curious, Barry, with the makeup of the -- of your players, are they about accepting the responsibility after a couple of Eastern Division crowns and then the one in '07? Are they the type of athletes that will step up and meet that challenge with you and your staff and fans?

COACH ODOM: Well, that's the culture that you build. You work on it every day. You want guys that have tremendous competitive spirit. And we want guys that are -- they want to do whatever they can to put the team first, to make sure that we're in position to win games.

And we've got a group that's excited about the upcoming season, excited about being better than they were before. And those are the guys you want to recruit. You want leaders, you want competitors, and then you develop those guys in your program, and that's set by the coaching staff.

We've got a lot of really competitive guys that sit around the staff table every day, and also we got a bunch of guys that really haven't failed at anything they set their minds to at all, ever. And that's our mindset moving forward.

Q. Coach, you know, I imagine you went to Mizzou

thinking you might eventually replace Gary Pinkel down the line, maybe not after one year. What was your mindset about getting the job, and did it just happen a lot faster? How ready do you feel for this?

COACH ODOM: In college football you never say I'm going to be the head coach at university X and it happens. A couple years ago I was told a number of times, hey, you need to get ready to start preparing to be a head coach because you're not far away from getting a couple interviews.

I always trained when I was with Coach for the opportunity. I set goals every day. One day I want to be a head coach. There's a lot of great coaches that don't ever get the opportunity for whatever reason.

So when the opportunity presented itself this offseason, I absolutely felt very prepared going into it and even more so that I have been on the job for eight months. And along with that, you know, it's also a group of guys with our staff, our entire organization that make the thing go. And there's decisions that I've got to make that will set us up for the years to come, but also we got a lot of really good people around me.

Q. All right. Thank you, Coach Odom, for your time.

COACH ODOM: Thanks, guys.