

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Chad Morris Arkansas Razorbacks

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Chad Morris will be entering his second season as the head football coach at the University of Arkansas following a legendary and highly successful high school coaching career and various stops on the collegiate trail including at SMU. Earned Coach of the Year Honors at Texas three times and won three state championships.

He and his wife, Paula, have two children, Mackenzie attending graduate school at the university and works with him in the football program. Under NCAA rules, I will tell you that I am permitted to acknowledge he has a son named Chandler, if you know anything about Chandler. Suffice it to say, he enjoys hunting and fishing with Chandler which is permissible.

He and Paula support the Tempo Temple Foundation that they initiated. And I asked if that's an indication of offensive tempo, and he said in everything we do, and they're hosting an event for women in northwest Arkansas, but they support two foundations and multiple charities in the northwest Arkansas area. University of Arkansas head football Coach, Chad Morris.

CHAD MORRIS: All right. Thank you, Commissioner Sankey. Thank you for what you do for our great conference and the vision that you set for all of us.

Thank you, all, for coming out and covering the Hogs and the SEC, the greatest conference in college football. It's an honor and privilege to be head football coach at the University of the Arkansas. And special thank you to our local and state media to travel here and cover hogs. We greatly appreciate the passion and the coverage that you give our fan base.

Media Day always means one thing, and that's football season's on us. So we're excited about this opportunity. 235 days ago we walked off the field and started a year two journey. And we learned a lot last year. And most important, we learned that one play has no bearing on the next. And one season has no bearing on the next. Every play and every season has a life and a history of its own.

And true measure of someone, a staff, a group of young men that chose to come back, when things go



bad, a true measure is what their character is and how they respond. And it was hard. Last season was hard. And there's no doubt, but we learned a lot as a staff. We learned a lot as players, and we responded.

And as head football coach, that's what you ask is how you respond. When things go tough, how you respond. Our staff responded by putting together one of the top recruiting classes in the history of our school. Our players have responded by continuing to be developed by our staff and our strength staff and Trumain Carroll, lead by Trumain Carroll, which continues to do a great job of establishing our culture and what we stand for and core values when our coaches are out of the office.

Being able to reconnect our current players this past year, with our former players, and has been critical, allowing our doors to open to all of our former players that come in and interact into fellowship and to shared experiences of being a student-athlete at the University of Arkansas and to share the impact that we all have on every household in our great state.

Hunter Yurachek joined me as the director of athletics one day before I got there December 5th, I believe. He brought in a one Arkansas. And let me tell you, we have some of the greatest fans in college football that are deserving of a great football program. And it's important that we -- we unite and lock arms in becoming one Arkansas.

You see the three players that I brought today off of our football team, they represent everything that college football is about. They also have an edge and a drive to raise the competitive standard in our program. They are great players, but more importantly, they are even better students and men. And I know you'll enjoy your time with them today.

McTelvin "Sosa" Agim, a graduate, a 4.0 student last semester, defensive tackle from Texarkana. Scoota Harris, linebacker who graduates in December. From New Orleans, Devwah Whaley, a senior running back that will also graduate in December from Beaumont. And the best thing about these guys, they are some of the best players on our team. They are also -- they pride themselves in being the best players for our team, and they represent what we want our culture to

be about.

When you take a head football coaching job, you know that establishing and enhancing a culture is your top priority, and it takes time, and it takes consistency, and there's a certain process to follow to develop the results that you're looking for. You can look at examples for guys that I worked for. Coach Swinney, guys in this league, Dan Mullen and Mark Stoops. It didn't happen overnight.

The process has gone from being a coach-fed team to a player-led culture follows three steps that we always talk about. I know it. I do it. And I own it. And my focus as a head football coach at the University of Arkansas is about building a program that's a consistent winner. Year in, year out, we want to compete for championships, but to win championships first, you got to develop champions and our staff is doing a tremendous job of doing that and recruiting that way and turning young men into champions. But it doesn't happen overnight.

Our mission is to prepare young men for success both on and off the field for the rest of their life. And when I got in this business of changing lives and impacting lives through the game of football, and winning football games, that hasn't changed. We always have and we have always developed young men in our program as people, as students, and then as players. That's our process for getting results.

And we do that through our vision. And our vision is "Every," the word "Every." Every matters. Every rep. Every day of those 235 days, that day one really does matter. What we did on that first day matters and what this year looks like. Everything matters and everything counts.

Offensively, our philosophy has not changed. We want to be fast-paced, hurry-up, no-huddle football team, and we've made tremendous strides by developing our young men on our roster, by recruiting the way we recruited and attracting the right transfers.

We're excited about our quarterback battle that we have with the addition of Ben Hicks and Nick Starkel and the ability to bring Ben in in January and watch the development of John Stephen Jones through the spring and the valuable reps that he got, it will be an interesting battle as we go into fall camp.

Running back. Devwah Whaley is here today. Rakeem Boyd, one of the top returners in our league, healthy. Chase Hayden. This is an area that we have some depth and we have experience at.

Offensive line is an area that we have to improve. We

knew that. We played with eight scholarship offensive linemen the entire year last year. A lot of cross-training took place. We knew this had to be a focus going into year two in how we developed and how we recruited in bringing in six, signing six offensive linemen and expecting some of those guys to contribute. Myron Cunningham being one of them, a junior college guy we brought in.

Wide receiver was an area we thought we had to get bigger, we had to get faster and unite that combination with the guys that we have on our roster to help us create our speed that we need to compete in this league. At tight end, CJ O'Grady, which has a chance to be one much the best in the country, is one of the top play makers returning from last year. We're excited about him.

Defensively, with Coach Chavis at the helm for year two, our defense is built on speed and stopping the run, and understanding it's a line of scrimmage league, we, too, signed seven defensive linemen to add to an already experienced group. And I feel like we had the pieces in place year two defensively to continue to show improvements as we move into this season.

At defensive line, you'll meet Sosa, T.J. Smith, a phenomenal leader, a senior, graduate, Dorian Gerald, Gabe Richardson, Jamario Bell, Jonathan Marshall -- these are all guys that have played and have a lot of reps underneath their belt. And it's time to take that next step forward in this program as well as bring in the freshman D-linemen that we brought in that we're excited about.

Secondary brings Kam Curl as a leader for us. Joe Foucha. I'm excited about Joe. Joe is a young man that played a lot last year as a true freshman. His experience with Kam Curl's leadership should make the back end better. We got to continue to develop the guys up front.

I know we played a lot of young guys at the corner, and when you play young guys, mistakes happen. They made some mistakes last year, as we all did, but how we responded is the only thing that matters, and these guys have done a really good job responding this spring.

Linebacker Scoota Harris leads the SEC in tackles last year, a phenomenal person, a great leader, as I talked about earlier. Bumper Pool -- might be up with of the greatest names in all of the college football -- joined us. Played as a true freshman last year. I expect great things out of him. I know Coach Chavis, which coaches the linebackers, demands those guys play at a very, very high level. Hayden Henry, Grant Morgan, these are experienced players that are returning.

Special teams. Promoted Barry Lunney to our special teams coordinator. We understand the importance this unit has on the outcome of games, and we also understand this unit has to show improvement in year two.

Bring Connor Limpert, a kicker, back which was a weapon for us last year. Punting was a weakness. Because of that, we went out and brought in an experienced punter, a veteran that will add value and add competition in that room. So I am excited to watch the competition as we go into fall camp.

I've been in this position before. I've stood in the same area of record, of building a program. Year one at Arkansas was similar to when we got to Clemson and coming off the season that they had came off of and watching the values and the vision that was set in place and in movement and the challenges that you had to go through in changing a culture. Year one at SMU. And all three stops there was success happening inside the walls of the football building.

And while only us as coaches and players could see that success happening, through the defining of the culture, it was happening. And we know this, that in year two, as we move forward, that the successes that were happening in year one will show up on Saturdays. And it wasn't fun. It wasn't a lot of fun when you go through tough times like that. But we know that building a program, there's a process that you have to go through. It's not fun. It's not always easy. But it's always necessary.

And with investments that our players and our staff have made on and off the field this offseason, I'm confident that our fans, which deserve a great football program, will see success on Saturdays begin to show up.

And as I mentioned, I'm honored and privileged to be the head football coach of the University of Arkansas, and with that I'll open up for questions.

Q. I was curious about recruiting and the last recruiting class and moving on into this one. How have things gone and staring in the face of that 2-10 record, how difficult has that been to overcome?

CHAD MORRIS: I think when you look at the way we recruited during the 2-10 season says a lot. It says that, you know, the passion level that our fans have, the passion level to have a player want to come and be a part and be able to play and play quickly helped us in that recruiting in that first year. There's no getting around it.

Going into year two, if you look back where we were

this time last year, very similar where we were in recruiting. Going into year two and see the successes that will come in year two, I'm excited about how we're going to recruit. And the way we are, we're off to a great start right now. And I think that our goal as a staff is to continue to be consistent in the way we recruit.

Again, building a program is about being consistent. Let's be a consistent winner, consistently competitive every week of every phase of your program. And so I think going into year two, we're in really good shape where we're at, and we got to continue to recruit. It's like shaving. If you don't do it every day, you look like a bum. So you got to recruit. And it's every day and our staff hears it from me every day.

Q. Talk about your offensive coordinate/quarterback, Coach Joe Craddock, he's a native of this community, went to Broward Christian and how crucial he is going to be in developing Ben Hicks and Nick Starkel?

CHAD MORRIS: Joe has been with me now going on eight years. He and I think a lot alike. Joe and I have a great working relationship. I'm heavily involved. I'm more involved now than I've ever been. Joe knows that. I've developed some pretty good quarterbacks along the way too. He's been underneath me as we recruited and developed those guys.

So I anticipate that when he and I are working together to take Ben Hicks, which had played for us for three years, and now Nick Starkel and John Stephen Jones and

K.J. Jefferson, I'm excited about what he and I both can do with those quarterbacks.

Q. Got two things. One, your expectations for Ws on Saturday. I think the players upstairs were saying about making the post season. Is that a reasonable expectation for improvement this year? And part two, the lessons -- you talked about lessons in year one that you learned. What were your biggest takeaways from what SEC football is about from being in the middle of it now?

CHAD MORRIS: Yeah. I think when you look at expectations for year two and wins and losses, I'm not going to put a number on it. I know inside our program and talking to our seniors and our leaders, and they want to leave their legacy. And getting this program into the post season is definitely a goal of ours, and it's something that we have talked about. And we started talking about it 235 days ago, but it was going to take a lot. How far do you really want to go with this? And so I definitely believe that I'm asking for our football program and our staff to be consistent and to be the

best they can be each and every day. And the other part was --

THE MODERATOR: Lessons, year one.

CHAD MORRIS: Yeah. I think the biggest lesson from a head coach that I learned is -- and I knew it going in. I knew that the challenges this league brings each and every week, but it's a line-of-scrimmage league. And if you don't have the depth in the offense and defensive lines to sustain and be a consistent competitor, it's difficult. And so that's why we went out and recruited like we did in those two areas.

Q. You mentioned in your opening remarks about building the team through recruiting and transfers. I mean, with the new transfer portal, how have you approached that in building your team for this year?

CHAD MORRIS: Well, I think, you know, guys have always been able to transfer. And now it's called a transfer portal, and guys are into it. I remember one of our players that had graduated several years ago came back to me and said, man, I want to try to create a database coach that when people transfer, that you would know where to look if you're a head coach. This was many years ago we were talking about this a lot. Because in the past, you used to hear transfers, but you never knew it. There wasn't a pool. Well, now there is.

So what that has done is allowed our staff, as we build our staff -- and in our recruiting department, we've got a portion of our recruiting department that does. We were active in the transfer portal. And I think it gives the student-athletes opportunities, which is great, and it gives our staff and our people to build programs opportunities, which is great.

And so we've got an area assigned in our recruiting department that comes through the transfer portal. It's just unfortunate that there's more people in the transfer portal than there's actually scholarships out there. So you try to educate your players before they want to go into that transfer portal, this is what takes place.

Q. Do you have a designated date on when you plan on announcing the starting quarterback, and if so, what is that date?

CHAD MORRIS: Yeah, I don't have a date set. This is the actual date because I don't know how camp is going to go. I know we're running somebody out there on that first game. I do know that. I don't want that to be -- I would like for it not to be just -- that's the first time everybody knows it, but we'll see. The sooner, the better because I want our team to rally around that guy and who those guys -- that guy is going to be. But I

also know that, you know, it's going to have to work itself out. They've had a tremendous summer.

The leadership from all of that group has definitely impacted our program and talking to our defensive guys in particular, because I always ask them about what does it look like from that side of the ball. And talking about the leadership of Ben, the leadership of Nick. Nick played in this league. Nick's won in this league. And he understands what this league is about. So we got a battle going.

Q. With how much quarterbacks are moving around now, what is the background into the recruitment of both Ben and Nick and how were you all able to land two guys that were starters?

CHAD MORRIS: You know, Ben played for us for three years. I recruited him out of high school. I had a great relationship with him and his family and watching his development from a freshman all of the way up, even watching him last year after we left, a guy that's fiercely -- as much of a competitor as I've ever been around and to watch him compete and watch him grow has been very impressive. He knows the offense. He's been a quarterback of a football team that went 2-10. So he stood in that team room. He stood in front of teammates before. And he's also dug a team out of being in that position before.

So he understands. He's got that experience, and he understands what our culture is about and staying consistent. And I think that he's done a great job of taking the young guys in that room -- from the day he got here in January, he took the young guys. He took John Stephen Jones and Jack Lindsey and those guys, and at the time Connor Noland and took him under his wing and said this is what we're doing and this is how it needs to be ran. And you'd see those guys up there. And he'd bring receivers up on weekends and work with them and bring the quarterbacks in. So his leadership has been valuable.

Add a Nick Starkel, a guy that's very experienced, and that's a fierce competitor. I've known Nick since he was in high school. I recruited him. To watch the way the ball jumps out of his hand and how electric and how hot that ball comes out, and his decision making, how he can progress and see the field, and his accuracy is what impressed me as I watched him. And had it not been for an injury to him a year or so ago, two seasons ago, the outcome for him in his season might have been totally different.

So we're excited about having him and to know that he has two years with us. So I believe that -- I think one of the things talking to Nick is he saw an opportunity, an opportunity to come in, and to play in a league he's very familiar with, and his confidence level is extremely

high.

Q. Coach, what went in to deciding on the McFadden era uniforms? How did that come about? How often do you plan on wearing those uniforms as an alternate uniform and also is this a look for the future? Do you plan to bring white ones in next year?

CHAD MORRIS: It's a great look, isn't it? If you follow the way Twitter blew up when we announced those, it was unbelievable. When I first got -- I guess I was at Arkansas a week or two weeks and I got with my equipment group and I asked how can we get back to that uniform. To me, that was a traditional look. But the way the process happens is you have to order things a year, year and a half out. And so to be able to unveil those uniforms this year and wear the red over the white, we're going to wear them every opportunity we can get. And as we move forward in our program, as long as I'm a part of it, that's the look that I want to have.

Q. You guys could be one of five NCAA teams that can have a graduate transfer start at quarterback. It's a different dynamic than other positions because you only play one. Do you see that trend continuing to grow and how good is it when trying to build your program up to have those options of getting guys who started previously?

CHAD MORRIS: Well, I think it's -- I do not think the trend is going to go away. I think that that's something that's here to stay and especially at the quarterback position. And you couldn't blame -- guys want to play. Quarterbacks, you know, when you recruit a quarterback, it's different than recruiting someone else. These guys want to play, and they want to be the man. They want to impact the game.

And when they see that, look, it may not happen at the place that they're at, they have that option, and that's great for our student-athletes. And so I don't think that's going to go away. I know it's not going to go away at that position, but I also believe that as you recruit and as you sign classes, that there will always be that tendency to make sure you've got spots available for guys that may come into your program through the transfer market.

Q. You mentioned your time at Clemson and SMU, talking about year two, that you've been through something like this before. When you're building a program, you mentioned, you know, going with the players, but is there a point where you have kind of that inward look at yourself and kind of have to prove, like think to yourself, yes, I've been in this before, and what from those previous experiences help you get to year two?

CHAD MORRIS: Yeah. As you're going through it and you're living the moment, you reflect back on your experiences and what got you through those tough times. And one being confident, knowing who you are and knowing to remain consistent and be consistent in your message and don't waver, because you want to build something to last.

And so, yes, a lot went in to reflecting back and saying, okay, this is the way we handle these situations. This is -- this is what got us out of building that program the first time we went through it or the second time we went through it. And so those -- reflecting on past experiences, there's no question.

And as I've shared, I've been in this spot before. I'm confident that I understand what it looks like getting out of it, because I've done it. And we've done it. We got a lot of memories of our staff that have been in this spot.

Q. Your Missouri game at the end of the regular season is going to stay on that Friday after Thanksgiving, but also moving to Little Rock in the years that you guys host, what are your thoughts on relocating that game off campus?

CHAD MORRIS: It will be a great environment in Little Rock on Thanksgiving weekend. That will be a lot of fun that weekend. I know when we went down there and played in Little Rock this past year, it was a driving rainstorm and cold. The environment was unbelievable. So when that opportunity gets here, we'll be excited about it. But we got a lot of work to do between now and then.

Q. What's your philosophy behind moving to grass field? I don't know if that was something from, you know, going back to your coaching days in high school or Clemson. What's your thought on changing back to grass?

CHAD MORRIS: Well, you're in the natural state, and, you know, I'm a big runner and I love to jog and to jog by our practice fields and jog by our baseball field and our soccer stadium and our softball field, and you see just how immaculate a grass field looks and the way our grounds crew does such a tremendous job.

And then knowing that in football there's nothing better than a freshly cut grass field on a Saturday afternoon. It's painted up. It's got a pop to it. It's got a smell to it. Again, that's just -- it's football in its natural state.

Q. I wanted to talk to you about CJ O'Grady. Started off the season last year suspended two games, didn't catch his first pass until five games in, I think, but has a lot of talent. Where has he been this offseason? Is he going to realize his full potential? And also Hudson Henry coming up,

what could his impact been, being the position that you've described as the second hardest position to learn on offense?

CHAD MORRIS: Let's start with CJ first, a guy that has talent just oozing all over him, a guy that was -- went through some challenging times last year with a new staff, with the expectations, with the standards that we were setting, and to be that teammate that we want.

And when you saw him begin to buy in, and you saw what he can be. And there's no doubt that he can be one of the best in the country at tight end. And he's a top play maker we got coming back for us. He's extremely talented. It's just how good does he want to be?

So that's been our challenge to him in this offseason and motivating him and pushing him and driving him. And not just us, but his teammates. Again, we've gone to much a player-led football team. I've seen our players really, really push him and motivate him in different areas, in different ways.

Hudson Henry, a phenomenally talented young man that is going to play and he's going to push and he's going to be -- have a great career and a great future. So, we'll see how his transformation into fall camp goes. But talking to our defensive secondary and going through their summer workouts and watching and listening to who's impacting on the offensive side of the ball, Hudson's name always comes up.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Morris, thank you for your time.

CHAD MORRIS: Thank you. Go Hogs!