

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday July 12, 2017

Barry Odom

Missouri



MODERATOR: Our second coach in the big room this morning is Missouri's Barry Odom. Barry's in his second year leading the Missouri football program, closed the season out well winning two of their final three games, former student athlete at the University of Missouri, one and only season as defensive coordinator of Mizzou. The Tigers enjoyed top ten -- the first top ten defensive ranking in school history.

On a personal note, I just completed a radio interview with the Missouri radio station, and they asked about how well Missouri's been integrated into the Southeastern Conference. They gave a lot of examples about how well the transition has gone from my perspective. One in particular, Barry is one of my faithful texters. When something good happens in this league like a baseball championship nationally or two teams in the College World Series Final, I get a text from Barry Odom, and that's much appreciated.

So, Barry, the podium is yours.

COACH ODOM: Good morning. Great to be here year two. And it's an honor to be here, not only to represent this wonderful, unbelievable conference, the best conference in America, but it's also a great honor to represent the University of Missouri as the head football coach.

I'd like to thank Commissioner Sankey and all of his staff on the number of things that they do, the tireless hours that they put in, but everything's done so well, first class, and attention to detail is off the charts. And you know any time that he puts our name or the SEC brand on it, that it's going to be done right. And I respect that and appreciate it, and like we mentioned before was and am so proud to be a part of this conference.

I'd like to thank you guys as media that cover our programs and cover, not only our staff, but our student athletes. You know, in a world of technology and trying to break the story or get the information and everything's a click away from everyone in our society with social media, you guys have a tremendous job and responsibility. And I respect the way that you guys do the work and represent our kids because at the end of the day, you look at why many of us are in the

business or the arenas that we are in because of our student athletes. And I appreciate the work that you guys do.

I got great respect for the other coaches in this league. Every week, if you don't prepare the right way, if you don't do everything right, your checklist from A to Z, if you don't do it right, you're going to get exposed pretty quickly. And we got great coaches. And not only that, you know, everybody's a competitor, but also there's friendships within the league. There's great respect. And you know, the guys that are here were here the last couple of days. And then for some reason, I was sitting in the back, and there was a loud buzz. You could feel it. And I thought it was for me in the room, but I was quickly reminded that Nick was before me.

So I know that there's been so much excitement because of these couple of days on what's coming up here in the next few weeks with teams reporting and getting started with our fall camp. And right before we get started with that, you've always got the media day, and then you get into fall camp, and then game one's staring you in the face which we're all excited about.

The fan base in the SEC is unbelievable and unmatched. The passion and the energy as a competitor, you don't want it any other way. And it's really exciting to get year two for me started.

I talked about being honored to represent the University of Missouri. We've got an opportunity to go into this second season. And for me, you know, last year on this day, I was standing in the hallway just before I walked out. And I learned that, you know, I already knew from the night before, but learned it was announced the athletic director had left. So that was a change walking on the podium for the first time.

So the experience for me over the last year, the leadership that we have within our University, with the presidential hire, President Mun Y. Choi, we got a new chancellor in Dr. Cartwright. Those guys in the last year since they've been hired have done such a great job on campus, have done such a great job leading the University of Missouri into the future. And we hired a guy named Jim Sterk who is our director of athletics. All Jim has done in the short time he's been there is set records on fundraising and leading our athletic

department into the future and providing us a foundation to go be successful.

So I'm excited where Mizzou is right now. I'm excited for what we're going to do in the long term for the future of the University of Missouri. The role that we have as coaches and as teachers and educators, every day that we've got an opportunity to be around kids, every day we've got an opportunity to be around our student athletes. We got an opportunity to change lives. We got an opportunity to lead those guys in every aspect of their life to go be successful.

And you look at one of the reasons that I'm in coaching is because I had guys that for years and years that coached me, that had an impact on me. And then I had an opportunity to go to the University of Missouri as a student-athlete. And that absolutely changed my life. It changed my life course history.

So you look at that now, and I've got an opportunity to recruit a kid that's 15, 16, 17 years old, get him on our campus, and then become a server for him in every aspect of his life. That's why I'm in coaching. I've got an opportunity for kids to get their degree from the University of Missouri. It's that degree when you go out into the real world, whenever you are done playing football, whenever that point is, you have an opportunity for the next four years to go do something that you want with that degree, and that means something for me. That means something socially that we got a chance during this time to lead those guys and give them an opportunity to give back to society, to do more to make this place better than when we got it. And I'm excited about that.

And then you've got the opportunity as a coach, in the greatest conference in America, to go coach against the best. You've got an opportunity as a competitor to put together a team and prepare and to be a great teammate, and to work. And we got nine assistant coaches all pulling the rope in the same direction. You got a chance on Saturday afternoon or Saturday night for three and a half hours to go compete. And there's not much anything better than that.

And when there's a winner or a loser and everything that you do, and I want to win. That's the bottom line. I want to make Mizzou to go win a championship. And my vision hasn't changed since I got the job. We got an opportunity to do great things. We've got an opportunity when I drive into work every day to make Mizzou football better than it was before. And if I can continue do that consistently, then the wins are going to happen.

We looked back at last year. We did a very, very thorough self-evaluation throughout the year and then

when the season was over on who we were and why we didn't achieve the things we wanted to. I didn't do a good enough job as the head coach getting us ready to go win games. We got a lot of guys coming back. I think we have a tremendous staff that I am very proud of. I am going to make a lot of wrong decisions. There is no doubt about it. They know that, and they're going to make me right. We have a group of those guys in the room that do it every day. And I'm excited to go to work with them again this season.

Offensively, if you look, we got ten returning starters back on an offense that played really well down the stretch. It's our job as coaches to make sure that everything we do is make sure that those ten returning guys plus the new additions, that they play at a higher level than we did last year. That's exciting for us on the opportunity to be able to build and put those pieces in place, all the moving parts that it takes to be a really good offensive football team. We need to have more consistency on that side of the ball and everybody understands that.

Defensively, we weren't near good enough last year. I know that's been talked about enough since season's end. And when you win four games, guys, believe me, it hurts your soul. And that's where I was at. So you figure out how to fix it whether you inherited the problems or you had the problems on your watch. That's the job of a coach. That's why they call you coach. Go fix it.

And we've got a great opportunity to be really good on defense. We've got a bunch of guys coming back. Five or six guys had meaningful snaps in this league. We recruited well, we got great coaches on that side of the ball, and I'm looking forward to get that started and building that back the way we need to.

The things that we have an opportunity to do within this conference, and one of them is a great experience, and you look at establishing and developing relationships with your kids, but also putting them in position to have experiences that they're going to remember forever. And one of those today is this event. We had a chance to bring three kids with us, three student athletes.

J'Mon Moore is a returning starter at wide receiver will be -- when we hit the field in August will be a college graduate, and I'm proud of him. Had over 1,000 yards receiving. He's grown up a tremendous amount. He's going to be a guy that we lean on a lot offensively. I'm excited he's here.

Drew Lock is our starting quarterback who threw for over 3,000 yards last year. Got an opportunity to get his college degree well before he graduates in sports management. I'm proud of that and the way he's

commanded running the offense. He's become a student of the game and have really, really high expectations for him.

And Eric Beisel is the guy on defense that we brought, the starting middle linebacker. When we start in August, he as well will be a college graduate. There's a few reasons I brought Eric. Number one, he's done a great job towards the end of the year last year on being put in position to go lead our football team. And then since the season's over, he has really gathered that senior class together. It's a great group of 18 kids. They've come together and decided they are going to draw a line in the sand and go make Mizzou football what it's supposed to be.

Also for the Arkansas beat writers, I bought Beisel for that, too, because I understand we're supposed to flame that rivalry a little bit up. You're welcome in advance,

Bob Holt. I know you got plenty to ask him later on. But thanks again for everything that you guys do. And with that, I'll open it up to questions.

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

COACH ODOM: Bob, real quick. Before Bob gets started, I was at -- I don't know. We crossed paths a number of years ago. I was at Memphis, and they had a job open at Arkansas, and he almost had me pegged for going, and so much so, that they had pictures of my house for sale, which I didn't have a house for sale at that point. And I've known Bob for a long time. And every week during media, during the call-in show, Bob always has a question. Hey, it could have nothing to do with Mizzou, but I appreciate the work you do.

Q. Okay. Thanks. I almost sat down again. I was going to ask you about Damarea Crockett, obviously an Arkansas kid. What was the key to him being so good last year? What are you looking for from him as a sophomore? How did he handle the suspension at the end of the last season?

COACH ODOM: Damarea has a chance going into his sophomore year. Had a great freshman campaign. I think a lot of things that go into that, I thought upfront. Greg Elarbee is our offensive line coach. And that group did a tremendous job as the season went on, not only protecting our quarterback, but also establishing the presence in the run game.

And Damarea figured out as the season went on that really his running style had to change a little bit on what he thought he was coming in to play college ball.

I mean, at Little Rock Christian, he thought he could -- and he did, he just ran away from everybody. He used his speed. And that's changed in this league specifically.

You got to know when to try to turn on the jets and when to put your foot on the ground and go north and south. So the understanding of how to play the position was a pretty big learning curve for him as a true freshman, but then also when he got into the groove, he got a tremendous skill set. He's up to 230-ish pounds right now. He got a chance to be -- if we'll do everything we get a chance to do offensively, he has a chance to be a real special player.

Q. I wanted to ask you, the No. 25 is pretty special in your program. What went into the decision to give that number to Jamal Brooks this year?

COACH ODOM: You look, and for those who don't know, in 2005, we had a linebacker on the team, Aaron O'Neal from

St. Louis, Missouri. He was a great kid. Passed away. I got -- as well as Cornell Ford on our staff and Andy Hill, guys that were there, such a -- that, to me, Todd, that happened yesterday. And it's a relationship that we had and I still have with his family that such great respect and honor for them.

So at that point, that senior class set aside some things that we wanted to do to honor A.O. for the rest of time. And we decided to designate No. 25 to a certain player. And really, if you look at it the first year, it rotated between seniors on who wore it. And since then, it's been designated to one player.

We got into the cycle that it always ended up kind of just being a senior. And as a staff, we looked at it and said it would be nice to establish tradition and put it in a guy that's going to have it in his entire career. So every year and every offseason and again in preseason camp, we'll address the importance of that number.

Jamal Brooks, linebacker, incoming freshman will wear that this year. And I know that we've had the conversation that means a great deal to him to wear that in the right way.

Q. There's been a lot of realignment talk this offseason mostly from the Auburn side. I have not heard a lot from the Missouri side. What are your thoughts on that and what would it be like if you were in the SEC West one day?

COACH ODOM: I look at it as having an opportunity to be where I'm at on the week with president -- or with Commissioner Sankey already giving his comments on realignment.

You know, it's not been on any agenda item that I know of. He addressed it pretty well. And it's not there. And right now, I need to focus on making sure that Mizzou football is as good as we can get on the schedule we play and the division we play. So I'm excited where we are, and we'll stand with Commissioner Sankey on our conference stance on that.

Q. This is a kind of two-parter. I was wondering if you could expand what you're expecting from Crockett. And how did he handle getting suspended at the end of the year, and you have Byers, another kid from Arkansas, what his impact could be on the defensive line this year even as a true freshman?

COACH ODOM: I didn't finish the first question earlier.

Damarea, we expect him to be a guy that plays like he has played in games before with experience, which he will. He had a great summer. And the things that he can help us do in the run game and also catching the ball out of the backfield, we got to find ways creatively to get him the ball because I think he's got a chance to be a game-changing player. So his role will grow.

It's also important that the two or three other tailbacks that we've got, that they continue, because everybody's going to play at that spot, but Damarea's got to be ready to carry the load for us offensively in the run game. And pass protection improved for him last year, but you want to see a guy that had some success, played well down the stretch, has had a tremendous offseason and puts that into play when we start back in fall camp.

He's a mature kid. And he understands the importance of what we're putting on that position. And he knows he's got the skills to go do it. So he's got some confidence about the way he can play. And I think more than anything, him having some experience and understanding being in the arena will help him more than anything.

He handled the end of the year with an incident that happened the week of the Arkansas game, handled it very well, very mature, and has learned lessons as our team has on some of the situations that went down with that.

We know that every decision that we make is impactful, not only for yourself, but our entire football program.

Yeah. Akial Byers is a kid that we signed from incoming class from Fayetteville along with Taylor Powell. Both were teammates and I think tremendous players. We are fortunate to have them in our program

and get some reports over the summer how guys are progressing. And academically, they've done a great job making sure we're starting our career out right academically this summer, but also in the offseason -- in the summer workouts, both of those guys stand out in the work they've done.

Q. Almost every sport is trying to find ways to speed up the game, you know, baseball, golf. And the other day, Steve Shaw mentioned some administrative things that they're going to do to try to speed up the college game, but they wouldn't do it through rules changes. And I wonder if that ever came to be on the table, such as eliminating the stoppage of clocks, the clock after first stance, would that be something the coaches would resist, you think, in college football?

COACH ODOM: I think, number one, in addressing what Steve talked about the other day, I know one thing from the speeches and talks and discussion week had in Destin, I know where I'm going to stand on the sideline and where I'm not going to stand. There's a clear line, so looking forward to a couple of those rule changes.

But with the pace of play, you look really just to jump in and say, well, this is the way we've got to do it. You look -- there's so many factors that you need to really look at on how does that really affect an SEC game. How does that affect -- for us, on the stance that we're going to take, how does that affect the way you play offense or the way that you have to coach defensively.

There's so many things that go into that to try to make it right. And I think you have to go through a cycle. Let's look and see what happens this year with the halftime being adjusted a little bit on the time on when they're starting the clock. And let's see kind of where it plays out in the grand scheme of things. And to have discussion, to answer for other coaches, I'm not really sure how that would play out, but really you have to study it to have an opinion.

Q. I kind of touched on it there when you talked about in Destin and the new sideline rule, but who will be in charge of grabbing you and keeping you off the field? And among your assistant coaches, who are you most worried about possibly violating that rule?

COACH ODOM: You're going to get me in trouble with nine assistants, but there are a lot of competitive guys that are coaches. And that's probably why we're in the profession.

I'll maintain the sideline demeanor for myself. There's

-- you're obviously going to have discussions when calls affect -- they are affecting lives. You're going to feel passionate about it. So you're going to have some enthusiasm as things -- you always do. But if I'm looking at our staff on who we need a pullback coach, Brick Haley, our defensive line coach, he likes to chatter and talk. And he likes to do it out on the field. So we're working on that here in the next couple weeks on where to stand.

Q. I'm going to stay sitting if that's okay.

COACH ODOM: You might as well keep the mic on you.

Q. You said four is tough on your soul, but that last one, you guys got a big comeback win to take into the offseason. What kind of momentum did that give you guys? What do you think of the rivalry? At this point you guys beat them two out of three now, Arkansas?

COACH ODOM: We had Arkansas right where we wanted them at halftime and then ended up finding a way to win the game. Geographically, it's in a great location for it to be a natural rivalry game.

I got respect for Bret and the job that he has done and continues to do. You know, people won't like it, but he and I communicate. I respect the job that he does.

But it's important that within our conference, all the tradition and the history that there is, and for us to continue that and continue to try to grow that, and for us, with that game on Thanksgiving weekend, the importance that it's going to be in both of our programs' futures, it's going to be very, very important to both sides.

Q. D-line was a big point of emphasis in the recruiting cycle last year. Just curious about who you think is going to step up and fill the role of Charles Harris and who you anticipate to be the big force on the D-line next season?

COACH ODOM: You look any time you lose a first-round pick, there's a guy that can rush the passer like Charles was. Obviously you have to have guys step up in a lot of different ways, but Mizzou's had that -- we had more draft picks on the defensive line in the last couple years than anybody in the country, and we've got to continue that.

And I understand the importance on playing defense. It starts up front. And when you're really good up front, both inside and on the outside rushing the passer, then you got a chance to be a really good defense. So, we addressed some of the needs that we thought we had in the recruiting cycle. You don't want to count on a lot of freshman, but also I'm counting on those guys and

us as a staff getting them ready to go play.

I'm looking at guys that have the opportunity to continue to grow in that area. I think Marcell Frazier at the end of the year with being pretty productive for us, had a great spring. I think Terry Beckner inside can be a special player.

You have A.J. Logan with a lot of experience.

Rashad Brandon was a kid we signed midyear. And Markell Utsey was another kid from Arkansas that we signed that played really well last year. And Jordan Harold, another guy that plays defensive end that has got meaningful experience.

For us as a staff, we're going to have enough guys. We got to find the right places to get those guys in position to go play fast, to find a way to get into third down, and then creatively do enough to be able to get to the quarterback.

Q. Got a two-parter for you. Where is it that Drew Lock needs to expand his game? Where does he need to be improved this coming year? And you mentioned you talked to Bret some. How often and what is the nature of you all's conversations?

COACH ODOM: Well, Drew, for me and for our program, and to play the position of quarterback, Mizzou's had a lot of great quarterbacks over the year. Starting -- you can go way back and hit Brad Smith and Blaine Gabbert and Chase Daniel. There's a number of guys that played well at that spot. I feel like Drew can be the next guy that plays really, really well at a high level at that position.

We need ten guys around him to play really well, too because we're going to put a lot on Drew's plate. And we have, and we'll continue to do that and push it. He's got a high football I.Q. He understands what we need out of that position.

And also I want him to know, he doesn't have to get it all in one throw, and he understands that. Understanding it and going and doing it is a couple different things. He's got a chance to be a special player. We've got to become more consistent as an offense and that starts with him as well.

MODERATOR: Conversations with Coach Bielema?

COACH ODOM: Yeah. We talk usually by text, I don't know, a handful of times. Depends what's going on. But obviously we've got an opportunity to do something at both of our places, that we're both competitors, and want to be great.

And for a number of years, like I said, I've respected

the job that he's done. And you get together at Destin for meetings. And then you run across each other in recruiting so you strike up a relationship or friendship over that time. So it's usually by text. You know, there's a couple phone calls here and there.

Q. Barry, you guys obviously have a lot of Arkansas kids on your team. Do you see that you guys continue to recruit there or is it kind of how it's happened the last couple years?

COACH ODOM: I think, number one, with recruiting, we got to do a great job in evaluation. And then it doesn't really matter what -- you know, what the publications say or what everybody else thinks.

If we feel like that it's a guy that wants to be at the University of Missouri, that fits what we're doing offensively, defensively and the culture of our program, and they realize once they get on campus that everything that they want to accomplish being a student-athlete, that you can get done at the University of Missouri, we'll go wherever to recruit them.

I would venture to guess in the last two years, we signed kids from a wider area geographically than maybe Mizzou has in the past, but we got to recruit the state of Missouri with great energy, and then we got to do a great job in the surrounding areas in the SEC footprint on finding kids that can help us go win a championship.

MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

COACH ODOM: Thank you, guys.