

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday July 10, 2017

Butch Jones

Tennessee coach

MODERATOR: Welcome University of Tennessee head football coach, Butch Jones.

COACH JONES: Okay. It's great to see everyone. Hope everyone had a great summer. And as we all know, the SEC Media Days are kind of the kickoff to college football.

I would like to start off first of all and welcome Coach Bielema into fatherhood. So congratulations to him.

But it's truly an honor and a privilege to be up here today and representing the University of Tennessee, fifth SEC Media Day, and very proud of the progress that we've made in our football program in four years.

There's just -- I was thinking on the plane ride over here, just four and a half years ago where our program was facing the potential APR penalty, and now that's a thing of the past with a 972, second year in a row that we'll graduate 100 percent of our seniors in our program. We have 67 players on this year's football team that has a 3.0 or above. And on the last two bowl wins, we've had 26 college graduates participate in those bowl games.

And then on the field, we're very proud of the fact that it's very, very difficult to win in the Southeastern Conference, and we're one of only three programs that have won nine games two years in a row. We've been very fortunate to have three straight bowl victories, first time in 20 years in our great program's history and tradition, but there's so much more out there. There's so much more out there to be accomplished, and we've only started. And that's what I like about this year's football team, is there they're very, very driven, very, very motivated.

The three individuals here today, I think are very symbolic of our football program and the evolution and development of our program over four years, starts with Jashon Robertson, offensive lineman for us, Jashon was recruited as a defensive lineman, spent a week in training camp as a defensive lineman. And because of the limited number of offensive linemen that we had at that time in our program, we asked him to move over, and he started every game as a true freshman and ended up being a Freshman All-American.



Emmanuel Moseley, I'm being kind to him, was 145 pounds at the time. He was an option quarterback and won a state championship, came two times to our camps in the summer to earn a scholarship. And the way he's grown in our football program and developed his body, it's truly remarkable.

And Kendal Vickers, I was joking with him on the plane flying over here, he was a 250 -- I'm sorry, 215-pound defensive end wide receiver, and I remember in practice, watching him catch passes, and now he's developed himself into what I feel is one of the best defensive tackles in our conference.

It's been a very, very productive offseason for us, probably the most competitive offseason that we've had. And a lot of that goes -- is attributed to our players, to our leadership, but also to the addition of Rock Gullickson in the strength and conditioning area. And Rock has been a 17-year veteran in the National Football League and has really kind of changed the dynamics in that room, along with the entire strength and conditioning staff.

We have to replace some very, very good football players. We had six drafted players in the first four rounds of the National Football League draft this past year. That hasn't been done in Tennessee in 15 years.

So, again, that's how far we've come in our program. We have five new coaches in our football family. As we all know, Larry Scott assumes the offensive coordinator position. And the way I looked at it, Larry had a year of an interview process, and very excited about him and what he brings to the table from that position.

Mike Canales, is now the quarterback coach. I've been very fortunate to have known Mike for over 20 years. We'd go with him and do football when he was at South Florida at every convention. We would actually take the mirror off the bathroom wall and draw plays. So he's an individual that I've always admired. I think he's the best developer of quarterback in the country.

And Walt Wells is our new offensive line coach, Tennessee native, and brought so much to the table there. And Kevin Beard, everyone's seen the YouTube videos with the click-clack and the cleats that he wears

in practice and does the drills with the kids.

And defensively, Charlton Warren is our defensive backs coach. It's a very unusual situation. He spent ten years in the United States military, in the Air Force. Now he's coaching college football. And he's been a great mentor and a great football coach to our players and has really helped in the back end of our defense.

And then lastly the defensive line position was filled with Brady Hoke. And Brady brings a whole other dynamic. He's been a Conference Coach of the Year in three different leagues.

The exciting thing about this coaching staff is we have three former head coaches, and any time you can have head coaches on your staff, I think it's extremely healthy. It's been a great help for me, but it also helps mentor your younger coaches on your staff as well, as we want all coaches on our staff to have the goal of being a head football coach one day.

In terms of this year, we have to start fast. We have three games in 13 days. So our health, the turnaround, is going to be paramount, and we're excited to be able to have the opportunity to start the season in Atlanta, in the Chick-fil-A kickoff game against a very good opponent. It will be a great challenge for us. So I'll answer any questions you all may have.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. If you have a question, please raise your hand. Question for Coach.

Q. Obviously, Josh Dobbs did a lot of stuff for you guys for a long time. What's it going to be like replacing him, and what's your quarterback situation going into fall camp?

COACH JONES: Sure. Well, again, you're replacing an individual who really leaves a legacy at the University of Tennessee in Joshua Dobbs and everything that he brought to the quarterback position. When he was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers, he was the highest drafted quarterback since Peyton Manning in our program's history, so he's brought a lot.

But I'm really, really excited about the quarterbacks that we have in our program, and I think the competition at that position is really elevated the level of play of everyone else around them. You know, you have two kind of distinct personalities. You have a young individual in Jarrett Guarantano, very energetic, very demonstrative, very passionate, very, very talented, and then Quinten Dormady, who is a coach's son, who has kind of been in our football program. So a little bit different in terms of personality-wise, but these two individuals are very, very talented.

And the great thing about these two individuals, we

talked to our young football team about this all spring, is compete and don't compare. They've been able to do that, but they also have the mutual respect towards each other that they're still helping each other out, and that's been great to see. I think it's a great issue to have.

We will not name a starting quarterback until the time is right. I can't tell you where that is. That will be decided obviously on the field when we start training camp.

Q. Hey, Coach, in terms of replacing leaders both on offense and defensive side of the football, how is that something that you've really combatted, because Joshua Dobbs and of course Derek Barnett on the defensive side of the football, how have you gone about replacing those big leaders on your team?

COACH JONES: Well, as we know, leadership is the key to any successful football team, and we do have to replace some individuals there. But that's the exciting thing about this football team is it's really been leadership by the entire team. It started with our 17 seniors. They've done a great job of really educating our younger players about the standards and expectations within our football program, and this is probably the best collective leadership that we've had in our football program to date.

And it gets back to the details and accountability and toughness by which we've spoken about ever since we started our offseason program in January. So that part of it, from a leadership perspective, has been very good to see in terms of it's been more of a collective -- more collaborative group effort than it's been in the past.

Q. Coach, I know last year Peyton Manning said he didn't have any interest in being a coach at the college level, but I know you talked to him. What indications has he given you, if any, that maybe at some point down the road he'd like to be a bigger part of the program in some capacity or another?

COACH JONES: Well, Peyton and I are in constant dialogue. We're in constant communication. I think right now he's enjoying retirement. I know he's looking forward to hosting the ESPYS coming up. But he's an individual that we really tried to really involve him in our program, as much as he can because he has many things going on right now. And we had an opportunity to bring him back about a month ago and be able to see our quarterbacks and talk with them and just get around our football team, which obviously is extremely healthy for everyone.

But, again, I know he has plans down the road, and

he'll be successful in anything that he chooses to do. But we try to involve him as much in our program as possible.

Q. Last year, you had that season with big swings. A lot of emotional finishes, and, like you said, you got to nine wins. So given the expectation you had last year versus this year, what did you guys learn from a coaching standpoint?

COACH JONES: Well, you always step back and you do a thorough examination of your season and what could you have done better, what did you do well, how can you continue to grow and elevate, and I think the thing we have as a program is you can never have enough depth. And everything is about competitive depth and being what we call nine strong, all nine position groups.

I think it was a great illustration, to some of our younger players at the time, that you are one snap away and no matter who's out there the names never change, but expectations change, and being ready for the opportunity when the opportunity presents itself.

I think one of the great illustrations is John Kelly. John Kelly is an individual who waited his opportunity in our program, and when his opportunity came, obviously he made the most of it.

I think it's that competitive depth that we talk about and every player understanding their role and understanding their job description and being ready for that opportunity when that opportunity comes.

Q. Coach, can you see a scenario where you play two quarterbacks into the season until that plays out when the time is right, or would you really prefer to pick a guy and then go with him?

COACH JONES: Well, I think playing time is earned, so if both players earn their right to play, we'll play both quarterbacks. I've been in systems where we've been able to do that, and really Quinten and Jarrett's skill sets are very similar to each other. I think we have an offense that really can play to the skill sets of the quarterback and all of the players around.

Again, if both players earn the right to play, they'll both play. Again, it's how it's going to play itself out, because these two individuals are very, very capable and very good football players. It's a good problem to have.

Q. Derek Barnett was obviously a great player and a special one at Tennessee in what he accomplished. Now you have to replace him on the defensive line. Talk about that unit as a whole. And also Kyle Phillips, a guy who is a young player

who could take that next step this season?

COACH JONES: Yes. We're looking forward to getting Kyle Phillips back. Again he's an individual who has been offset by injuries, but he's back to his full health right now. And he's one of those individuals that has also grown into a leadership role, and it's been great to -- he's been very boisterous, which has been great.

Again, he has all of the skill set. It's just him remaining healthy. So we're excited. He's actually in Vietnam right now. We have a Vol leaders class right now, and himself and Jack Jones are over there, and I think it's going to be great in terms of a leadership standpoint and what they bring to our team when they return.

But Jonathan Kongbo is an individual that you play defensive end, and then when we had the rash of injuries up front, he was forced to play defensive tackle. We've moved him outside to his natural position. He's had as good of an offseason as anybody. He's about 265 pounds right now. He's one of those individuals who's working out day and night. So, we're excited about him.

And Darrell Taylor is another young man that we thought took tremendous strides this offseason and into spring football. He's really committed himself to the weight room and strength and conditioning area. He doesn't even look like the same player right now.

Again, I see those individuals really stepping up. The chemistry and that continuity that we have in the defensive line room is one of the stronger positions that we have in terms of accountability. I love sitting in their meetings and hearing them hold each other accountable and the standard and expectations that it takes to play defensive line. So, I think that's been one of our stronger units from a leadership standpoint.

Now it's just, again, regaining our health. Shy Tuttle is a young man, I know we talked about at defensive end, but at the defensive tackle position. They started running now, doing change of direction drills. So we anticipate him being ready for August camp. He'll be limited in some facets of his game. To be able to have him back and be running now is very, very encouraging.

Q. Coach, you talked about some of the new coaches -- you talked about some of the new coaches that have come in, especially the head coach experience that comes with the staff. How do you view your personal role to manage some of the guys who have done the managing in the past?

COACH JONES: I tell you what. First of all, you're going to surround yourself with great people, great people of character, great teachers, great mentors.

The great thing is I've known these individuals for a long period of time. And we always talk about being a better version of you every day.

And I want individuals that have sat in that chair that understand, A, the dynamics of what I'm going through, but also, hey, if there's a better way, a better way to look at things, you have a better way of doing things, I'm open. We're all in it together. We all want to be the best of everything we do. We also provided a great sounding board to really bounce ideas off: Hey, what do you think? How would you handle this situation? Would you do it any differently?

But all three of these individuals, I think they respect the position, so they understand everything that goes into it. I'll give an example. It's 4th of July and my phone is going off, and it's Brady Hoke. And he's talking about the dynamics of our staff and how great our staff is and how this is going to be a great year and how he loves working with the kids and everything that we're doing.

For me, that's very comfortable. That's the type of resources that these individuals bring to the table. They've coached at the highest level. They understand the day-to-day operations, and I have a great respect for them and I know that they respect everything we've done in our program. So they've been great additions.

Q. Coach, considering the last season and the fact that you guys were a top 10 team and only finished 9-4, 22nd overall, do you view that last season as a disappointment?

COACH JONES: I don't view it as a disappointment. The way I view it is we didn't accomplish everything we set ourselves out to. And, again, our goal every year is to win a championship and compete to win a championship.

So, was it a disappointment? No. Did we not accomplish some of the things we set out to do? Absolutely. We have to learn from the things that went wrong that we could have done better.

But I think all you have to do is look at it's difficult to win and it's difficult to win championships. And I think this league really exemplifies that. But I'm still proud of the way our team responded. And I told our football team this. The lessons you learned from last year, the resolve, the resiliency, are going to serve you for many years down the road in life.

And that football team went through a lot of things. I know we started off 5-0, and I believe our first five opponents were divisional champions. And I made a comment going towards the tail end of our season that the back half of our season would be much more

challenging than the front half of our season.

Everyone kind of looked at me like, what are you talking about? But I knew where we are at as a program, and we were still needing that competitive depth across the board, and we have some position groups where we couldn't afford to have injuries.

But, again, this is a results-oriented business and we fell short of our goals. But I don't like to use the term "disappointment," because when you still look at it, it's hard to win in this conference. And only three teams have won nine games, and the University of Tennessee is one of those.

Q. This is a two-parter, if that's okay. One is you alluded to you guys obviously raised the level of the program since you inherited it. What do you think you got to do to take that next step, you know, to get to Atlanta? And also you're the only team that usually has to play Alabama every year. I know that's a traditional rivalry. Do you think about it would be nice not to have to play Alabama every year?

COACH JONES: Well, first of all, taking the next step, I think it's you first of all sustain success. And when we set off four years ago building this program, we knew it wasn't going to be a quick fix and we wanted to build something that would be -- the foundation would be set for many, many years, and that foundation is set for success.

I think a lot of times, too, when you're building a football program, your program goes through evolutions or different stages, from being able to compete to having the competitive depth, but also your players and everyone in your program understanding now -- when we first came to Tennessee, we were part of a lot of homecoming games, and what they -- you know, we talked about as a football program, you're now -- everyone is going to play their best game. You're going to get everyone's A game. There are no off weeks in this conference. That takes a maturity level. That takes an understanding you getting yourself -- preparing yourself to play the best game week in, week out. That's been part of our evolution, too.

I think maintaining the consistency, maintaining the expectations, we want more and we expect more. I know our fans want more. That's the great thing coaching at Tennessee are those expectations.

In terms of Alabama, obviously that's a great, great rivalry. That game means so many things to so many people. So, again, we take that game very, very seriously and have a lot of respect for what Coach Saban has built at Alabama and what they've done. It's

also a great rivalry game, so that game means a lot to us.

Q. You mentioned that your head coaches that are now part of your staff, but there's another head coach who's also part in Coach Fulmer. I wonder how he's been -- what's his role with you? Do you consult with Coach Fulmer?

COACH JONES: All of the time. That's a friendship that I value. He's been a mentor to me. He's been a sounding board to me. This has been over time. This started from year one. I reached out to him, had him come by. Welcome him back in the program, had him speak to our team.

You know, you have a great resource right here. Here's a College Football Hall of Famer. He understands the dynamics of Tennessee. He understands everything associated with our institution. And I consider him a great friend, a great mentor, and it's great to have him back.

And like I told him, Coach, I want you at practice. Come to practice. I want you to sit in meetings. Anything that you feel, it's your program. You helped build this football program.

And that's, you know, the expectation that we have with all of our former head coaches and all of our former players. They are the ones that built this program through their hard work, sweat equity. Any time you can have a resource like Coach Fulmer, I want him around as much as possible.

Q. All right. Coach, thank you for your time.

COACH JONES: Thank you.