

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 11, 2017

Jim McElwain

Florida

MODERATOR: Our fourth coach today is Florida's Jim McElwain, entering his third season as the head coach at the University of Florida.

COACH MCELWAIN: How's everybody doing? You doing all right today? I can see just the energy in here, it's just incredible. Wow. Can't be that bad.

Well, welcome. And more than that, what a great time to get ready for college football. You know it's that time when the SEC Media Days are here, and obviously our opportunity to visit about some things that are going on and visit about our team.

I'll say this. Going into year three, I'm really excited not only about our team but more so about our organization, and our organization understanding what it takes and understanding that the small little details and sweating the small stuff is something that's really important.

I think we've done a pretty darn good job of understanding the why we've been successful at times and understanding the why we haven't been successful. And, you know, learning from those things is something that you constantly grow with.

So with that, I hope you guys enjoyed the guys that came with us, Tez and Cell and Duke. Just watching those guys grow and seeing who they are and what they're all about, they're really good guys, and hope you enjoyed visiting with them. With that, we'll open it up to some questions and roll from there.

Q. Jim, Martez Ivey was talking about the LSU rivalry and how it's blown up now and he says to him it's almost bigger than the FSU rivalry. How would you describe what's happening between these two teams and just the rivalry in general over the last ten months or so?

COACH MCELWAIN: Well, I think first and foremost, rivalries are what makes college football as awesome as it is. And for us at the University of Florida, here's the great thing. We got a bunch of rivalries. And each week you go out there, you get an opportunity. And so, you know, whether be them, whether it be FSU, Georgia, Tennessee, you name it. You know it's one of those deals that that's why you come to Florida, playing



big ball games and great rivalries.

Q. What did Malik say or do for you guys, and what's your quarterback situation going into fall camp?

COACH MCELWAIN: Sure. It's one of those situations where it doesn't matter the position group. We're always looking to add to everything that we do and create competition. And ultimately it doesn't matter what the profession you're in, but true competition is something that really breeds excellence.

And I'm excited about having him in there. We're now up to finally our number in the scholarship count that we want to be in the quarterback room. We've got some real options there. And that's a good thing. And yet, you know, he's a guy that can light up the room with his smile. He's excited to be there and excited to compete, and we're looking forward to seeing what happens this fall.

Q. Just how has Martez handled the transition from guard to tackle and just your thought on his progress?

COACH MCELWAIN: Yeah. You know, Tez is a natural left tackle. That's what he was coming out. It speaks volumes to his unselfishness that he went in there and played at guard, knowing that we needed, you know, that to happen. That first year we got there, just because through some bum luck and some things that had happened, you know, we only had four scholarship offensive linemen, so piecing a group together, which we were able to do. And in Tez's case, I think he'll really flourish now. He has that ability to move on the outside.

Q. What are your thoughts on possible relocation of the Georgia-Florida game to a home-and-home series rather than playing in Jacksonville every year?

COACH MCELWAIN: You know, I haven't heard anything about that. It is what it is. Jacksonville's a great place to play the game. It's kind of something that has kind of become historically kind of the place to be. You're probably on top of that more than I am. I must have missed that when I was up at my lake cabin in Montana that somebody was talking about it, so...

Q. Jim, you talked about you liked this offensive

line. You feel like you're a better receiver than you've been a long time. You got a lot of quarterback, tight end, running defense. Is this the best team of the three you had at Florida, or is it something you have to kind of wait and see?

COACH MCELWAIN: Time will tell. Each team kind of creates their own identity. You are never what you were a year ago, and you're never going to be staying the same. One thing I do know, you're either getting better or getting worse. You never stay the same. And with these guys, it's a different team. Our strengths are going to be in some different areas that maybe hasn't been a strength since we've been here, and yet that's not to downplay, you know, like we've got some good young players that are going to have to grow up awfully quickly, so -- but with that, you know what, that's a pretty darn good team, and I'm excited to see what they do this fall.

Q. Coach, somebody just tweeted out that you said earlier that you know who your starting quarterback's going to be. If that's true, can you shed a little bit more light on that?

COACH MCELWAIN: Yeah. I don't know how that came out. Who knows. I know we will start a quarterback, I guess, so...

Q. When you were at your lake place in Montana, did you pretty much figure it out?

COACH MCELWAIN: I figured out a lot of stuff at the lake place in Montana. Starting quarterback wasn't one of them, Mike. All right?

Q. Coach, what led into LSU being named as homecoming opponent? Why not one of the nonconference opponents that often happens?

COACH MCELWAIN: Yeah. Here's what I love about this. So, I get off the plane, okay, having been gone for a week, and, you know, kind of focusing on the future and actually reflecting on the past a little bit like I do every year when I'm up in Montana, and believe it or not, unlike maybe Coach Saban at Alabama, I have no choice in it. Okay? It's a university choice. So, they didn't tell me until I got off the plane and somebody said, hey, guess who your homecoming game is? That's the first I heard about it.

Q. What do you think about it?

COACH MCELWAIN: Well, you're going to have homecoming, right? So I'm good with whatever game it is. I just know this. We've -- I've heard about this, obviously, all day long. The first I heard about it was yesterday. And I'm loving the fact that you think it's news.

Q. Did you by chance reach out to Brian Kelly or anyone at Notre Dame when it came to Malik Zaire

and get sort of some sort of dossier on him?

COACH MCELWAIN: Well, there are people that have been involved in his life that obviously reached out to us. There were some things that had to fall into place before we can even really address it the way it was. But I've heard nothing but great things about him. In fact, part of his letter of recommendation to our graduate school is actually from the president of Notre Dame. That should tell you something about the kid.

Q. Kirby and Butch were obviously asked the same question. You've seen them twice. What does Florida need to do to close that gap with Alabama?

COACH MCELWAIN: They've just done an outstanding job. I think closing the gap, as I go back to I guess the understanding here, each year is its own and certain things happen that you don't have control over, and yet what you hope happens is you've taken care of a lot of the details along the way, that when something comes up, you can still be successful.

That's the great thing they've done in that program. And I don't know the gap itself. You know, I do understand this. They're right now at the top, and, you know, it's up to the rest of us to go get them.

Q. Coach, you guys obviously played Florida State every year, now you're opening it up with Michigan. Did you have any say in scheduling that? What did you think about -- is there some motivation from the bowl game, you know?

COACH MCELWAIN: No. So I'm a believer -- we're the University of Florida, and college football fans, I think Gator fans in general, they deserve us to go out and play whoever we can at the best of our ability no matter where they're from. I think it's really good for college football that two different conferences are playing each other on opening day. It's something that I agreed to. I wanted to do. It's something moving forward that we're looking to do, you know, in these neutral-site games as well in the future. So, I just think it's the way it should be. I don't know. Maybe I'm screwed up, I guess.

Q. Coach, as someone who hopefully will never experience this, can you tell me what it's like to wake up and realize that you're going to have to answer questions about whether you were nude on top of a shark?

COACH MCELWAIN: You know, I love the humor in it, all right, and yet, you know what, what it did, that actually not only attacked the university but attacked my family, when you know it's not you -- you know, I bust chops with the best of them now, and yet when it got personal...

Nobody else?

Q. Having won in Baton Rouge last year, do you feel like Florida really got the best end of that deal now with two straight in Gainesville?

COACH MCELWAIN: You know, I haven't given it -- look. You think I'm nuts here, I get it. I haven't given it a second thought. You go play the game. You don't know where it is. In fact, growing up, think about when you just went to the ball yard and played. It never mattered where the game was.

And that's kind of the attitude that we take. You know, we lost a bunch of revenue in the city of Gainesville by not being able to play that game, and yet at the same time there wasn't one emergency worker that wasn't down on the coast helping with a devastating event.

So, in the big picture, how important was it? You're talking about people's lives now. So, yeah, we'll go play a ball game. That's the way it was.

Q. Jim, you, your coaches, your players, you guys find all sources of motivation, I'm sure. Where we picked you guys to finish in the East is probably not one of those things, but --

COACH MCELWAIN: Where are we picked?

Q. It hasn't been decided yet.

COACH MCELWAIN: Okay, good. Let me know, though, will you?

Q. As a competitor and somebody that obviously played the game, do you draw any motivation over your players by where you're perceived in the conference?

COACH MCELWAIN: First, you got to understand, very competitive, now, not a very good player, all right, but very competitive. But, no, I -- that's not something that we really focus on, because the only way you have an opportunity to test yourself and see who you are is to go out there and play, and doesn't matter at this juncture where we're picked.

And how much truly does motivation get you through the hard times? I'm not sure, right? It's the preparation and the attention to detail that you've put into it going into whatever event it is that's going to help you be successful. So, I don't know. You know, I -- will somebody at least say we exist? That would be nice, I guess, right?

Q. Coach, can you shed any light at all on Antonio Callaway's status with the team? And, secondly, just strictly on the field with him, how does he compare with some of the best wide receivers you coached?

COACH MCELWAIN: Yeah. You know, and he's going through some things right now, and obviously he's

been handling it well. We'll continue to see how that goes. But he's a talented young man, and he's a really a good American. He's a guy that is fun to watch practice. You know? I've been around some really good players, and I don't want to put him in these categories, but these guys that have been successful, like a guy that I coached at Louisville, Deion Branch, who practiced every day like it was a game. Julio Jones when he was at Alabama. I mean practice. I'm talking about as soon as you walked through the gate, man, it was on. Antonio is one of those guys. He just loves to play the game.

Q. Malik Zaire, I know he's transferred to Florida and you're going to inject him into the competition at quarterback. You've done a good job building offenses in your time at Alabama and Florida, and we have a lot of pocket quarterbacks. With a guy like him, with his skill set, what would you do to interject his mobility into your offense?

COACH MCELWAIN: I think what you do, you build around anybody's strengths, whoever it is. I think when you go back to the days when we had Drew Stanton at Michigan State, very similar to that. I think Drew's still playing, if he isn't -- I think he might still be hanging on somewhere, and -- but throughout the years you've had different kind of people, and you build it around whatever that skill set is to help them be successful.

Q. I know Letterman had an encounter with a bear in his place in Montana. What's the closest you've ever had with a bear at your lake house in Montana?

COACH MCELWAIN: Truth is, it ran through the breezeway of the cabin, and it looked hungry. But I'm not sure who was more scared, us or him, you know? So, we got a mountain lion out on the island now that actually kind of worries me a bit, too. But just keep an eye on your pets. That would be the thing to do.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach.

COACH MCELWAIN: All right. Thanks, guys. Have a good one.