

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Will Muschamp South Carolina coach

MODERATOR: Good morning. We'll begin our day with the University of South Carolina head football coach, Will Muschamp.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate those kind words. Having stepped in the shoes of two Hall of Fame coaches, I understand the shoes he's stepping into with Commissioner Slive and Commissioner Kramer, who preceded him. And I can assure you our league is in great hands with Commissioner Sankey and the people he's got this place.

I'm really excited about our future. It's great to be back. Last day. You guys don't look real good, to be honest with you. You look a little worn out. Pat Dooley, what's up? You remind me of that Josh Turner song, "You Look Like I Need a Drink."

But it's great to be here. I actually was scheduled to come on day two, and my friend Kirby Smart called and said, Would you mind coming on day four? I need a little more vacation time, with his wife. So, to accompany him -- he might be working on his basketball skills since he never beat me at Valdosta State, regardless of the story he tells.

But certainly glad to be here. Year two at South Carolina. We're still a very young football team. We had 70 percent of our rosters still freshmen and sophomores. We only have 11 seniors. 19 first-time starters last year on last year's team and seven true freshman, which those two stats tie for the most in the country.

But I was extremely proud of that football team. You're 2-4. You're going into the open week, and I told our staff: We're going to go pedal to the metal. We're going to push these guys.

And when you're not having success and things aren't going your way, then all of a sudden you got a coach going after you, it's frustrating. But trust is a choice in life, and our guys chose to trust us as a staff and continued to believe, and certainly we were able to turn the thing around. And a credit to several of the guys that I've got here today, but certainly for our entire unit. But that's been about as proud of a team I've ever been



a part of as far as how they continue to fight and believe and trust in us and what we were trying to do.

Three guys with me today. Jake Bentley, our quarterback, we had gone into last season, I was going to redshirt Jake, and then we practice on Sunday nights with the bottom half of our roster to develop that part of the roster. I saw a guy go from August to September into October, continued to improve his skill set. And we were struggling offensively. And that was not on a quarterback position, that was multiple areas. But when he came in, he brought us a spark and a charge to see him go through the offseason program to spring ball now into the summer, really understands how to be a quarterback. And that's what excites me.

He was voted along with Deebo Samuel as a Most Valuable Player by his teammates. That will tell you something about a guy that played half the season, should be a high school senior, and his teammates are voting co-MVP. They split right down the middle.

Deebo Samuel is with me today. Very explosive player with the ball in his hands, returner, runner, receiver. We need to be able to get him a bunch of touches in every game. He's also a guy with a very competitive edge. You ask him to be a gunner, he's going to go do it. We're really excited about him. He along with Jake were co-MVPs on last year's team. And then Hayden Hurst was the first sophomore in school history to be voted a team captain. He's the only underclassman we had voted as a permanent captain. That tells you the respect, the work ethic he has. I'm really excited to see him jump from year one to year two at the tight end position. Last year was the first year he played at the position.

I know there will be some questions about not bringing a defensive player. Unfortunately there was some class conflicts and test conflicts and some things that we just couldn't work out. We certainly have some guys that were deserving to be here. But, honestly, the last time we brought our defensive guys to Birmingham, it didn't go real good. We gave up a bunch of points and a bunch of yards. So I didn't know if they'd want to come, so I didn't ask them.

I think offensively you see a bunch of are knowns and some competition. Competition is great because that

breeds consistency in your performance. When you're able to walk on the practice field and not have to motivate a guy to practice the right way all of the time because he knows he doesn't practice the right way, he's not going to play. We had that at multiple positions. You look at running back with Ricco Battle and A.J. Turner, two freshmen that played very well for us last year. Ty'Son Williams, a transfer that's going to come in and compete for playing time as well. We've got depth, quality depth, at the position of receiver. Bryan Edwards had a fantastic freshman year. Rاندrecous Davis and Chavis Dawkins did start games as freshmen as well. We think we recruited very well at the position. OrTre Smith was a guy on campus midyear. But we have very good competition at the position, along with Deebo Samuel. Tight end, quality depth. A bunch of different guys with a different skill set as far as the things they're going to provide for our football team. So excited about that position. And then we've got 98 starts back on the offensive line. I think we made a lot of improvements, really challenged those guys as far as their strength is concerned. But we have competition at both tackle spots and inside.

Defensively, a little different story as far as the known is concerned. We have a lot of unknowns. We've got some questions that need to be answered. Matter of fact, I was finishing scripting our first 11 practices last night, and our 11th practice is going to be a scrimmage, and that's going to be D-Day for a lot of these young guys. We need to make a decision on the who and the what, who is going to be playing and what can they handle. We need to do it early, because we open up with NC State, then we go to Missouri, and then we welcome Kentucky at home, which we've all seen for three straight years.

It starts up front in our league obviously. Taylor Stallworth, Ulric Jones, and Dante Sawyer are three seniors. For us to play well defensively, we need these guys to play well. So we're putting the pressure on these guys. They've got to play well for us to take the next step. We did have some guys to play as true freshmen -- Keir Thomas, Dennis Wonnun, and Kobe Smith that I thought did some really nice things. They need to take the next step. Year one to year two has got to be your largest movement as far as your improvement as a player. That's got to happen for those guys.

Really excited to get Skai Moore back. He brings an element of toughness, leadership, speed, athleticism. Very instinctive at the position. Led South Carolina in tackles for three years before I got there. He's a playmaker and a guy we're really excited about. Been through an awful lot this year as far as the adversity he's been through. Coaching change. Thought about coming out a couple times. I think he made two very

mature decisions to come back. Really excited to see him play this fall.

Bryson Allen-Williams is a guy we got to continue to expose his skill set. Let him get in the pass rush more. I think that will help us, especially with some of the space teams that we play.

And T.J. Brunson needs to take a next step. Again, played a lot as a true freshman for us last year and continued to improve as a player.

In the secondary, Chris Lammons is a guy that can do a lot of things for us. He can play corner, nickel, or safety. And I think his skill set is pretty vast, and I really like his leadership over the summer and how he's continued to improve. And D.J. Smith played his best ball in the spring. I'm really excited to see him play this year.

JaMarcus King and Rashad Fenton are two guys that can play well for us at the corner position, and Steven Montac can move aground.

Losing Elliott Fry hurts, because he's a very dependable guy. My first game at Vanderbilt, he kicked a 55-yarder. There was no question it was going to be good.

Alex Woznick to me has all the ability in the world; just hasn't done it yet. We feel comfortable that he has the ability to be very good.

It's an exciting time to be a Gamecock right now. I really see a push in our athletic department and support from our administration of doing the things you got to do to be successful. 650 Lincoln, where our players live, we've been in that two years now. It's as nice a living facility as there is in the country. The Dodie Anderson Academic Enrichment Center. Maria Hickman and her staff do an absolutely phenomenal job. 20 straight semesters of above a 3.0 cumulative GPA for our student-athletes. That's unheard of. Last year our football team graduation rate was rated third in the country.

So our guys are graduating. They are getting great educations at South Carolina. Our new operations facility will be done in December of 2018. It's underway right now. It will be as nice a developmental facility as there is in the country. And you couple that with the game day atmosphere we have at Williams-Brice, which is as good as anywhere in the country.

An exciting time for us moving forward. I thought we had a very solid foundation in year one, and moving forward and ready to get this thing kicked off, and I open it up for any questions.

Q. Coach, I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about Hayden Hurst, what it's been like to coach him. And what kind of an example can his story be to kids who possibly their first option in life doesn't exactly pan out, and they, you know, kind of reassess and find something else that they can do?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Absolutely, Gary. I think the first thing I would say it's a delight to coach the guy. The guy lives in the weight room. If he's not there, he's in the film room. He's asking questions. He is as coachable a guy as there is on our football team and that I've been associated with.

But he brings an element of maturity to the group, and because baseball didn't work for him, he chose another avenue, and so to have that maturity on our football team, to see his work ethic and the example he sets for the younger players is invaluable for me as a coach.

Because that -- when it comes from your peers, it's a lot different than when it comes from the coach. That's why as a sophomore, second year on the team, first year starting at tight end, he's elected a permanent team captain. To me, it's all about the respect you have from your peers, and he's as respected a young man on our fastball team.

Q. Will, can you just talk about second year. You went through this before, the comfort level you have now, and is there like less resistance in what you're dealing with now than maybe what you had to deal with at Florida?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think the most important thing is just understanding your roster, understanding the players you have on your team, the young men you've recruited in the previous two years to your football team. You're able to mold your team a little bit more about where you want to go and the direction you want to head with it, which, probably, to me, gives you a little bit more of a comfort level, as far as moving forward. I think that as much as anything.

But I also need to credit our players because I think they have bought into the type culture we want to have within our organization. And we have not had much resistance from that. Now, we've had some attrition, but the guys understood maybe this isn't for me, I want to go somewhere else, which is fine, but I want guys that want to be at the University of South Carolina. I believe we're on the verge of some really good things.

Q. Dave Williams is at Arkansas now. What would you say Arkansas is getting in terms of a player and a person, and what did you think about him going to Arkansas?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think David, first of all, is an outstanding person, an outstanding young man, and a really good football player. I didn't want to lose David. I tried to talk David into staying at South Carolina. He came to me in January. He said, Coach, I'm going to graduate. He did everything right. No off-the-field issues, no violation of teams rules. He did everything we wanted him to do. He said, I wanted a fresh start somewhere else to play my senior. He was a graduate transfer. I said I totally understood. I think he originally was going to go to Connecticut, and then I was down in Destin and Bret and Jeff Long came up and said, hey, would you be willing to release him within the league, even though we play all next year? Absolutely. Give the guy an opportunity, if that's what he wants to do. David's a good football player. I think that they'll find that they got a good one.

Q. Coach, you talked about Skai Moore. What are reasonable expectations for that young man with the injuries coming back from, it's a little scarier than most football injuries?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think the first day of contact we had in spring ball, I didn't say much to him, and we put him in a one-on-one drill, and he went right after it and threw his eyes in there, and it was awesome. Came out of it, and I said, You all right? He said, I'm ready to go.

We would have obviously not medically cleared him if he was not okay. He's a tough young man. He's going to be fine. He'll -- my expectation for him is to play extremely well. That's exactly my expectation.

Q. With a guy like Deebo Samuel, battled some injury problems early last year and came on strong, especially in the Birmingham Bowl, what can he do with the full season of being healthy.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, that's one thing we've got to do is keep him healthy. He's had some soft tissue issues at high school at Chapman and then at South Carolina. So that's something that we monitor through our catapult system and things. We make sure his mileage is not as high so he doesn't risk those injuries. We really harped on him, the hydration levels that he's got to hit every day to be able to understand that that's part of the pool process, as far as soft tissues are concerned.

He's an electric guy with the ball in his hands. We have to find multiple ways to get him the ball. That's our plan going into the season. I would certainly endorse having him for the entire year.

Q. Offensive line coach Shawn Elliott left to become a head coach at Georgia State. Could you talk about him and what you expect from him as

the head coach down in Atlanta?

COACH MUSCHAMP: I think Shawn will do an outstanding job. I think one of the strengths he has a coach is relating with the players and getting the players to play hard. That's something that if you had mission one as a coach, let's do that, is believe in your coach and play hard. And Shawn will do a fantastic job, and we appreciate his time at South Carolina.

Q. Have you had anybody like Jake Bentley improve that much during the start of the season as a quarterback? Anyplace you've been, have you had anybody like that?

COACH MUSCHAMP: I don't know that I have. I think that obviously did not go through spring, was around our players for the player-run practices in the summer, and then went into fall camp. Had a good fall camp. And you could see him continuing to improve. The amount of reps and amount of turns just wasn't there. I just didn't at the time, going into the season, feel like he was as prepared as the other two quarterbacks.

But as you practiced on Sunday nights and we let the guys that have played a lot in the games go in the locker room and we're taking the other guys and we're coaching and developing the bottom half of our roster, and I'm watching a guy continue to improve. And I'm talking to Kurt Roper and saying, Coach, he's starting to get it. He's starting to understand what we need to do.

And then the frustration of not playing well offensively. Again, not all in the quarterback position. There was multiple issues. But part of being a good quarterback is understanding how to be a quarterback. And Jake understands that.

Q. How does having a -- identifying a quarterback put the long-range rebuilding plan ahead of schedule and provide a foundation?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I don't think there's any question that, if you have an established guy at that position, it helps your skill recruiting offensively and helps your offensive line recruiting, and then it helps you on defense, because guys want to understand that having a guy at that position that can excel, you're going to win games. And that's part of the process in recruiting is saying we're going to win some football games. Which we are at South Carolina. No doubt.

COACH MUSCHAMP: You don't have to identify yourself. They could use your voice to torture prisoners of war. I was waiting for a year to say that. Go ahead.

Q. You talk a lot about facilities. It seems everybody's upgrading their facilities in the SEC.

When you.

Were at Florida, were you aware that your facilities had lagged behind? And how much of a detriment was that to you building that program?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I don't think there's any question. You know, there's a plan to move forward. I mean, the indoor that they finished was done. Jeremy and I, we had done that about a year and a half before. We agreed to get the indoor done. I think we had a plan moving forward to continue to enhance our situation there. But that's part of it.

At the end of the day, we don't believe in bells and whistles, but recruits do. That's a fact. And they want to see new. They want to see shiny. They want to see progress. And there's no doubt that helps you in the program.

Q. How do you think being at Florida helped you as a head coach at South Carolina?

A. Well, I don't know that -- I mean, whether it's Florida or anywhere else, you know, time as a head coach helps from a standpoint. I don't look at it any different than playing as a freshman or a rookie.

As you continue to get more snaps, the game slows down for you. I'm not talking in terms of the game. It's not the X-and-O part. It's all the other stuff. It's public relations. It's recruiting. It's managing your football team. It's managing your campus. There's a lot of things -- hats that you wear, in the role. And certainly, the more at-bats you get, the better you're going to become at it.

Q. Will, expounding on Jake, what is the biggest thing maybe in your experience with sophomore quarterbacks that you see them improve on from their freshman year to their sophomore year?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Understanding how to be a quarterback as far as the film room is concerned, total understanding of the offense, protections, blocking schemes upfront, identifying defenses. All of those things are the next step.

As a guy coming in in August, it's like drinking water out of a firehose. We're moving fast. The installation, we're going to install this day. You know what we're going to do tomorrow? We're going to install again. The next day, we're going to install again. The defense continues to install.

All of a sudden, Coach Muschamp puts in three down on day five. That changes the whole ball game as far as protections and run game is concerned. To be able to sit down and digest offensively what we do and

identifying defenses to me is the biggest step mentally.

Q. You got the crossover with Arkansas this year. I might not have seen them in a couple years.

What's your prep been like for them? What do you think of the program?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Obviously, Bret, he's done a great job at Wisconsin and now Arkansas. It's a different ball of wax as far as playing those guys as far as some of the teams we see in the east. We may get some traditional two-back run game. Dan does a fantastic job of that. They've gone strictly three down on defense. It is something we need to prepare for on the eastern side.

I think more than anything, the physicality that that organization is going to bring, you need to understand the two-back runs and those things, which are a little bit different than what we face on the eastern side.

Q. Can you just talk -- when you're playing a quarterback, you decide to go with a quarterback, who is senior in high school, basically, is that a sleepless night situation? I mean, is that a tough decision for you to -- in your first year as a coach?

COACH MUSCHAMP: After we had lost to Georgia, I went home. There's a Sunday game because of the hurricane. And I went home that night and was just kind of going through in my mind just thinking what we need to do to improve. We are going into an open week. We are not going to have time for reps. We're not going to be in a game-plan mode trying to get somebody ready, that sort of thing. To be honest with you, I called Coach Tanner. I said, am I wrong to think we need to play a high school senior? He said absolutely not. I'm not telling you what to do. You can do whatever you want to do. He said, you know, if your gut tells you to do it, do it. So I went into the office Monday morning, I told Kurt we're going to open it up. Kurt agreed with that, and we move forward from there.

Q. Will, you had 21 sacks last year. You lose Darius, what strides, if any, did you see during the spring when it came to finding a pass rusher?

COACH MUSCHAMP: Well, I think the biggest thing is being able to affect the quarterback with four guys rushing. With all of the spread teams you play, they're making you defend the whole field. Five-man pressure is great. But that generally means man coverage or some sort of you have two-trap coverage. You have a lot of -- your back is to the ball. You have all these quarterbacks that have legs that creates issues for you.

I thought Dennis Warren has made some strides. I think he's a guy that really came on. He's getting stronger. He's up about the 250 range. I'm excited about him. I think you can give him a pass rush. We

need to utilize Bryson Allen-Williams in the pass rush. He's not natural pass-rush ability. We have a situation number wise last year, which didn't work to utilize him more. And we need to do that more.

Taylor Stallworth I think can be a very effective rusher inside for us. Dante Sawyer is a guy that can rush both inside and outside, so we need Urich to be able to push the pocket. There's a lot of components that I think we have. We just need to do a better job with it.

Q. Will, how has the implementation of RPOs changed how you recruit at linebacker and safety and defensive back?

A. I don't know that it's changed the type of athletes you recruit. Certainly schematically, it creates some issues for you. As far as your pattern match coverages with the run game, you get canceling gaps, being able to carry people down the field. It creates a lot of run pass conflicts for a linebacker and a safety.

It's also really difficult when the offensive guard releases 15 yards down field, too, on a slant. That kind of poses an issue and that's got nothing to do with athleticism. I think more than anything, it has more to do with scheme than it does the type of young man you're going to recruit.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you for your time.

COACH MUSCHAMP: Thank you very much.