

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Missouri Tigers

Dennis Gates

Men's Media Day Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: At this time we are ready to begin. Coach Gates is going to give you some opening comments, and then we will take questions.

DENNIS GATES: First, I want to say thanks for being here. I'm definitely excited to represent this conference and, obviously, walk the same sideline as some Hall of Fame coaches. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Q. I just wanted to see what your expectations are for this season going into your first year.

DENNIS GATES: That's a great question. My expectations is simple, and that's to get better every day, continue to challenge our staff, but also our student-athletes, and making sure that we're prepared by April.

When I say April, obviously, the championship game is April 1st, April 3rd in Houston, Texas. And that's obviously a goal of every team across the country and obviously in our conference.

That's what we focus on. It's just winning each day.

Q. What can you say about Kobe Brown and his abilities, and what have you seen so far, what he brings to the team?

DENNIS GATES: First of all, I commend Kobe Brown. I commend Cuonzo Martin and his staff and the development of that young man and, obviously, drawing him and his family into loving the institution the way that they do.

He is a loyal person, and it speaks to the type of teammate, the type of leader that he is. I'm excited to coach him as we've done so starting in the spring, going through the summer, and now in the fall.



He has gotten better. Tremendously comfortable with the basketball in his hand, but also a great passer. Getting better at his outside shot. He rebounds with the best of them.

I'm excited for him to lead our team physically, emotionally between the lines, and he has done a great job.

Q. Six teams with new coaches in the league. Five of you guys are kind of young up-and-comer coaches. What does that say about the culture of the SEC? What does that say about what Missouri is looking for you to do as you try to build them up?

DENNIS GATES: Well, what it says -- I appreciate that question. What it says is that there has been a growth in our conference when it comes to the importance the basketball.

You have great, great football tradition. Obviously, where there was a time where you had two or three teams representing the SEC, you now grow that into about eight or nine hopefully.

What it says is it's a tremendous, tremendous conference with great resources, and our coaches -- and I'm thankful to be one of them. Our coaches, there's a style of play that you'll see completely different than maybe the past. When you look at the backgrounds all the way from the West Coast to the Midwest, that new group of coaches have come near and far, but also they have come from great, great basketball tradition, meaning their family trees or coaches that they've learned from or even regions of play that they're used to or are accustomed to preparing their teams with.

It will be an interesting style of play that is added to our conference, and I'm thankful that Desiree Reed-Francois, our athletic director, but also our president and board of curators believe in me to represent Mizzou.

Q. Where, when you look at the transfer portal and now that it has been in for a little bit, where have you seen the good and where have you seen the bad within those?



DENNIS GATES: The transfer portal, obviously, it's a two-way thing. It has helped new programs kind of reset the roster, but we have to look at the big picture of it. It gives student-athletes opportunities to reset their careers, start it over. There are some great stories behind that.

I truly believe we have to also measure those that still remain in the portal because there's over, I believe, 400 kids who had scholarships that are still in the portal. Whenever you have something as new as that part, you have to understand it's still evolving, and it's in transition to regulate itself.

So you are going to have good/bad stories come from it, but it gives our student-athletes an opportunity, no different than coaches have opportunities to now, whether it's through transition, to represent a different program.

Q. A couple big-picture issues with college basketball. There's some big ideas out there. One being summer basketball. The other, the expansion of the NCAA tournament field. What are your thoughts on both of those?

DENNIS GATES: Those are two great questions. I'll talk about one first. As it relates to summer league, when we look at the NBA Summer League, for example, that has gone on for years. The physical toll of a football program isn't the same in the summer months. You're not going to have football players in pads.

So, obviously, in basketball you can have some growth. Summer League in the NBA has been going on since '69, 1969, whether it's through the Salt Lake Revue back in the day or even the L.A. Summer League where Kobe Bryant first made his appearance at Long Beach State. Then, obviously, the Magic, Orlando Magic when Dwyane Wade and LeBron James faced each other, that has evolved into now the Las Vegas Summer League where all teams are involved, all teams are excited about that development.

You have some coaches developing as well. So when I look at summer basketball for college, it already exists through pro-ams, whether it's the Drew League, whether it's pro-ams in Chicago, Seattle. Those things happen where these young college players are pursuing just development, right, wanting to play against other people.

It is something that our game will, I believe, go to, and it's an unbelievable opportunity because it's for our student-athletes. They're going to play, right? They're going to play basketball. What better way for them to have that opportunity to do it in the summer months, but also we have to look at staff opportunities.

I wouldn't want as a head coach to coach in the Summer League. I would want my staff to do it, and those are great opportunities that we look at when we look at, okay, how did someone's career start on the sideline?

Well, I can say I was a GA back in the day for Tom Crean and Leonard Hamilton. That helped me. But also now you'll have a next generation of coaches at this level say they got their shot and their confidence, right, their confidence in coaching maybe in the Summer league. No different than you have summer opportunities playing overseas and in those trips.

The other part of the question, you'll have to remind me. What was it again? The NCAA tournament.

I truly believe we have to look at the NCAA tournament this way, where it was at the very beginning. There were 16 or however many teams. It's always evolved. Think about the 60th anniversary -- or the 50th anniversary of Valvano's shot, right? That tournament had eight teams in the play-in. Eight teams were playing in. Princeton was the only team that won its 12th-seed game once they got into the field, but there was a preliminary round.

So it's always expanded, always. It's just time now to give that opportunity another look and maybe grow. I would like to see a double, to be honest with you. That's just me because I truly believe there are some great coaches who are left out of the tournament. There are some great players that we have not seen on that platform that we'll now see. There is some great games already existing with some unbelievable excitement. I think there's more out there for us to have.

I'm all for it because it creates an opportunity not just for our fan base, but for our game, for our tournament to grow, but also for the development of referees. I think that matters. Referees matter. That matters.

Our game of basketball being in different cities of that caliber of tournament, those things matter. You have coaches that are sometimes graded on if they're going to make the tournament or not.

We're in a transitional business. Whenever you can have that transaction meet the realities, I believe it's on its way.

And I appreciate that question.

Q. You mentioned Kobe Brown earlier. His dad, obviously, a very successful high school coach here in the state of Alabama.

DENNIS GATES: Absolutely.

Q. Have you seen that influence on Kobe, his father's influence, and could you see Kobe himself being a coach one day?

DENNIS GATES: Yeah, that's a great question, great statement.

I have enjoyed my time getting to know the Brown family. Again, I appreciate them giving me the opportunity to coach their child.

And whenever you look at a coach, it's a sacrificial position, and you have to also look into the home. Mom has done a great job as well. So I see a little bit of both in Kobe. I see Kaleb Brown as well in terms of the younger of the siblings.

And they, too, are unbelievable young men. I truly believe they will be coaches at some point in time well after they retire from the game of basketball, but I see the influence of not just Mom. I see Dad and vice versa.

So thanks for the question.

Q. Obviously, a lot of newcomers on this year's team. How have you yourself and the rest of the team prepared for what you are going to see in the SEC?

DENNIS GATES: Great question. I always respected the conference, the coaches, and the competition doesn't just start inside the lines. It goes into the recruiting.

When I was an assistant in the ACC, we've recruited against SEC teams. That's when the games are sort of won. If you can sort of win those recruiting battles well before it begins. And I'm excited to share the same sidelines as the Hall of Famers that exist because I truly believe there are several Hall of Famer coaches in our conference.

To have the opportunity to compete while leading a program, impacting young men on the court, off the court, it's a dream come true. I stand on the shoulders of my mentors: Leonard Hamilton, George Raveling. They've instilled in me a lot of things. I've worked, I've played for some great coaches. Ben Braun, Ricardo Patton. I've been there. I've seen sort of how they've done things. And I'm excited to lead my program here, our program.

And the biggest thing that comes out every day is our staff. I believe our staff collectively is a great staff. We have Charlton Young as my associate head coach. We have David Nutt, long-time head coach, SEMO, Arkansas State. We have Kyle Smith Peters as well as some other guys on our staff.

That's where the programs, obviously, over -- we analyze it, but sometimes that's where the games are won and lost, with your staff, with your recruiting, and putting it all together, and we're doing a good job.

Q. You mentioned recruiting. So I'll just ask: Have you already had to go up against Oklahoma and Texas on the recruiting path, and how do you think the addition of those two teams are going to affect the SEC? I don't think that's been addressed here today yet.

DENNIS GATES: I would look at it this way. My focus is not on where the league will be next year or the year after or the year after that. I have to put all my energy and time right here right now and in our conference where my feet are.

But those are great institutions, and it wasn't just a basketball decision or a football decision. Those are some great institutions with great people heading the way in their programs, but also leading the institution as a whole.

I can't comment on that. I haven't researched it, but I do think our leadership did a great job of expanding. No different than keeping up with where college sports or college alignment is all together.

Q. Just to go back to my last question. For the players currently on the team, how are you setting expectations for what they're going to see playing against this level of competition?

DENNIS GATES: Yeah, so what I've done is we have a series of captains. It starts with internal leadership. Kobe Brown is a captain, but we also have Nick Honor, who is represented here. He is a captain. He is a young man that's played at the highest level in the ACC. He has played in some hostile environments. He has been to the NCAA tournament, and that's an essential position. But we also have other (Zoom freeze) which is going to be essential to our success.

And, you know, the storm is coming, so to speak. It's not going to be easy, not for any team. But the team that I believe can keep it all together and get to the end collectively and lean on the tenets or even the mantra at the end will prevail, and you'll see those things happening. Hopefully in my program.

Q. Talk about Charlton Young, how you got involved with him and brought him into your program?

DENNIS GATES: Absolutely. Relationships are valuable.

Charlton Young, he and I worked together for several years. We've created some unbelievable results, whether it's scout reporting base, whether it's building base, whether it's building a culture, building our basketball community at Florida State and working for a great leader in Leonard Hamilton.

He wouldn't be here if Coach Ham had not blessed it. It was sort of like Christmas Eve, and trying to have that conversation with Coach Ham, which I talk to him daily. So the relationship began in 1997 when I was being recruited by Charlton Young, and he was an assistant, a young assistant at Northeastern University. And that relationship, obviously, rekindled through our time of crossing paths at Florida State through our mentor, Leonard Hamilton.

Thank you, guys. Have a blessed day. Again, great to see you.

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