

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday July 15, 2019

Dan Mullen

Florida Gators



COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Good afternoon. Our second coach will be Dan Mullen, the head coach of the University of Florida, in his second year at Florida, 11th overall as a head coach in the SEC. He was named the 2014 National Coach of the year. Dan's mom, Barbara Mullen, was born in North Wales in the United Kingdom, and she learned to dance at a boarding school in Chester, England. Continuing from that, Barbara still lives in the same home where Dan grew up and operates a dance studio built in 194. Thanks to his mother's influence, Dan can play the piano. He's a big fan of BroadwayHD, the streaming service devoted to performing arts.

Dan was perhaps the only own kid in the neighborhood who left ballet practice to go to football practice, which was ahead of his time, given that football teams now engage now in ballet and similar stretching activities.

University of Florida head football coach, Dan Mullen.

DAN MULLEN: It's -- thank you to the commissioner and the amazing job he does. You just look, and even coming here, you can see what it means that the -- when you talk about the SEC just means more, you show up at Media Days and you see the attention and the excitement and the energy of not just the media that are here but all of the fans that show up and the people that are really excited to get this season going.

And we're really excited about this year. Obviously, I know it will be a little different. We lost a great member of the Gator family when George Edmondson, Mr. Two Bits, passed away. That is such a -- it will be a really interesting to see our first game when they come out in -- to go pay a tribute to him and what he did, and one of the great traditions in college football.

I think that's one of the things that makes college football so special, is the traditions. I know everybody loves the game, the excitement and the energy and the game day, and playing football is the greatest sport in the world, and the excitement that the game brings.

But, in college football, the traditions and the passion that come along with those traditions are what makes it so special.

So, we brought some great players with us today. I brought Lamical Perine, our running back, is here with us. Great -- came back for his senior year, obviously a dynamic player as a running back and obviously great skill set and receiving, all-around player.

Jabari Zuniga is here with us, defensive end, came back for his senior year. Really important. I know his mom keeps me up every day making sure he's on track to graduate. That's the most important part of his decision to come back his senior year, even more so than his growth development in a football career, but to make sure he gets his degree.

And brought quarterback Feleipe Franks with us who I think has come a long way. Continues to come a long way. Continues to grow, continues to develop and continues to take those steps. And in development, especially in today's world, you look at the development, the 25 ranked quarterbacks in all the recruiting sites, in his recruiting class, 17 of them have transferred already. He's stuck it out, and he's continued to work and stay through different adversities, to continue to grow, to continue to develop, and he's starting to reap all of the rewards of that now with how he finished last year.

But not just those three, the whole team. I think we took great strides in our first year in the program. You know, when you look in year one, you get a ten-win season, you finished ranked sixth in the country in the final polls, it was really exciting. It showed how fast our guys bought in to what we're trying to do and what we're trying to build. And we have a great group of guys coming back, a lot of talented players coming back on this year's team that now have won games and have high expectations and understand what the Gator standard is all about.

It's about competing for championships every single year. And the positive attitude we have is really exciting.

And the excitement beyond just football and what's going on in the field is great. I'm really excited. We have -- you know, we just walked in today, did the unveiling for our new locker room in the stadium, the Bryan Kornblau locker room.

It's unbelievable. Our players got to get in there for the first time today as we continue to work on upgrading our facilities. We're going to -- within the next 12 months, we'll be breaking ground hopefully on our new football training facility which will be a state-of-the-art new everyday operations facility for the football program, as well as involve other aspects for all students on campus. One of the great things you look in the Gator standard that we talk about at the University of Florida goes beyond football, goes to all sports. Every sport on campus is expected to compete for and win championships, both SEC and national championships.

It's great. I love having our players around all of those student-athletes, all these successful athletes in other sports. And then when you leave the athletic field and get to go to the classroom and be a school -- the only school in America that's ranked top ten in football of public schools in America last year.

And they are going out against the premier students every single day and working with and studying with and associating with and networking with and competing with some of the top students in the United States. The complete package that comes with it, and that's really what we believe the Gator standard to be, is about being the absolute best that you can be at whatever it is you are doing.

So our guys have really bought into that. We've had a great offseason. The strides our guys took coming in, getting ready for year two. We need to take a huge step forward for us this year. I think we had a lot of success last year, but our consistency of performance is something I want to see us change to perform at a high level every single game, every single week, every single play, the consistency of our performance to continue to improve.

So I was going to use all 30 minutes and ramble on, but then you guys would be upset that no one got to ask any questions. So let's open it up to some question.

Q. Coach Mullen, you've done a great job developing quarterbacks during your time at Mississippi State and with the Gators. What did you think Feleipe Franks improved -- what aspect of his game do you think improved the most last year?

DAN MULLEN: I think as the year went on, he understood what his abilities were and he decided to use all of his talents. I think a light came on that I'm 6'6", 245 pounds and pretty athletic. If they're going to completely empty the middle of the field and I can run into the end zone from 20 yards away untouched, I can

do that.

And I think when he bought in to using all of his skill set to play, and not trying to limit himself or not trying to worry really about what everybody else thought, he was going to be a better player, and he did that. I think he started to block out all of the outside noise, all of the other opinions. I told him, I said: If you think -- if you know of all of these other opinions that are out there of how to play the quarterback position, if there's someone better than Brian Johnson, let me know, I'll hire them to be our quarterback coach. But I think he's a pretty darn good quarterback coach. I have some pretty good experience developing quarterbacks as well. But, Feleipe, if you think everybody on Twitter is much better at that, to coach, just let us know, we'll look at them as being the quarterback coach.

So I think once he was able to block out all of the things out, all of the outside noise, and really look at his skill set, what he does well, he was able to improve, and I think that helped build his confidence and improved his performance on the field. I thought he took huge strides this spring as well of doing that, of now not just understanding himself but how to use his skill set and better understanding of making plays within the offensive system.

Q. Coach, how important is that Miami game in Orlando to open the season as far as keeping the momentum going that you guys built at the end of last year in the bowl game?

DAN MULLEN: I think it's huge. I mean, there's a lot that goes into that game. We're the opening game of the 150th year of college football. So it's a great honor to just be involved in that game. You have the -- everyone that's been really -- can't wait for college football to start, we get to kick the season off with getting to watch Florida play Miami.

And on top of it, being a big rivalry game, you know, within the state of Florida. And, you know, it's not one that's played all the time, but there's a lot of tradition in that game and there's a lot of people I feel have very strong opinions and are happy that that game's being played, and to get to see that rivalry be played is really exciting.

And to start off the season. You know, I mean, it is -- it is a huge -- it's going to be a huge, you know, kind of catapult for one of the teams. Whoever wins that game ends up really kicking off the season on the right note with a big win in a big game with a lot of national exposure.

It's a big game for us. It's exciting to be a part of it, and I know our players are excited to play in it.

Q. Dan, what was your reaction to hearing that Feleipe had been drafted by the Red Sox?

DAN MULLEN: Well, as a Red Sox fan, they do need a lot of help in the bullpen, it looks like. We've been struggling that way. And -- but he -- I think he can throw. He's got a lot of heat. He said he threw at 95 in the workout for him.

I've seen, though, he's still working on his accuracy. I don't know if I'd want to get in the batter's box if he's throwing 95. But I think it's great. I think it's a great honor for him to have that opportunity.

There's another quarterback that I coached that I don't know if anybody's heard of him, he's kind of a Minor League ballplayer right now, played for the AAA Mets in Tim Lincecum, and he's managing to try to pick up baseball. So maybe when football is done, maybe he has a future in baseball. That'd be really exciting for him. I'd be really happy for him.

I'm glad it was the Red Sox. I'm a big Red Sox fan. If one of our guys got to go to a team, I'd love for it to be the Red Sox.

Q. I'm curious what you have seen from Diabate and just kind of the challenges of maybe recruiting players from opposition's college town?

DAN MULLEN: You know what? I think he's done a great job. He's such a high-end character young man and he's a great academic student. I know the draws of coming to the University of Florida for him and his family, as such a great not just football player but academic student as well, were huge.

I think, you know what, he's got a great attitude and a great work ethic. Had a pretty solid spring for us. Obviously it's making that adjustment and wanting to see how that adjustment translates onto the field as young players.

He's still a young guy, but by graduating early, I do think -- sometimes us give yourself that advantage of getting to go through an offseason to understand what it is and you get to physically develop a little bit better. And it gives you that opportunity to get on the field and play right away as a freshman.

Q. Commissioner Sankey talked about mental health in his opening, and you've talked a lot about academics. Is that something you focus on within your program, the stress on players on the field and off the field in the classroom?

DAN MULLEN: Absolutely. I think -- I mean, one of the things, you look at our players, is they come on -- I think a lot of things. There's lots of different pressures on them. You know, there are guys that on a Saturday,

a lot of people come and watch them play, and a lot of people, you know, think, boy, these guys are these celebrity football stars.

Monday morning they still got to go to class with everybody else. They still got to make sure they're turning in their papers, getting their assignments done, get in the classroom and complete their degree and continue to work that way.

So there are those pressures that come from them. Not just the time responsibilities and the physical strain of playing football, but the emotional responsibilities of the pressure, be it 19 years old and having everybody really critique your performance.

And then just that maturity. I mean, college is such a big maturing time for young people. You are 18 to 22 years old and how you learn about yourself, find out about yourself. A lot of guys it's the first time ever being away from home. You're growing and finding out about yourself, and a lot of these guys are having to do it under a spotlight with a lot of people watching them and critiquing everything they do.

I think it's huge. We spend a lot of time with our team on developing every aspect of their life, of maintaining not just their physical health, their mental health, their emotional health, and allowing them to continue to grow and develop in every way possible and expose them to as much as possible so they can learn.

Our ultimate responsibility for me as the head coach is to make sure, when these guys walk out the door, that they're prepared for whatever the world is going to throw at them. I think everybody gets caught up in the 1 percent that go on to play professional football. But there's a lot of guys in our program that have a whole life ahead of them when they go leave, and we have to make sure they are prepared for whatever life is going through with them.

Q. Dan, everybody says college football needs a rival really bad, and we know they do. Florida has more rivalries than most teams do as you know quite well. A particular one that resides in the state up above where you play, there's been a lot of talk between the two schools, the fans of these, a lot this summer, more than usual. Good thing, bad thing, and do you sense there's more talk about Florida/Georgia?

DAN MULLEN: I don't know. I think the rivalries is one thing that's unique for us, as you said, you have the different rivalries that we deal with. I think one of the things, I think if you can find a Florida fan, I don't know if you'll find a consensus one way or the other. This is our biggest rivalry or that's our biggest rivalry. And I

think that makes it fun.

I mean, the rivalries are what's special. You know, for us, I think obviously, every game that we play is really important. The rivalry games always have a little bit more meaning to them. But I don't know that one's bigger than the other for us, you know? And I think it's -- I think if you look at the fans, I think maybe if you look at the Florida/Georgia rivalry, and it is a unique deal, because it has a lot of implications on who's going to win the SEC East.

If you look at Florida/Florida State rivalry, it has a lot of implications on people that are neighbors and live next to each other within the state boundaries. So I think they're very unique in their own way of what makes the rivalry special.

Q. Coach Mullen, do you have any interest, talking you about that Florida/Georgia rivalry, of making it into a campus game both in Athens and Gainesville or do you like that it's a neutral site in Jacksonville?

DAN MULLEN: You know what, I think you can make an argument either way. I think being in a neutral site, obviously it makes it a very special game, a very unique game that you get to go coach in. There's not many of those in college football if you look at those every year, traditional neutral site games. And I might be off on it.

I know there's Florida/Georgia. There's Texas/Oklahoma. And there's Army/Navy. I don't know if there's any more than that. If I am, I don't want to offend a rivalry out there. That's something special to say that you got to play in this very special unique game. But you can also see and make the argument the other way of how big a game it is. You're taking one of your biggest rivalry games every year and you're moving it off campus where you can't host that in your home stadium for your fans, all of your season ticket holders for recruiting.

I think you can make arguments on both sides of why it should stay in Jacksonville, why it should leave Jacksonville, and be a home and home. Then it's interesting, I think it will be an interesting discussion the next couple years of when the contract runs up of what the future is going to be for that game.

Q. Just at Mississippi State, year one to year two you obviously made a big jump. Is there anything you can maybe apply from that situation to this year's and obviously having jumped up ten wins last year, what maybe goes into jumping from 11 to 12?

DAN MULLEN: I think we made the same jump last

year. I think we went from five to nine. That's four. So if we can go from 10 to 14, that would be pretty good. This year, I would take that. I think a lot of it I think comes from year one to year two. I think coming in now, everyone understands the program. So when you come in, last year when you show up in January and you're going through the offseason, that's the first time the guys have ever done it. They are going through spring ball. They didn't always know what to expect out on the field. They can talk about it. They have never physically done it. And going through summer and training camp and in season, go to play the first game, and pregame meal, it is like, okay, how does this work. I think in year two, there's a lot more comfort within the program.

Our guys knew what to expect coming into the offseason. It's easier to attack the offseason. I think we've made bigger gains in a lot of ways this offseason than we did last year. I think a lot of last year's are dramatic gains because it's very different than what they've done, but this year there's a better understanding of what they are trying to accomplish so you can make big gains.

In spring ball, we go out on the practice field. There's no question or doubts. When we go to drills, everybody knows what the expectations are. They've run the offense and run the defense. So I think that gives you the opportunity to have a big jump in the second season. Obviously I think we had a great year last year, but would love it to be even better this year.

Q. There seems to be a trend at least at LSU with defenses looking for one-on-one matchups even going away from standard positions in the secondary and linebackers to get those. Offensively, have you noticed that and how do you attack that offensively?

DAN MULLEN: I think one thing if you look at football, there isn't very much of a match-up game. It's something that we started to really work on about 15 years ago when they created the offenses how to create advantageous matchups out there on the field. How to take -- how to work to get one of our better players or our best players on one of your weaker players.

So I think that was always a big focus that we have. If you look at the football at the next level in the NFL, that's a huge focus in the NFL of how to create different matchups on the field. Because of that, I think defenses have done a great job over the years of trying to adjust to that. Okay. If you're creating this matchup over here offensively, how do we defend and not allow you to create a huge advantageous matchup on you. It's just part of the chess game back and forth.

Q. There was no turnover this offseason among head coaches in the SEC. How do you see that translating to your field prep or your game prep and your on-field work?

DAN MULLEN: I don't know. We don't play everybody in the league, so I guess it's only tricky when you're playing somebody new, but there was some coordinator changes as well. So you're going to have to deal with that part of it, you know, whoever's calling the plays and how you adjust to those things. It was good, pretty interesting that there wasn't turnover this year.

This is my -- I think my 11th year being here at SEC Media Days, and this might be the first time in those 11 years that, you know, we go to our league meetings, go to spring meetings and it's all same 11 -- well, the other 13 people are the same. It was 11 for a while. And 13 people are all the same, so I don't know that that's happened before. But I think it's unique. I think it's great.

I think -- I do think there's a lot to building programs. I was very fortunate. I spent nine years at Mississippi State University. And in that time, I was allowed to go build a program and build a program that could potentially win consistently. I know it's tough in today's world because everybody wants instant gratification, but I was able to build a program that could win consistently there. And same thing, I want to accomplish at the University of Florida is coming to build a program that not just wins, but also competing for championships on a consistent basis. And to do that, sometimes that takes time, and I guess it's good to see that people are looking in and saying, hey, if we feel comfortable with the direction our program's headed, we're going to be patient with this, and give this coach an opportunity to go build it to go have success over the long haul.

Q. Dan, what was your take on Van Jefferson, how he adapted to new surroundings and your expectations for him?

DAN MULLEN: I think Van coming in and being the first year player in the program, he came in, worked his tail off in the offseason, put on some weight, got some size, got faster, you know, and then went out and performed. I mean, he is a worker. He's one of those guys that is constantly working every day on being a better route runner, working on his hands, studying the game, understanding the game.

And I think that translated into a lot of success. He was the leading receiver last year. And coming back this year, I think he's a guy that has great maturity to understand and say, okay, here's the parts of my game

that I need to -- as all of our guys do have great aspirations of going on and playing professional football, but he has maturity to understand.

Here's parts of my game I can continue to work on and put myself in position to be completely prepared when I get an opportunity to go to the next level, and he's done that all spring and has had a tremendous spring and really adapted well into the program, into what we do, and how we run the program. And it's really great. Our program is about hard work. And that's something he believes in, so I think it's a great fit for him to be in a program that really has the same values that he has.

Q. Coach, we know you have always talked about this system being sort of like a two-year process. And clearly you guys hit the ground running last year. How do you control the narrative that the bar could possibly be set too high? Going into this year, what's your message to those guys?

DAN MULLEN: I like to set the bar really high. I don't know if there's anybody out there that has higher expectations for the team as a program than I do. We like to set that bar high, and we're constantly striving to be the absolute best that we can be. So I don't always let expectations bother me. I kind of like them, having expectations, and I like guys in our program having expectations and expect great things from themselves, expect great things from the team and expect great things from the program.

So instead of shying away from them, embrace those expectations, and try to live up to them and be honest with you, surpass the expectations out there for us as a team and for us as a program. I think if you do that, you're going to have the opportunity to be successful. You know, that's something we've always tried to live by.

Q. Coach, just wanted to get your -- about the transfer portal, do you think there should be some kind of a timetable where kids can transfer in? What kind of challenges has that presented as far as managing your roster?

DAN MULLEN: Well, being new, I think there's -- it offers a great deal of challenges right now for everybody. And, you know, I think one of the hard one is finding the balance of, you know, the signing limitations that the NCAA has. And I understand it. I have worked on NCAA committees and understand why they have those and the reasoning for them. But also, if you're going to have the transfer portal on this many guys enter the transfer portal in one year, I think you always have to look and say, okay, well, we've changed the rule over here, so we have to be willing to change the rule over here to make it fit to allow coaches to be able to best manage the roster and

allow programs to manage the roster.

I think it will be something -- I think it will probably be some rough waters still for the next couple of years for everybody, everybody involved, the players that are transferring, the programs, you know, that have guys transferring in and out of, and obviously, the NCAA, in different leagues at the administrative level of what the trends are and how to go work with it. Right? I think -- I read somewhere there's more kids in the transfer portal than scholarships available. That doesn't make a lot of sense for those kids. Kids are going to be left without and kids are going to be put in a bad situation potentially. It would work out for some and not for others. That's always a rough deal.

I would interested to see how it goes over the next couple of years within transfers. And for these kids, hey, you know, I've had a guy on a transfer portal come to me and say, coach, it's good, right, I'm going to be immediately eligible where I can go play there next year. I don't think so. That school is going to have to file a waiver for you for the NCAA. Well, can you say yes? The NCAA says yes, I don't control who is eligible or not in the NCAA.

So I think there's a lot of a learning curve that goes on and will continue to be a lot of learning curve for both players, coaches and administrations within the transfer portal for the next couple of years until everybody adapts to it. There's going to be a new norm in college football. It's going to be very different than it's been. I think as everybody learns to adapt to it and what the best way is to adapt it, we'll see over the next few years.

Q. Quick question about players coming out early and in comparison to basketball, which seems to have -- allows a little bit more time for the players to judge, they have camps, they can pull their name out, on the football side it happens really quick, especially for teams that play in bowl games, and that process seems to be really rushed. Is that an optimal way to do it or do you think something more like basketball is more appropriate?

DAN MULLEN: I'd to study the basketball way. I study our way because I know that's the reality we live in right now. So what's the best way for me. As a head coach, I try as best as I can to educate guys and who help and allow them to make great decisions of -- for the short term and obviously for their long-term futures.

I think it is. I think one of the hardest things we do deal with is making sure that guys get the proper information and make great decisions. You know, I've seen guys make really good decisions, declaring early for the NFL draft, and I've seen guys make really good

decisions coming back to school and staying to continue their growth and development.

You see guys that make really poor decisions leaving early for the NFL draft, you know, where that really hurt them and they could have had a lot more success if they had stayed. I haven't seen many that have decided to say and that hurt them. I'm sure there's a couple of cases out there.

But to me, it is making sure that they have the knowledge and the understanding to make the best decisions for themselves and for the future and what they -- and I always hope that guys make the right ones. That's the biggest one for me, is -- mine is I hope they make the right ones because my concern is not just short term, but their long-term future, that they are making the best decision for them and their future and their lives.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mullen, thanks for your time today.

DAN MULLEN: Thanks, everybody. Enjoy the rest of your summer. Get ready for some football. Go Gators!



2019 SEC Football Media Days

Florida Player Quotes

Monday, July 15

Redshirt Junior Quarterback Feleipe Franks

On if there was ever a moment last year where his confidence dipped...

"I don't know. I don't think about, where you said, 'I don't think this is going to work out.' I'm the type of person where if something doesn't go my way, I was always taught you keep on working. You don't just give up and turn your back. I never did that, where I said, 'This isn't going to work out.' I worked harder and more diligently. Not just me, but with my teammates, and it just helps me. I know I have been saying it all day, but I have always been the type of person that works super hard. But when you want to meet that production and with my work ethic, and so it is kind of just what I have been waiting on, and that's what happens."

On if he thinks Florida and Miami are big rivals...

"Yeah. We don't play often, and that's one of the things that makes it so special. Two really good, in-state teams that became rivals. It is such a fun game. I love playing games that are highly anticipated, that you play a really good team. The University of Miami is a really good team, and the University of Florida is a really good team. When teams like that play, that's what makes it so awesome. The stage is set for you, and you have to go out there and perform. That's the kind of stage I like playing on. So yeah, it will be fun."

On what Florida's expectations are this season...

"Expectations are high. 10 wins is not easy to do, I don't think anywhere. But, it is good when you do it. You get a lot of momentum. We are talking about a season where we worked extremely hard this offseason. We are ready for this upcoming season. There is a lot of momentum built up, and I think we have all prepared the right way. We have done everything the right way this summer, going into fall camp, to prepare us for next season. So I think it is all just preparation-based, and our team has done a great job."



2019 SEC Football Media Days Florida Player Quotes Monday, July 15

Senior Running Back Lamical Perine

On the impact that Coach Savage has had on 4th quarter abilities...

"I just feel like his workouts help us out with a lot of things that we do. For instance, when we are down in games, we never get sad-faced or anything like that, because we have been working so hard through the off-season and the summer. Just working hard so we are prepared for all moments."

On excitement over season-opener with Miami...

"I am very excited. I am actually excited to be here today as well. That's going to be a great experience. We have got the spotlight on us, because we are probably going to be the only game on that day. I am excited about it and pumped up, and I am sure my teammates are as well."

On the development of the offensive line...

"I feel like honestly those guys knew that they were going to have to come in and work very hard and things like that, because there were a lot of key guys on that offensive line that went to the NFL. They have been coming out and playing great, getting chemistry together on our off times, and I feel like that will help them out throughout the season."

On preparing to beat Georgia and make it to the conference championship...

"I feel like honestly we just need to keep playing our game and never get too compulsive really. We need to come out and make sure we don't make any mistakes, and then I feel like we have a chance to beat them."

On what it takes to compete on the road in the SEC...

"Just don't lose composure. A lot of guys see 100,000 people, and you just get nervous and start shaking and things like that. If you can keep your composure, then you'll be pretty good."

On Miami being a rival...

"Yes, I do feel like they are a rival, because it is an in-state game. We are trying to be the best team in Florida. To be that, we have to beat the best teams: UCF, Florida State, Miami. Whoever you want to put us against."



2019 SEC Football Media Days Florida Player Quotes Monday, July 15

Redshirt Senior Defensive Lineman Jabari Zuniga

On Nick Savage's impact on the program ...

"I feel like he is one of the best strength coaches in the country. He brings that passion and enthusiasm to every workout, no matter what time it is. He is going to come in ready to work and make sure you are ready to work."

On the considering the Miami Hurricanes a rivalry game...

"Yeah, I do. Any school you play in Florida, those are the games that mean something. We know that we are going to get their best and that they will get our best."

On his thoughts heading into the fall...

"Coach Savage has ramped up the workouts, preparing us mentally and physically. We feel like next season is going to be one to remember."

On his goals for the season...

"First, I want to win the SEC East, win the SEC Championship and then get to a bowl game. Obviously, get to the National Championship. We, as a team, have very high expectations. We feel like we can do some special things this year."