

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TippOff Media Days

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Mississippi State Bulldogs

Sam Purcell

Press Conference

SAM PURCELL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate everyone joining us in Birmingham for the first in-person SEC media day in a few years. Not only is this my first SEC media day, but it's also my first media day as a head coach.

Let me start off by saying how grateful I am to John Cohen, our athletic director; Ann Carr, our senior women's administrator who traveled with me today; and everyone at Mississippi State for giving me an opportunity to coach one of the best programs in the country and to coach in one of the best leagues in the country.

As I enter year one of my head coaching year, I enter year 22 of coaching strong young women. My journey to Mississippi State started in 2000 in the SEC at Auburn under the guidance of Hall of Famer and now my father-in-law, Joe Champy.

I've been fortunate in my career to have learned from some of the best basketball minds in the game in Nell Fortner, Charlene Thomas-Swinson, MaChelle Joseph, and most recently, the last nine years, under future Hall of Famer Jeff Walz at Louisville.

Having studied numerous elite coaches throughout my career, I understand the energy and work ethic it takes to develop a program into a consistent winner that competes at the highest level.

My approach early on at Mississippi State will be the blending of our returners and our transfer players so that we can come together with one focus and one belief and play team defense and getting after it and playing fast on the offensive end.

Coaching in the best conference in America provides an exciting challenge each and every night, and it's our job as coaches to develop our players both physically and



mentally and give them the tools to compete at a high level on the court.

The staff that I have with me at Mississippi State is outstanding. Murriel Page, Gabe Lazo, and Corry Irvin are all outstanding basketball coaches, and I'm excited with each skill set that they will bring to our team to make us better.

With that said, Hail State, and I'll open it up to any questions.

Q. Which is more challenging, being a part of the Auburn staff under Joe Champy or being his son-in-law?

SAM PURCELL: Definitely his son-in-law, no doubt. Yeah, just blessed. I tell people all the time, I have unique Christmases like no other, as you can imagine when I go home with my wife. Some people watch football and eat a lot of food, and we always talk basketball.

I'm forever grateful for that relationship and what he's done in my life, obviously giving me his blessings to marry my wife but the constant input he provides for me in my coaching career.

Q. You lost some folks to the transfer portal. What can you say about that, not only for the program but also how to overcome and rebuild from that?

SAM PURCELL: Well, for me, it's not really overcoming. It's an excitement like no other. Me being a first-time coach and being new, the beauty of the NCAA rules enable me to get in the transfer portal.

So for me it's not about what we lost but what we brought in. I'm very fortunate in my first year to inherit some young ladies that are very special that attended Mississippi State last year, and then able, like I said, to get in the transfer portal and get on the phone and say, hey, we've got a couple spots that we would love to fill, and people jumped on board.

I'm really excited about this year.

Q. You've talked a lot about the transfer players



coming in. Obviously that's going to be a big addition to your roster. What have you seen from the freshmen coming in, Aniya and Debreasha, and do you see a path for them having a meaningful impact this season?

SAM PURCELL: Oh, yeah. Debreasha Powe, I cannot say enough good things about her. First and foremost, I'll never forget when I got the job, it was eight months ago. My first home visit was to make sure I did not lose that young lady. What a special young lady she is.

I can't say enough about things. First and foremost, she values the classroom. She's a winner because what she does off the court and the way she lives her life.

Our team and the short period that we've started official practices we've seen immediate impact, and I'm expecting a huge year for her her freshman year.

Q. Your returning players have experienced a lot of coaching turnover and teammate turnover in the last few months. With your newcomers coming in, what have you done in the off-season to help blend this roster?

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, great question. I tell everybody, I did nothing with basketball. I think the success to any team is making first and foremost to understand we're people and that we got to know each other.

We did a lot of great team bonding, just sitting down and fellowshiping, eating food and building that strength with one another that, you know, hey, I can look to my left, I can look to my right, I know who I'm going to battle with night in and night out, and that momentum that we've really spent a lot of time in this summer has carried over, so now it's no longer new or old, it's one.

We've got a good thing going right now.

Q. Can you just talk about any surprises that you may have had joining this team but also just coming into a head coaching role in general?

SAM PURCELL: Only surprise I would say right now is living in Starkville and the food. I told our fan base, I appreciate the Southern hospitality. It's like no other. If you haven't been to Starkville, I highly recommend it.

The fellowship has been awesome.

But no surprises for me. I have to give a lot of credit to my old boss in Jeff Walz and his management style. There's a reason he's a future Hall of Famer. It's because of the way he trains his staff, that he puts us in situations and puts a

lot on our plate, so when given the opportunity that we're ready to go.

It's been an easy transition for me, and I'm forever grateful for that opportunity the last nine years at Louisville.

Q. What's it like coaching a team with three sisters on the team?

SAM PURCELL: It's unique, no doubt. I was fortunate in Louisville to have two sisters, so this is not my first experience with sisters. But what I told them is we're going to embrace first and foremost that you are sisters, but when we step on the court, I expect you to be teammates.

They have done a phenomenal job of that, but it's been awesome just to see that dynamic, because ultimately as a basketball team, I want us all to be family. But to actually have three sisters that are truly family, it's been fun to coach.

Q. Coming into your first year at Mississippi State, how is it having a player like Anastasia Hayes beneficial for you?

SAM PURCELL: It's everything. It makes me a lot better coach, I know that. First and foremost, her speed, what a special young lady. The good Lord has definitely blessed her with a skill set and a speed that it's tough to guard.

She reminds me a lot of Dana Evans who I coached at Louisville, who -- I call it bye-bye. We had a scrimmage the other day and she was in the backcourt at the free-throw line, and I think she took four dribbles and passed three kids and laid it up. I said, ooh baby, this is going to be a fun year to coach her. It's truly a blessing. I'm excited for her last year.

Q. Obviously things are going a little bit back to normal now post-COVID, but the Hump is undergoing some construction. What are you expecting from capacity and the crowd and the atmosphere for Mississippi State games?

SAM PURCELL: I don't think it'll change a thing. That's why first and foremost I took this job. Women's basketball matters in Starkville. The energy that I've felt, we actually did a meet and greet in July and had 300 people show up to talk about women's basketball. It was awesome. It was motivating for me. It was motivating for our players.

Any little construction that is occurring, I know our fan base, it's not going to hold them back. If we can open a door, they'll find a way to find a seat, and it's our job as coaches and the players, we're working hard to make sure

that we put a product on the floor that they're proud to
come back and watch night in and night out.

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