

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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South Carolina Gamecocks

Lamont Paris

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with South Carolina. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. Obviously you know this is coming. Picked last in the SEC. You have an older team. How do you broach that subject with those guys? Would you handle it differently if you had a young team?

LAMONT PARIS: Let's see. Right out of the gates with picked last (smiling).

Here's what I'll say about picks. There were 14 picks last year. Does anybody know how many of those was right? The team was picked at whatever spot, then it ended up finishing in that spot out of the 14 picks? Zero. Not one team last year was picked in this spot and then finished in that same spot, so...

I say that only to say also half of the picks last year, let's say if your standard deviation was one or two or three, it seemed like you knew something, and you picked those right. I.e., I picked the team first, and they finished fourth. You had some sort of idea.

Seven of the picks last year fit to that criteria. Seven of the picks were off by more than four. Two of the picks, one was off by seven, one was off by eight.

There's not much in a pick. But I will say this. Personally, and I hope our team takes this, the only thing I can thank them for is they picked us last. Second to last is nothing. What does that mean? I can't even use that as billboard material. So last it is.

But last year I think we had the most teams in the NCAA tournament in the history of the SEC. I think that's accurate. I think we also had the most teams in the NCAA tournament of any other conference in men's basketball. We tied with the Big Ten. So we had a good league.

Our team had 122 total starts of all the players in their career, 122. We did not finish last last year. We this year have 480 total starts. I don't know. Maybe we'll finish last possibly, but to me, this is the way I think, the audacity for someone to say you're going to finish last. The league as good as it was last year, we were under-manned, I will say that, for certain we were under-manned.

We won four games. We won at Kentucky. We had the No. 2 team in the country in an overtime game, they had to score at the end of the game to force an overtime. We played another NCAA team till the last possession. We had three overtime losses. Didn't finish last. Then we're picked to finish last.

Maybe the league has gotten that much better. I know my team is more experienced. I know my team is better. I don't aspire to not be last, right? I don't aspire to not be last. Someone's asking me about the fact that we were picked last, so...

It just doesn't make that much sense to me. Hopefully to my team it will be something, a source of inspiration and disrespect, honestly, to them to come out and play. They're not playing to not be last. What a low goal that would be, okay? But you're asking me about being picked last, and I don't see it.

It's a cool pick. I guess it's convenient. Maybe you like this coach better. This coach is smarter. This coach has more experience. This player that we picked up, you don't think he's very good. I don't know. We're much more significantly skilled, significantly more experienced, and we did not finish last last year.

Anybody else?

Q. Talk about the team, strength-wise from last year, what is going to be better about South Carolina as a team as far as the strength?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I'll answer in two ways. One way would be, one measure, would be just our experience. I gave the numbers on that. Just older team, more games



played. They've been coached more often. They've been in more situations. They have a different expectation for themselves that they know that's realistic.

I think if you look at the teams that have had success, a lot of them have had experience. Right from the start, that's one thing. That experience goes two ways. Not only is it just experience in college basketball - three ways - experience in college basketball, experience at this level of college basketball, and it's experience with me. I also have more guys that I have coached, significantly more guys that I have coached and coaching again this year, from terminology, all that. Last year we had none.

That's one.

I think we're much more skilled. We have a much more skilled team. That's not a thought, that's a fact. We have a much more skilled team just in the ability to shoot the ball. More guys are capable shooters. We had a guy like Myles Stute who has proven his net worth as a shooter in this conference. Meechie Johnson made 80-some threes last year. Ta'Lon Cooper shot around 40% from three. B.J. Mack, obviously he's a guy that's known to make threes for a bigger guy at his position.

Our skill as shooters and ability to put the ball... Offensively I think we're significantly better. I think that's the first thing you'll be able to see pretty quickly. It's probably the biggest improvement we've made overall, aside from the fact these guys were born earlier than the guys that we had last year.

Q. What is the type of program you aspire to achieve offensively and defensively when you get your full roster in the coming years, this year as well?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I aspire just to be a good, solid team that is a consistently good team. I think we use the word 'consistency', and there's a negative connotation oftentimes associated with consistent. But I hold consistency in the highest regard. I aspire to be consistent. I aspire to be predictable. I aspire to be predictably good. I aspire to know what we're going to get every day in terms of our effort, communication, how we compete, in terms of how we follow defensive rules. I aspire to be so predictable in those areas.

Once we get to that point, I know what the results are ultimately going to be.

From an offensive standpoint, I like to shoot threes. They're worth more than twos. I'm no mathematician, but I know that's the way that works out. I think it allows you to spread the floor. I think there's a couple of things that guys

don't like as players in the game today. They don't like to be dumped on and have a three sprayed in their face. They'll do anything to stop either of those from happening.

I think if you can get some guys that can shoot the ball from three and make 'em, defenders have a tendency to overreact. That overreaction allows guys that aren't great drivers to be great drivers if they're good decision-makers. It allows the floor to be spread, allows guys to play one on one in the post a little bit more.

That's what I aspire us to be as an offensive team. I like guys that have a good feel for the game, that are intelligent, that are unselfish. That doesn't mean they're not aggressive, they're not good. I aspire to have a team that has guys that are good at something. Whatever that one thing might be, to really be good at that. Then it's up to me to figure out a way to use that ability offensively.

That's us offensively.

Defensively, again, I think -- offensively I like to be creative. I think guys have to be creative, they need to make decisions, I think they need to be able to fail. But I want to be solid offensively.

Defensively is the opposite to me. You have to be regimented, have a certain amount of rules that every team has. Are you good at following your defensive principles, whatever that is for any particular team?

Yeah, that's what I aspire, a team to be solid, predictably good, predictably good, reproducible results. In my experience as a head coach even, as an assistant coach, I've been around teams that have won a lot, and they were predictable results no matter where they were picked. My first year at Chattanooga, we were picked last, 10th out of 10th, because there was no such thing as 11th. That's who we were as a team. Four years later they picked us first, so...

Q. Arkansas questions. Devo Davis, you faced him for the first time last year. He's back for his fourth year at Arkansas. Kind of uncommon these days. What do you think about that? What do you remember about him as a player, what makes him good?

LAMONT PARIS: He's been around. He's got familiarity with the league. He's a competitive guy. At the end of the day he's a really competitive guy. He made some plays. He played well against us, that's for sure.

He has a flair for making a play when it really counts the most, which I guess they all count the same. It seems like based on time and circumstance, some plays seem to

count more than others. He has a flair for that. He's been around for four years in the same place, which is a rarity these days.

We talk about these rules that I talk about that every team must have on either side of the ball. He knows those. He helps impart that culture from older guys to younger guys. It's done by coaches, but it's the coach's job. When it is done by players, it means it's real.

Good player, he's a good player. He's an experienced guy. Obviously there's a lot of value in that. I commend him for doing what he's done and having such a good career.

Q. Eric Musselman, he was one of the first transfer portal guys in Nevada, what do you know about Eric? He was one of the first guys to do what's become such a big trend now.

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I think they had six or seven thousand-point scorers at Nevada on the one team. I remember seeing that at one point when he was there. I thought what an advantage that was. We had taken a lot of transfer portal guys, too. It wasn't even a transfer portal, it just was transfers at that point. Remember way back when, guys had to sit out when they transferred. We had some guys that ended up doing that, being good players for us.

It's the way of the world now. Certainly he was in tune with that before it became the en vogue thing to do.

Q. You were out-rebounded by four a game in SEC play last season. How do you feel about your bigs? Have you addressed that issue?

LAMONT PARIS: I hope we have. Some of it is experience. Josh Gray, whose mass makes a difference in this conference, and probably most conferences, he developed and blossomed throughout the season last year. He's continued to grow as a player. As he continues to be able to be in there for extended minutes, I think that helps our rebounding efforts.

We added some guys like Myles Stute who has a track record of rebounding effectively. We've continued to emphasize it.

We have to do a better job. I mean, you think about every possession ends only in a couple of different ways. It's either a turnover, a made basket or you have to rebound the thing at some point.

Most of them end up in that if your team is any good. You have to rebound the ball at some point. Someone has to

do it. We'll do it by committee. We don't have someone right now that I would say is going to have Oscar Tshiebwe numbers as a rebounder.

But I think it's determination. There's some skill involved in it, but I think it's more determination, willing to roll your sleeves up, embrace physicality and contact. Some other things, like having a nose for the ball, anticipating where it's going to come off and things like that.

Q. What have you seen from Myles Stute throughout the fall, the summer too, what do you expect from him this year?

LAMONT PARIS: Myles is a great kid. He and his family, unbelievable people. I he'll really fortunate to have him in our camp and on our team.

He's just a experienced guy. He's emotionally stable as a player. He'll do whatever you ask him to do. He's been around this league. He knows the style of play from other teams. He has been in all these venues before. The value of that is extremely high.

But he's a tremendous kid, really, really dedicated worker. Very dedicated worker. I can't say enough about that. He stays in the gym and works really hard at his game.

He's a great listener. He tries to learn anything that he can. So my expectations are high for him in a lot of different ways. We try to add some different things to his game at some point. But my expectations will be for him to continue to be a good shooter, improve some things that can help him improve his percentages, to be an aggressive guy for us, to have a leadership role, and to lead by example, to be a really good player for us. I think he's going to be a really good player for us.

Thanks, guys.

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