

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Chris Beard

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with Coach Beard. We will go straight to questions.

Q. You obviously have Wes Flanigan back with you, Allen Flanigan. How did that work out where Wes left Auburn to come to you, then getting Allen?

CHRIS BEARD: Good morning. Always have great memories thinking back to the state of Arkansas. Our team at Little Rock was really special. Our team is connected today. We already had several of our players visit us in Oxford the first several months.

Wes Flanigan is a huge, huge addition to our staff. Before I start talking about basketball, he's one of my best friends in life. What we built together and experienced at Little Rock was special. Our friendship, pulling for him in Auburn with Coach Pearl, Wes has been a dear friend.

From a basketball standpoint, one of the best players that ever played in the SEC at the guard position at Auburn. His son Al has a chance to be in that same category.

I'm blessed to not only have a great coach back on our staff but one of my best friends.

Q. What are the things that you look forward to coaching Allen Flanigan this season?

CHRIS BEARD: A lot of things about Al. When we were at Little Rock, Al was just a kid growing up. I remember him coming to summer basketball camp, always being at practice, getting shots up before and after. It's just been awesome to watch his journey, how he developed in high school, playing for his grandfather, Hall of Fame coach, in my opinion maybe the best that's ever coached high school basketball. Certainly being around his dad, playing for Coach Pearl at Auburn, it's been awesome watching his development, how he's grown.

I'm looking forward to coaching in my opinion what I think is one of the best players in college basketball, but also looking forward to spending the seven- and eight-month journey. I have a lot of respect for him as a person. I love Al as a person, as well.

Q. What has Allen Flanigan already brought to you first time through to have that confidence in him, what he's brought as you start building this new program?

CHRIS BEARD: He really is a good player.

I think, you know what, what I think players want at the core is they want a coach they can trust. I think a lot of players don't understand that's what we want as coaches. Ultimately we want guys that we can trust, they're going to buy in, do what the organization, the program stands for, count on 'em in times of adversity to bounce back, count on 'em in times of success to stay humble and keep grinding.

In a short amount of time in Oxford, Al has earned my trust as a player. He is a guy that shows up every day, does what's expected of him. He obviously produces, as well. We're excited to have Al in this first year on this Ole Miss team.

Q. Obviously with that cloud still there as far as waiver eligibility for Brandon Murray and Moussa Cisse, how have you seen them handle that as far as the day-to-day process of making Ole Miss a winner in year one?

CHRIS BEARD: Both guys, Moussa and Brandon, have attacked this situation with a lot of professionalism, a lot of maturity.

We talk about it. We have a truth-telling program. We don't spend a lot of time in our organization trying to play mind games. We put it out there. Obviously a lot of unknowns right now, especially as the season approaches quickly. We have our first outside competition this weekend.

On the one hand we talk about it. We keep everything in



the open air. On the other hand these guys are doing a great job controlling what they can control. That's just approaching each day, whether it's practice or individual workout or the academic piece of being a student-athlete. Kind of twofold.

We're definitely not ignoring what's going on with that, but also we're just attacking each day and controlling what we can control.

Q. You have another kid on your roster, Rashaud Marshall. I think you had to re-recruit him. What are you expecting from him? How good a player do you think you got in him?

CHRIS BEARD: We do think we got one of the best freshmen in the country in Rashaud. Doesn't mean all the pressure in the world is going to be on him as a young guy, but we think he's talented enough and tough enough and disciplined enough to contribute early in his career.

Give Kermit Davis a lot of credit. We've walked into a really good situation at Ole Miss because the foundation has been laid. We inherited a lot of really good players. We inherited a program that had a lot of good things going on in the community. We are blessed to follow Kermit, one of the best guys that's ever done it in college basketball, one of the best guys that ever coached in the SEC.

Rashaud had been in Kermit's recruiting class. With the help of Win Case, who is on our staff, we did a good job re-recruiting Rashaud. We're excited to have him. I think he's one of the freshmen as the season goes on will prove to be one of the better freshmen in college basketball.

Q. How well do you know Eric? He was a guy that went from being an NBA head coach to college assistant, humbled himself. He was one of the first guys to take advantage of the portal. What do you think about Eric and the pathway he's taken?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I know Muss. I would say we're friends. We talked about basketball a lot. I think we played each other three times when he was in Nevada, we were Texas Tech. We had a non-conference game, great game. We played in the NCAA tournament. Another great game. Came down to the buzzer. Then last year we were able to play in a charity exhibition game, which I think was great for both games.

He's a guy we've exchanged from basketball ideas from time to time. I have a lot of respect for him on the outside looking in. We don't vacation together. We don't exchange Christmas gifts, but I think there's a lot of respect on both ends. I got a lot of respect for their program, how

they recruit, coach, player development. I wish him the best of luck this season.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRIS BEARD: It's been impressive. I think all of us in coaching have made transitions, myself included, from different levels. I think his experience in professional basketball, in my opinion, really even the Minor Leagues and stuff, maybe gives him a little bit I don't know about advantage, but it gives him a lot of reference point, in my opinion, to how college basketball is now with the portal, ever-changing landscape, certainly name, image and likeness.

I don't want to speak for Coach. You asked the question; I'll answer it. A lot of things going on in our game right now that might be uncomfortable for some of us are not uncomfortable for guys like me and Muss because we've experienced different levels of basketball.

Q. You have experience rebuilding programs at Texas Tech. How different is the rebuilding process now? You have 10 newcomers on your team with the transfer portal.

CHRIS BEARD: Great question.

I think whenever you take a new job, there's similarities between other opportunities you've had in the past. But on the other hand, every job is a little bit different.

I think we got a great challenge at Ole Miss, but with challenge comes great opportunity. We inherited a really good base. I think we have five players on our team that will be returners. We have four freshmen. We have five or six transfers. Our team will be a mix of three categories.

Have a great fan base. Ole Miss is kind of hot right now. Football team, women's basketball, baseball, the Olympic sports. We want to do our part with men's basketball.

Easy to sit up here and talk about, very difficult to do. But we have a lot of optimism. I think we've got good players. We're early in our journey. We're fighting time more than anything. Yesterday was I think our 15th practice.

We're excited. A lot of optimism in Oxford right now. I think the main source of that is we have good players.

Q. I think it's 70 combined wins between your previous three first seasons. Walking into this situation, in hindsight, what have been the individual things you've taken away from each of those first seasons?

CHRIS BEARD: We've had some success at different jobs, not just the Division I jobs that get most of the credit. I think this is our eighth or ninth head coaching job. We've had some really good first-year teams. The first thing I always acknowledge is the guys we followed. Again, we've been blessed, Tubby Smith, Shaka Smart, Fred Rike, now we're blessed to follow Kermit, a guy I think his résumé speaks well for itself, one of the best guys that ever coached the game. Andy Kennedy before that.

You acknowledge what you're walking into. There's some good things.

I think secondly, we've always had just high expectations for first-year teams. I told the players the other day, expectations is the biggest gift you can give anyone. I don't tell my three daughters, Pass your classes in school. We have a little bit higher expectations in our family. Make all As, excel, do the best you can. We don't tell our shooters to go in the gym at night and make some shots. We tell our shooters to go in the gym, shoot for 90 minutes, try to make 75% of your open shots. It's just expectations.

I always thought that with first-year teams. A lot of people don't think the first year matters. I respectfully disagree. Don't put a mulligan, an asterisk next to this first-year Ole Miss team. It's our players, our staff. We're fighting time a little bit. No excuses. Everybody has obstacles. One of our obstacles will be time this year.

Combination, inheriting, following somebody that knew what they were doing, having good players open this year's roster, then having really high expectations, I think that's our kind of ingredients to giving ourselves a chance the first year.

Q. You talked about building trust with the players. Obviously your situation last year is going to follow, there's going to be questions about it throughout your tenure wherever you are. How have you built trust with the players, with recruits, the fans and the community since you have gotten to Oxford?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think trust is based on just reliability, dependability. Do what you say you're going to do, do it every day. Have discipline about what's expected of you and the organization.

You walk into a situation, sometimes a player will trust you before you ever earn that trust. As a coach, especially with a transfer player, older player, you give that trust before it's earned. That's kind of what's recruiting process is. Then you get to work.

I think one of the sources of real optimism we have right now in Oxford is our players have done a good job. In the summer and the pre-season, now 15 official practices in, continuing to not only earn our coaching staff's trust but each other's trust.

A lot of it comes down to just discipline to me. With relationships, it's all about doing what you say you're going to do, repeatedly. When things are good, stay steady, stay humble. When things are tough, there's going to be a lot of adversity, it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. When things get tough, be who you are, don't change.

We got a long ways to go. We're just building this thing. But there are a lot of positive signs right now in our organization 'cause guys are doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Q. When you talk about earning that trust from guys, as you go into living rooms, talk to families and players, they have questions about how things ended at Texas, how have you tackled that with them? How have you addressed that?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, one way: the truth. Just talk about the truth. Not only what's happened last couple months, what's happened in my whole career.

I also think as human beings, coaches, players, we all go through adversity, we all go through tough times. I always thought that's an opportunity to respond.

Certainly in teaching, coaching, I always thought that's what coaching is, Coach Knight said that on a daily basis, coaching is teaching. I think you have different opportunities to teach your players.

Certainly when things are really good, you have opportunities to teach. Sometimes when adversity hits, you go through some struggles, it's also great learning ground, a chance to teach people.

It's what we try to do in our program. We try to learn, we try to get better every day, and we tell the truth.

A question about Arkansas?

Q. It's about your athletic director.

CHRIS BEARD: He's from Arkansas. Let's talk about Arkansas. What is your favorite restaurant in downtown Little Rock?

Q. I live in Fayetteville.

CHRIS BEARD: Little Rock is the capital.

Q. I live in Fayetteville. That's where the university is. You don't live in Jackson, do you?

CHRIS BEARD: No, but I go to Jackson a lot. Flying Fish downtown is really good. Cache is fine dining.

Q. I don't know about that.

CHRIS BEARD: I'm not a real fine dining person, but I like Cache. Great burger place on the river, too. I don't remember the name of it. I can tell you how to get there. Parking is an issue, but the burger is good. I would always tell them to grill the bun, toast the bun. Little Rock has great restaurants.

I like Fayetteville, too. Beautiful drive from Little Rock.

Q. Almost forgot my question.

CHRIS BEARD: I bet the question is about Arkansas.

Q. It's about Keith, who is from Arkansas, Perryville.

CHRIS BEARD: Keith's birthday yesterday.

Q. I didn't know that. Keith obviously is a basketball guy. There aren't that many basketball guys that are ADs at Power Fives, SEC is more football. What is your relationship like with Keith and what did he do to help commit you to Ole Miss? What is the dynamic like when you have an A.D. who is a great basketball player?

CHRIS BEARD: I've been blessed my whole career to work some grade administrations, leadership and ADs. No exception with Keith.

It's just special, not only did the guy play BCS basketball, he's really good, really good. All-Conference, All-American, NCAA winner-type player. That's cool having a basketball guy around.

I actually called him the other night after practice and asked him a basketball question. That's unique.

In terms of the Ole Miss job, I just think the transparency and the vision that Keith Carter and Chancellor Boyce had about not only the men's basketball program but the athletic department really caught my interest very quickly.

We know we have a long ways to go to build the program, but there's no denying there's a vision. There's a vision internally within our program, within the administration,

within the city of Oxford. I really believe in the state of Mississippi. Everybody wants Ole Miss and Mississippi State to be good.

It's been great working with Keith so far. Yesterday, first time I've ever done this, wasn't my idea, but we gave the A.D. a birthday present. I was a little out of my comfort zone. One of our guys came in and said, Do you want to send Keith Crumbl cookies? I didn't know what Crumbl cookies were. They brought them by. They're not cookies. They're like mini cakes. Have you ever had Crumbl cookies? Do they have Crumbl in Arkansas? You should check that. You're an expert all things Arkansas.

It's out of my comfort zone to send another man cookies for his birthday. I didn't consider them cookies, I considered them cakes. We sent Keith a birthday present yesterday. Shout-out to the boss. Happy birthday, Keith.

Q. Specifically about TJ Caldwell. What do you view his role is this season having all the experience? Do you see him as a more off-the-ball player?

CHRIS BEARD: We're familiar with TJ from the state of Texas, so we recruited him. Had a really good year for Kermit. Kind of a typical freshman year when you're really talented, a lot of inconsistency, but on any given night one of the best young players in the SEC.

The challenge for TJ, the goal, the objective, what we talked about in recruiting him back, talk to him on a daily basis, is consistency. He's proven that he can play in this league both offensively and defensively. The next step as a young sophomore would be try to get him into more of a consistent mode.

I don't want to put all the pressure on his shoulders, but I confidently tell you he's a name we'll be talking about at these type of press conferences at the end of the season, too. I really think that TJ Caldwell will be one of the best sophomores in the Ole Miss -- in the SEC for Ole Miss. We've done that from time to time. I don't like to make a lot of predictions on players, especially only after 15 practices, but I have a lot of confidence in TJ.

His heart is in the right place, a talented guy, cares about his craft, smart, comes from a great family. Our coaching staff, we have a lot of responsibility this year to kind of get him to the next step in his career. I think he'll be a really good sophomore in our league.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

CHRIS BEARD: Thank you.

