

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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South Carolina Gamecocks Lamont Paris

Men's Media Day Press Conference

Q. Coach, you're one of six new coaches in the league. That's a pretty big turnover. What do you think about being part of that process, and what do you think maybe the new guys like yourself are bringing to the league?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, it's a unique situation that you have that much turnover in any league, really. Particularly in a league that's this good and this strong.

Yeah, so happy to be a part of that. There's some really good coaches in this incoming crop of new coaches and a lot of different styles of play and guys have had success doing things different ways.

So I'm looking forward to that and being a part of that group and continuing to move forward with the rich tradition that this conference has in terms of winning and developing good teams and tremendous coaches. I think the six that we've brought in is a really strong group. I'm glad to be a part of that.

Q. Last week you said this year is kind of about instilling some of the things that are going to be part of your DNA in this program. What are some of those things you want to be part of your DNA and your culture?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I think just competitive nature all the way around on both sides of the ball. I think that normally shows itself defensively more than anything because if you're extremely competitive, you'll force yourself to do some things that you may not want to do, that are going to be important to winning games, like blocking out or taking a charge or some of the things. I don't think as a competitor you have to talk yourself into shooting the ball better or more often.

Yeah, I think that's a big part of it, just our competitive



spirit, particularly on the defensive end. I think connectivity, I think unselfishness offensively. These guys know I don't care who scores. I'll tell you who won't have any points; it'll be me. So I don't care who scores. I don't have some predetermined stat sheet in my head on who's going to do what.

I like to have five guys out there that can affect offensively winning. So we'll move the ball, we'll cut, we'll play unselfishly, but we'll be aggressive, also.

I think those will be the calling cards on either side of the ball. I like skilled guys typically. We're not quite as skilled as what we will be someday, but that means we'll play a little bit different in some different facets.

But I value skill. I value being able to make the ball go in the basket. I value being able to pass. I value having a basketball IQ, and I value toughness and competitiveness.

Q. Some schools got to be picked last every year. Your school was picked 14th in the media projections preseason. How do you approach that with your team, and what was your reaction to that?

LAMONT PARIS: You know, it didn't surprise me. I would say that probably. You look, we have probably the fewest -- the least experience probably overall in terms of who's competed at this level and even at different levels, in terms of minutes played, points scored. I can see where that stems from.

It didn't shock me. I've been picked last just in general. Oftentimes I thrive on that. I'm motivated by that. There aren't a lot of reasons why I'm standing at this podium right now. It wasn't because I played at a blue blood. It wasn't because I had whoever the current czar of basketball is calling to get me a job. That's not how it happened.

I use that to motivate myself certainly. I will impart that on our guys to take it -- we'll take it personal. We'll have a chip on our shoulder. It doesn't mean we're going to win all 32 regular-season games because we have a chip on our shoulder. But where you are picked and where you finish are oftentimes two different things.

I hope to put a product out there that people are scratching



their heads and saying: How in the world did that work? I see who they have playing, and this guy didn't really play much at this school, and this guy has never played at this level, and that guy has never played that role at all. The former staff didn't think he could play much for them. This coach, we don't know that much about him. How is this happening?

I aspire to have people scratching their heads at some point on how we did what we did, but certainly that'll be a motivating factor for us.

Q. Dawn Staley in her first year was 10-18 and then now two National Championships at South Carolina. How much have you connected with Coach Staley and maybe even seeking advice from her as far as building a program at South Carolina?

LAMONT PARIS: You know, I've interacted with her a lot. She's an incredible person, first and foremost. I think our university is fortunate to have her as a human, as a part of our community, and then she's also good at coaching basketball, too, as it turns out.

Yeah, we've talked a lot about what her process was and how she got to where she got to.

It wasn't easy for her. It wasn't instantaneous for her, as you mentioned. I think if it was easy to get things done quickly, there would be more winning that took place in a lot of different places.

So it's a process. I think you have to have a plan, and then you have to be committed to the plan. I think you have to work that plan. You have to recruit towards that plan. You have to be committed towards that plan. I think I said that already. But I'll say it again: You have to have committed to that plan. That's how it works out.

I think it's high-character individuals. That's the first factor in anybody that I recruit. They have to be high character. I have to be able to coach them. I'm going to challenge them on a regular basis. And kids don't get challenged that much these days. And so they have to be high character.

But, yeah, I've talked to Dawn about what the process looks like. I did a rebuild at -- I've done a couple, actually, one as an assistant at the University of Akron on the heels of a coach that was let go. We did a rebuild there. And then at Chattanooga was the same -- was a very similar situation, starting from scratch and trying to build. I was really happy with where we got to when that thing was all said and done.

Yeah, I know the blueprint. I'm willing to roll my sleeves

up, and I'm committed to taking the time to do it the way I know how to do it. It's different than maybe what someone else would do. But I see it in the horizon, and I know there are a lot of steps to get there, and I'm committed to building it that way.

Q. You mentioned you had a lack of experience with your team; what have you done in the off-season to get them to gel, to get them ready for this first season?

LAMONT PARIS: You know, I don't think that that can be forced. Honestly, that's just my own personal opinion. We've put the guys in position just to -- we played a lot in the summer. I think that was one thing that just -- I think a lot of learning of each other happens during a basketball game-like situation. That was part of it. They all lived together. That was part of it.

We've got some really good leaders, also, one of which is here with us, Hayden Brown. He's our oldest guy. He's 24 years old. He's played in 1,000 basketball games or something like that at this point.

It's not surprising to me, they do some things on their own. I know they all went to watch "Halloween" the other night.

There's another "Halloween" out, by the way. Supposedly this is the last one. I'll believe that when I don't see it.

So they all went to watch "Halloween" together. They have meals at places. This is not something that I suggest, it's not something that I force upon them. I just think it's hard to -- I think it has to happen organically.

I think it happens when you have all these new faces, it happens because you have good leadership, and I do think we have that in our group.

Q. Who are some of the coaches you admire and you've learned from in the past?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I would say I probably have taken a little bit of everything from all the coaches that I've worked for. It was funny, we were talking on the way here even, last year at Chattanooga we won the regular season and the conference tournament, and we've done that at most places I've been. Most places I've been, we have done that in the same season, won the regular season championship and the conference championship.

I only mention that not to pat myself on the back, I happen to be along for the ride in those places, but I learned a lot. There was a lot that had to do with who your guys were and what they were about and how you got to winning and what the makeup of that looked like.

There were a lot of guys along the way. Bo Ryan would be one that everybody knows of, a Hall of Famer, and he'll be down to a couple games. Gary Edwards, who just retired from Francis Marion in the state of South Carolina, was a guy that I worked for and is a good friend and learned a lot from him. We did a lot of winning at IUP, same deal, won the regular season and conference tournament in the same season.

Keith Dambrot, who's at Duquesne, is a really good coach. We are stylistically different in a lot of ways, and the way we address our student-athletes is probably completely different. But there's something to the winning that we did at Akron and that he's done at Duquesne.

A lot of guys, Bill Fenlon -- just everyone that I worked for, Steve Moore, who I played for and worked for, who's another Hall of Fame-type coach.

I've been around a lot of winning. I've been around a lot of winning. I would say I've had the fortune to -- I'm a lifelong learner. I've taken a lot of things. My message and how I present the information is going to be completely different than all of those guys, but there's something in the sauce of that much winning that's taken place, and I've tried to identify what those things are and take those with me.

Q. What's the health of your team as you look towards the start of the season? Anybody dealing with anything that's going to slow them down? Number two, how deep do you think your bench will go? How many players do you feel like you can run in and out in a typical game?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, a couple good questions. One, we're nicked up; there's no doubt about that. I think probably everybody is dealing with something right now. But we've had a couple serious injuries. We had one season-ending injury to one of our players who was one of our most seasoned veterans. So that hurts us, without a doubt.

But then we have a couple other guys that are just -- have some bumps and bruises. They have missed a couple practices here and there, Hayden Brown being one of them. But we're looking forward to getting our full complement of guys back and healthy and ready to play.

But in terms of how deep we'll be, that's a good question. We'll see as we go. I like to play guys. I like to play a good number of guys. Even if some guys -- I like to play a consistent number of guys throughout the season. In fact, even if some of those guys only play six minutes -- I usually don't have a lot of guys where your average is

going to be nine minutes a game, right, and that looks like -- oftentimes it's four minutes, a couple times it's 23 minutes. I typically don't do that.

I've been more around developing guys in a way that, hey, you're only getting seven minutes, but you're getting those seven minutes every single game. That's what I like to do in order to help guys develop. I think they develop better under those circumstances knowing that they're going to get their shot.

We'll see how deep we are, who can pick up on some things, who contributes to winning. The more guys contribute to winning, there's value in some of the smallest things that you can possibly do. Blocking out; they've got a guy in this league that's a tremendous rebounder, the best ever possibly at Kentucky.

If we can get a guy out there that can just -- all you can do is be the greatest blocker-outer that ever blocked out, there's some real value in that.

We'll figure out what that looks like. I hope it's around -- if we can get nine guys that can consistently -- we have some good young guys that maybe in November won't contribute as much to winning, but I suspect in February they will.

We're going to throw guys out there even for small amounts of time consistently so that they can develop.

Q. A couple of big-picture college basketball things I wanted to ask you about. There's kind of a movement for summer basketball. I wonder how you feel about that. There's at least some buzz now about expanding the NCAA Tournament field and just your thoughts on that, as well.

LAMONT PARIS: You know, the summer basketball thing is intriguing. I'm really interested in that, to be honest with you. I think it's a time that we can put a spotlight on college basketball.

I also find myself searching for something on TV once the NBA Playoffs are over. I mean, I don't know what to watch, honestly. A little golf here and there, I guess.

But I think it's a good time. I think it could be really good. I think also for the guys -- it's so anticlimactic October 15th. It used to mean something. I see heads nodding in here. Remember that was a thing? That was a real day, October 15th. Now it's just a day.

The guys have been doing so many workouts and small group stuff and limited hours here and there. It's almost all

year-round. I think it's a good carrot for those guys to have something really to look forward to in the summer and playing some real competitive games and figuring out where you are and then attacking and addressing some things that you didn't do quite as well at that time.

I'm really -- I'm a proponent for it. I'm intrigued by it. It never really came across my desk until fairly recently, but I'm really interested in that.

The other one, I'm a traditionalist. Obviously change can be good, but I like the tournament where it is now. I do. I just do. I think there's a lot of ideas about certain things going on out there.

If it ain't broke, I'm kind of like that. Honestly, most times I think it's great TV. You don't even have to be a basketball fan to watch the NCAA Tournament.

The question is adding more teams, does it enhance that potentially somehow? It's already pretty good it seems like. Or does that do something that could disrupt the apple cart? I don't know. I don't know if it's worth the risk of that. Who are these teams that aren't getting in that are -- I think the drama of not making it, Selection show is what it is. I like it where it is right now.

I don't know how I really feel about that, but I do like it where it is now.

Q. You guys are participating in the inaugural Greenville Winter Invitational. Your thoughts on participating in an event like that and what it means for the state of South Carolina to host that.

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I think it's really good for the state. This state, it's got some real good tradition in basketball. I think it gets overlooked.

I think you look at it, the Ja Morants or the Zions of the world, and it's kind of like, oh, there's some good players in South Carolina, but there are a ton of good players in this state. I think it's really good. I think it's really good for the state.

There's really some really good basketball, if you look at all the teams in the state, also. Even the mid-major teams are really competitive, good teams.

I think it'll be a good event for the people in the state, trying to, again, tap into that basketball fever. I think it's in this state. Our fan base has been really good. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. I can't pretend to be a great scholar of Akron or

Chattanooga, but I've listened to you say you're going to rebuild how you know how to rebuild. How much different is it to rebuild with a five-star recruit, Mr. GG Jackson who's all everything? How does that change your plan?

LAMONT PARIS: Well, it doesn't hurt the rebuild process; I can say that with 100 percent certainty. There's a little bit of -- a couple differences in guys that are of that ability, particularly when it's that type of potential.

I've coached guys like Frank Kaminsky, who was the Player of the Year, best player in the country. But that wasn't potential, that is -- it's right there in your face. He's going to go out there tomorrow and make things happen in a way that's going to allow you to win basketball games. You can count on that. So it's a little bit different when it's even a higher level of potential than that.

So just trying to bring a guy like that along and challenge him and give him the freedom and the flexibility to go out there and fail. Yeah, not succeed; I think if you fail enough, if he fails enough and responds to that failure enough, successes will happen on a consistent basis. Giving him an environment to fail in and knowing that it's okay to fail because you tried something that you've been wondering if it actually -- if I can do that.

But that's a part of it. I think the other pieces are the biggest part of it when you're talking about long-term success. If it's short-term success, you put all these pieces together and it's like dice and you roll them and you see if it comes up the way you want, and if not you try it again the next year, versus having real pieces that you can count on, that have been in the system, that know terminology, that read -- so you get to a point where you're fine tuning things with those guys, even if they're not outwardly your most talented guy.

There's a lot of roles. No one role -- Tom Brady is pretty good, right? You know who his center was? Yeah, you don't, right? But I would guess that that guy has got a pretty important job.

You've got to have a lot of guys that make this whole thing go, and then you sprinkle in guys like that that will be -- that gives them the environment to go out there and, again, be creative and do what they do well.

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