

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Thursday July 14, 2016

## Will Muschamp South Carolina coach



COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Good morning, welcome to Day 4 of 2016 SEC Media Days. This morning, to begin, we have Will Muschamp.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Commissioner, thank you very much. When I first got in the Southeastern Conference, Commissioner Sankey was head of compliance, and every time you'd call him or e-mail or text him, he would answer. Or if he didn't answer, he would respond to you very quickly. And now as commissioner, if you call him, he answers. If you don't get the call, he's going to call you back or text you back and e-mail you back. You may not always like the answer he gives you, but he certainly is doing that. I appreciate the job you do and understand how difficult your job is.

I can go ahead and tell you guys look rough here Day 4. There's not a lot of juice and energy in the building. Bianchi, you look rough. You don't need to identify yourself; your squeaky voice I know. So you guys got to pick it up. We're in the fourth quarter.

You have me, Hugh, and Les, and certainly some of their questions may be more interesting than mine, and excited to be here. First of all, I want to thank Coach Spurrier for what he did at the University of South Carolina and what he did for the Southeastern Conference in the 1990s. Really changed our league offensively. I was a player, and certainly he benefitted from me playing and so did his quarterbacks.

But as a graduate assistant at Auburn working for Bill Oliver, I never forget a six-game breakdown going into their game, and it was 51 percent run, 49 percent pass, totally balanced down the middle. And, believe me, it wasn't off a chart. That was off Coach Spurrier's head. That was amazing. He's an icon. Did an amazing job for our league and for college athletics. Really appreciate his friendship and support of me and look forward to he and Jerry being a part of our program moving forward. But I really appreciate them.

I'm going to go ahead and tell you I'm going to disappoint you now. I'm not as entertaining as him. You don't need to write an article about it tomorrow morning. There's only one Steve Spurrier in life, and I'm not it.

Been in Columbia since December. Support of our fan base has been outstanding. The positive energy that we've gotten everywhere we've been, we really appreciated this and I want them to know how much myself and our staff appreciate them. The support from President Pastides and Coach Tanner, first of all, to give us the opportunity to be at South Carolina, we're honored. But also the support they're giving us to take our program to the next level and build on what Coach Spurrier and their staff did.

We're building a \$50 million football operations facility. We'll start in January. It will take 15 to 18 months. I think it's going to be a game-changer for us as far as the student-athletes on our campus presently but also in the recruiting process. We all like shiny and new. It will be, and we've been able to put our hands on it with the architects and get exactly what we want. We're really excited about that process.

When I first got to the job in South Carolina, I talked to our players about effort, toughness and discipline in everything they do. In every walk of their life -- academically, athletically, spiritually, and socially -- giving great effort, having toughness with what you do and discipline. It doesn't take any ability in any of those situations, it doesn't take any talent if you do that.

I've been really pleased with the reception of our players. Any time there's change or coaching changes, and those things happen, there's resistance. We've had very little. Our guys have really bought into what we're doing.

Three of the young men we're having today really made our transition extremely smooth for myself and our staff. We put them through a very difficult offseason, a really difficult spring ball, very physical spring ball, and we've had a great summer. And I really appreciate their ownership in what we're trying to do and them owning their experience at South Carolina.

This June we took our team to Fort Jackson, which since 1917 has trained 5 million Army troops, as far as in the United States of America. It was a team-building exercise, but more than anything, it was an amazing experience for our players, and they appreciate the

United States military and what they do for our country.

A lot of good team-building that night. I don't know if I would have taken other teams over there we would have gotten the same results. It was an amazing night for our guys and great experience for your young people. I appreciate General Cloutier and the folks at Fort Jackson doing that.

A lot of unknowns on our roster right now. You look on offense, you have 42 scholarship players. 34 of them are freshmen and sophomores. Very little playing experience. But within those unknowns, I do feel we have some talented players. I really do. I have been in this league for a long time, and I think there's some very talented guys in that.

Obviously we're still searching for a starting quarterback. Perry and Brendan distanced themselves in the spring. Both of those guys did a good job for us. Going into fall camp, Lorenzo Nunez will be a part of that competition as well, but he'll also play some receiver for us. We need some more help on that position.

Michael Scarnecchia unfortunately had labrum surgery when he was at home training in May. So he'll be out this fall. And Jake Bentley is a freshman on campus right now for us, and he'll be involved in the competition as well.

We're going to decide who will help us win football games, who's going to help us win games. And there's no time table. If we have to play two guys, we'll play two, but we'll do what it takes to win.

I have three guys with me today, two on offense. Deebo Samuel is a receiver from Inman, South Carolina, Chapman High School, and a guy I was really impressed in the offseason program watching the way he worked, going through spring. I think he has some elite ability. When he's been healthy last year, he's very productive for us and a guy we need to keep healthy. For us to be successfully offensively, he needs to play well. We need more guys around him in his position group to play well. But I think you'll enjoy visiting with him today. He's a retail management major at South Carolina. He's a redshirt sophomore.

I really feel good about our offensive line situation. We have 34 starts back and some talented guys. Shawn Elliott has done a nice job recruiting that position and developing those guys there.

And Mason Zandi is with us from Chapin High School right outside of Columbia in Lexington County. 6'9", 315. He's got really good feet and length. Very intelligent. He already graduated with a degree in

political science and has a minor in psychology and working on another major in sports management.

So our guys are extremely intelligent. We have seven players on our team that have already graduated going into the fall, and we'll have another seven to nine graduating in December. It says a lot about what we're doing academically at South Carolina, and we're really proud of that.

Defensively in our front seven we have a good mixture of talent and experience. The young man I brought day is Marquavius Lewis from Greenwood, South Carolina. He's got a lot of versatile ability to be able play in, to move inside, get matchups on some of our guards in our league. That's something we have to be able to do.

I feel comfortable in the front seven. We need to improve in the secondary. But I think we're capable. Feel really good about our specialist situation -- Elliott Fry, Sean Kelly and Drew Williams as a snapper.

We need to continue to improve our team speed to help our special teams to be able to control the vertical field position of the game. That's going to be critical.

When I first got to campus, I met with every player. It was pretty evident after a 3-9 season it was a beat-down bunch as far as mentally. I told our guys a positive attitude in life guarantees you nothing but a negative one does. We'll be positive about our outlook in what we're trying to do and accomplish.

We lost five games last year by seven points or less. Let's go find a way to make a difference in those games. Whether it's in the meeting room, on the practice field, or the offseason program, whatever you're doing, let's go find a way to get it done.

And I'll open it up for any of your questions.

You don't have to stand.

**Q. We're supposed to.**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Sankey is really strict, man.

**Q. A lot of times when a coach comes in, he doesn't keep the interim guy because it can be kind of awkward. I was wondering how that dynamic was with you guys.**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Shawn loves the University of South Carolina. He and his wife, Summer, love Columbia. I met with him the first night. He's a guy that -- as a coach, your tape is your resume. I thought he had really good tape. I thought those guys played really well. And did a really good job.

Those guys played hard, physical on tape. I never met

with Shawn personally. I met with him the first night and said let's work through a week or so, and we'll see if this works for me and you and Kurt Roper, our offensive coordinator, which I thought was the most important marriage, to make sure the play caller or the quarterback coach and offensive line coach are on the same page. And they hit it off.

I'm excited to have Shawn on our staff. I have no ego. I want to do what is best for South Carolina, and the best thing for South Carolina is having Shawn Elliott on our staff.

**Q. A couple of player questions. Can you comment, please, a couple Florida guys, Jamari Smith on offense and Jasper Sasser on defense and their contributions you think for this year?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Jamari Smith is a young man that we started, has played multiple spots at South Carolina, started the spring at running back. With the help we needed at receiver, saw him as an athletic guy that catches the ball well, got good speed in the lot. He's going play slot receiver for us this year. I thought he ended spring very well for a first time at position. I thought he did really good things, and he's been moved a bunch.

Jasper Sasser right now is a guy that's a really good athlete. Really going to help us on special teams. He's competing to stay at safety.

**Q. Coach, a lot of people say that even though you didn't win a lot at Florida, Florida's better off for you having been there. Do you believe that? Why? And also is it going to be harder to win at South Carolina than Florida?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: You know, I'll start with the second question. No. I don't think so. I think at the end of the day, Coach Spurrier and his staff have brought this program to relevance nationally, and that's what we plan on building on that.

So, I don't think so at all. I think within a five-hour radius of our campus, we can recruit good enough players to win the East every year. I also believe with having an airport where people are able to fly into we have in Columbia I think is a huge selling point for us for a young man to want to be a part of what we're doing at South Carolina, on top of the operations facility.

I think everything's pointed up for us. You know, again, I had a great run at Florida. I have great friends at Florida within the administration, Jeremy Foley, the people I've worked with, the community, you know, the players. You know, I have nothing but fond memories. I don't get into the negative part of how it ended.

That's part of our profession. Things didn't work, and a decision was made. Doesn't mean you have to agree with a decision, a decision was made. I don't think there's any question.

Not just myself but our staff had a tremendous positive impact on the University of Florida, and I wish it would have ended differently.

**Q. Will, what was it that you saw in Kurt Roper as -- at Florida that made you want to bring him back to South Carolina?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I look at the development of the quarterback position, and obviously some guys at Duke and at Ole Miss, and the short-term development of a guy like Treon Harris. I thought he did a really good job of giving us an opportunity late in the year as far as that's concerned. So, that, number one.

Number two, I think he's a really good play-caller on game day. I think in a year of transition, under the circumstances, we were in our last year in understanding what was at stake, which he understood what he was getting into. I thought he did a really good job. We averaged 32 points a game. We played extremely well at times in the season and at sometimes still had deficiencies in some areas.

Second to last thing, he's a great staff guy. He's an easy guy to work with. He's a guy that you enjoy going to work with every day in the building. He's got a wonderful wife and kids, and he's a wonderful father.

So, I think all of those things combined make it a really simple hire for me. Also, he coached Connor Shaw at the Cleveland Browns this past year. Connor Shaw endorsed him to the South Carolina people as far as a coach, a technician, and a guy that's certainly going to help us move forward.

And we're very similar schematically to what Coach Spurrier was before. There's a lot of similarities, a lot of carry-over because of Shawn and because of like-minded thinking as far as Coach Roper is concerned. So I think that's made our transition offensively much smoother than maybe my situation before.

**Q. You mentioned Jeremy Foley and your time at Florida. I was wondering if you could talk more about your relationship with Jeremy certainly since he announced his retirement coming up in October?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: He's a young 60-whatever. I don't know what he's going to do. He's a busy guy. What a phenomenal job he did at the University of Florida. He gave me a wonderful opportunity and

support while we were there. He's a wonderful friend.

I don't look at things like a lot of people view things. I view your business part of your life and the professional part of your life are two separate things and you don't let those two things bleed together. I know he's a good person. I know he loves the University of Florida, and I wish him all the best.

**Q. Coach, Hayden Hurst is a young man with a very interesting story. He was a Minor League baseball player, didn't kind of work out for him. Came to your school as a walk-on. Earned a scholarship. Now he looks like he's got a chance to be a big part of your offense. How unique is his back story for a player you've coached?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Really is. From Jacksonville, Florida. Bolles High School. Signed with Florida State as a baseball player and ended up going to the Major League Baseball draft.

But a guy that's got really good ball skills, very mature, obviously, an older player and is a really, really good athlete. He's going to be a very difficult match-up for people as far as how they want to count him. He's a guy that can split out and match up on a safety or a linebacker, but can play at the box and block at the point of attack and do some things. He's a guy that's very -- a wide skill set and he, and K.C. Crosby are both guys I'm excited about at that position.

**Q. Just wondering --**

COACH MUSCHAMP: You haven't aged at all.

**Q. Thank you. Neither have you.**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Not like these guys.

**Q. Really unusual situation that you got another head coaching job. Not only did you get another head coaching job shortly after having one, but in the same league and in the same division. I'm just wondering what are some things that you specifically learned? Are there some things that you're going to do different at South Carolina, maybe lessons learned previously?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Sure. And I'm really shocked it took six or seven questions to get to this one. But I think this answer could go a long time, but I will put it in a nutshell.

At the end of the day, we played well on defense over a four-year period. Over a four-year period we played well on special teams. It is somewhat ironic, a blocked punt and where I've ended up. You never know how things happen in life. But for the most part, over a four-year period, academically our guys did extremely well. We had an outstanding academic support staff at

Florida.

But our coaches held our guys accountable to do the right things and make good decisions. Our guys made really good decisions on and off the field. You know, our community service was voluntary when I was there for the most part. I think we recruited very good players. The last two drafts Florida got the most people drafted in the Southeastern Conference combined from the last two years. Four first-round draft picks.

Really, it comes back to offense, and that's where, from a practice standpoint, to make sure we're practicing the right way, whether it's staff, scheme, decision-making, whatever, but that falls on my shoulders. So I'm taking full responsibility of that and making it better in this situation.

**Q. Has watching how Nick has adjusted offensively, even if it's a little begrudgingly, had any impact on you, and have you guys had any conversations about that?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: We haven't had any conversations. What Nick has done and what we tried to do, not as successfully, obviously, is adjust to what our players can do. And he really, you know, did a great job this past year adjusting to putting in more open sets, because it fit his personnel and what they needed to do to be successful and still keep the hard-edge mentality that you've got to have in our league.

It's just -- at the end of the day, in order to stop the run, you got to be able to run the ball, and vice versa, and against your own team. Obviously, depending on the talent level, but those are things that are really important. You got to continue to evolve our game changes a little bit every year, but you can't get away from the base philosophical ideas that you have.

And certainly he has not strayed from that. I do know that. Even though he may have gotten to it a different way.

**Q. When you're talking about personnel, Bryson Allen-Williams played some on the inside. You have him on the inside because Skai was hurt. In the day era of the spread, you talk about having fast switch guys on the outside, more speed. How do you utilize him in that fast set?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Bryson Allen-Williams has a diverse skill set. He'll play inside linebacker and play on the edge. He'll be part of a four-man pass rush game as well. He's got natural ability to turn his hips to the quarterback, flip his hips. He's got natural ability to move his hands and feet at the same time. He can convert speed to power for a smaller man.



When I say smaller man, he's 235 pounds. He's got a vast skill set, and we need to take advantage of that. So when we're in some odd fronts, he can be inside backer. He can be a guy that's very similar to Neiron Ball, a young man we had at the University of Florida. The skill sets are similar in terms of how we want to use him as best he can.

What a wonderful man to work with every day. He has a great attitude. He comes to work bouncing around. Just the type of man you want in your program.

**Q. My question to you is over a three-year stretch of '11, '12 and '13, South Carolina won six games. It was 6-2 in the SEC, which far and away exceeds any other decade-and-a-half span at South Carolina. How -- I know you said that you had the access to recruits in your area, in a 500-mile radius of our area, with Clemson being the next-door neighbor also, so what do you do -- how difficult is it going to be for you to whet the appetite of the fans to return to that stretch they had in this span?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: The fans? We've sold out every game. They've been there. Are you talking about from a recruiting standpoint, sir?

**Q. Winning.**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Winning. Well, again, I think that, you know, you got to do the best you can do with what you have on your roster. I've said that you go into a season, we have a lot of unknowns for us. It's a new staff, a new situation.

But I think we've got some very talented players in those unknowns. I'm excited about the work ethic and buy-in and all it takes to be successful. I'm extremely excited about it. There is no three-year plan, five-year plan. They plan to win now. Okay? That's my mentality.

We make decisions as far as who's going to be the quarterback, who's going to be the running back or who is going to play defensive end, who helps us win right now? That's the bottom line, and that's what we plan on doing.

**Q. Just two questions. First, looking back on it now, how would you assess your relationship with Gus last year at Auburn? And, second, what are you taking from that experience, not just with Gus, but with that staff, going into this new opportunity as a head coach?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Gus and I have a great relationship and I really appreciate him giving me an opportunity. That was my third stint at Auburn. As excited as my family was to move to Columbia, South

Carolina, we were extremely disappointed to leave Auburn, Alabama. What a wonderful community and people.

But it was a great experience for me to see things from a different perspective. You know, Gus is as good of a person as you ever meet. I really enjoyed my time working there. I wish we had played better defense for them. We've got a combination of guys that played pretty well at the end.

I wish we had gotten to that earlier. Rudy Ford playing nickel, we should have gotten to that earlier. Blake Camper gave us flexibility positionally. Carlton Davis came on and played extremely well for a true freshman. He's going to be a really good player for him. They got those guys back in the front seven. Got to keep Carl healthy and Montravius and Dontavius and Devaroe and Maurice and those guys and Byron and Jeff, getting a year older, continuing to do some things at linebacker. And Kevin will do a great job for that defense.

I'm excited about those guys. I'm glad we don't play them, but I want to those guys to do extremely well. Taking things forward. Sometimes it's good to see a different perspective how somebody practices, how somebody prepares and see how it fits to fit your football team.

**Q. Will, a couple of the Auburn players were sharing stories about you from last season. Montravius said you broke one of your fingers during halftime during a game. Can you confirm the validity of that story?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: I'm all right. It's just a finger.

**Q. And what happened?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: You know, I get frustrated sometimes. Marcus Spears got me frustrated a bunch. No. He's in the back. But, you know, I get -- as much as anything, I get mad at myself for not doing a better job preparing our players, and you get a little frustrated when the young men don't execute exactly the way we want to, and I wear my emotions sometimes on my sleeves a little bit more than I should, so -- I don't remember the situation. I black out sometimes.

**Q. I doubt if there's any other team -- I haven't looked at everybody -- that gets three conference road games in September --**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Yeah.

**Q. Then East Carolina usually gives everybody trouble, then for the heck of it you get to come back home for Texas A&M and Georgia. But I'm wondering, do you find a tough schedule early may**

**actually sharpen the kids' focus?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: I don't think there's any question opening on national TV on Saturday night got our attention. Derek did a good job offensively there. Ralph Webb. They got good, talented players on offense and certainly give you issues. I don't think opening up with a Southeastern Conference point got our guys' attention.

Right now we need to take care of South Carolina, take care of us in camp. We need to improve every day, find a way, win the day. All of those things are what we need to concentrate on right now. That's the most important. The schedule is what it is.

At the end of the day -- in this league it's going to be tough no matter how it starts off. You can't always have it the way you want it. At the end of the day, I look for a great opportunity to be 2-0 coming home to our fans.

**Q. What has impressed you most about defensive coordinator Travaris Robinson?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, what hasn't would be my question. I was a defensive coordinator in Auburn in 2006 and 2007. He claims to have had a great NFL career. I challenge that a little bit. I can't find any stats. But he's a guy that got a lot of passion, a lot of energy. He can relate with everybody in the room.

He has a unique way of reaching people. He understands how we play defense and how we want to teach it. And the devil is in the details of what we do and how we do it, the problems that present to us and how to handle those situations, and he certainly is ready for this opportunity. But everybody we have on our defensive staff we worked with before, and all of those guys understand how we'll coach defense and develop players, and we'll do it better than anybody in the country.

**Q. Hey, Derek Mason was in here the other day and said the run-pass conflict makes playing linebacker probably the most difficult position in college. How do you see that evolve and the difficulties playing there?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: I think it's really hard the especially playing zone coverage. You can't put a player in what he's referring to as run-pass conflict. Don't ask a guy to have the A gap and have run through in the middle of the field. You can't do both. You can't fake inside zone. You have three running down the middle, carry the guy. You can't rob Peter to pay Paul.

At the end of the day, we have to be able to play man-to-man in a lot of these situations. And sometimes the

bad part about that, you may be asking your players to do something they may not be able to do. Then it goes back to matchups. Do you match it well with some of these guys with what we're trying to do to be successful. There's no question in zone defense you can't ask guys to have vertical carries in the seams and play run gaps inside. It's impossible.

**Q. Coach, you talked about the learning question. Is there one thing at Florida, maybe, when you think back on what you could have done differently, you would have done? And also do you know Belichick, and have you talked to him about his second job and how he improved?**

COACH MUSCHAMP: Know Bill very well. I haven't talked about his second job. We've talked a lot. I don't know that you ever look at one thing and say this is it. I know sometimes it's easy for a story to wrap it in a bow and say bingo, Eureka, here we go. I don't think you point at one thing and say that's what happened. That's good for a story, but that's not necessarily the way it works.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Thank you, Coach Muschamp.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Thank you very much.