

Louisiana State University Basketball Media Conference

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

President William Tate Scott Woodward Coach Matt McMahon

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here. We'll have President Tate start us out today, then athletic director Scott Woodward will be up and he'll introduce our new coach. We'll have a photo opportunity before Coach makes his opening remarks.

When we go to questions, please give your name and affiliation. Let's try to keep it as concise as possible so that we can get to as many people as possible in the time we have.

Would you please welcome LSU president William Tate.

(Applause.)

WILLIAM TATE: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here. It's a great day for LSU basketball, LSU athletics and for the entire LSU community. One of the important tasks in leadership, whether you're university president, athletic director or head basketball coach, is finding what I call transformative talent.

Transformative talent is hard to find, and once you find it, it's even harder to land.

That's because people who possess exceptional qualities and characteristics, no matter what their roles and responsibilities are, can ignite change in entire institutions. In a word, they're impactful.

After going through the process with Scott and after getting to spend tomorrow time with our coach, I have no doubts that we have a transformative talent in our new men's basketball coach. If you don't believe me, just listen to the words of his former boss.

The Murray State athletic director put out a statement on Monday after announcing that Coach McMahon was being hired by LSU. In that statement he talked about Coach's



tireless work ethic, genuine care for people and authentic leadership. He talked about his comprehensive commitment to excellence and the tremendous joy and pride he finds fostered for Murray State fans.

He finished by saying that the McMahon family will forever be cherished members of the Racer family and wished them the same unprecedented success on that journey ahead.

In a word, his former boss described him as impactful, transformative.

With more than 154 career victories, more lottery picks that he's developed -- I just want to stop right there. I've got to tell you, Coach, I watched you and what you did with that lottery pick, and I'm going to say this off the record: We had a chance to get that guy in South Carolina. You identified him. You understand transformative folk.

We understand here that Coach McMahon is not only the man for this job, he's the man to impact our institution and our basketball program in positive ways and make a difference for the entire state of Louisiana.

I want to welcome Coach McMahon, Mary and your entire family to LSU, and I want to say one other thing to you, Coach: You know I'm from Chicago. The last McMahon I rooted for got me a Super Bowl. My expectations are very high for the McMahon family, and I look forward to helping you and supporting you in any way I can. I want to turn it now to Scott Woodward.

SCOTT WOODWARD: Again, welcome, and good afternoon to everyone. I'm excited to introduce our new men's basketball head coach, Matt McMahon, but before I do that, I do want to thank a few people who have been important throughout this entire process.

First, I want to thank President Tate for his leadership and his vision for this entire university. It's unprecedented, and to steal his line and to be redundant, it is transformative, and what I've seen in his brief seven months here have been phenomenal, and I've been very lucky to be at some very special places, and President Tate is as good as there is, and we're lucky to have him here and I'm lucky to call him a partner and a friend.



I also want to thank our chairman of the board of supervisors Remy Starns and the entire board for their unwavering support of LSU athletics and student-athletes. On my staff I want to acknowledge Stephanie Rempe and Verge Ausberry who were instrumental in our ability to go hire the best young coach in the country.

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Kevin Nickelberry for the leadership he displayed during a difficult time as our interim head coach.

When we began this search, we were very intentional and specific about the characteristics and qualities we wanted in our next head basketball coach. We wanted a program builder, someone who developed not just elite basketball players but elite student-athletes.

We wanted a winner, someone who had sustained success over multiple seasons in a competitive conference.

Most importantly, we wanted a leader, a man of character who shared our vision and our values as an institution.

From the start, we were committed to those criteria. We promised to take as long as necessary to find the right man for the job.

Fortunately for us, it didn't take long.

When you find a coach like Matt McMahon, you don't hesitate.

In seven years as head coach, Matt has established a winning standard of performance based on values and standards. In his last five seasons he's won four conference championships, three conference tournaments and two NCAA Tournament games.

He's recruited hidden gems as President Tate mentioned and he's developed them into lottery picks.

He's climbed ladders and he's cut down nets. He's won championships and he's transformed lives. That is what Matt McMahon has done for his entire career, and that is what he is here to do at LSU.

Without any further ado, allow me to introduce the 25th head coach of the LSU men's basketball program, Matt McMahon.

MATT McMAHON: Good afternoon. This is truly an incredibly special and historic day for me and my family. This is an unbelievable honor, to have the privilege to stand here today as the head basketball coach at LSU.

I'd like to -- I have a long list of thank yous. We'd be here for hours if I named everybody. But I'd love to start with President Tate. Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for your kind words, and I look forward to seeing you on the court.

To Remy Starns, Collis Temple and the LSU board of supervisors, thank you for this opportunity. Scott Woodward and Stephanie Rempe have been tremendous through this process.

And thanks to my family, my wife Mary is here, she's the best player in the family, had a great career at Furman. Our oldest daughter Maris, our son Mason and our youngest daughter Mabry, and they are all in. They will love being a part of the LSU community and can't wait to get started.

What I loved about this opportunity was the chance to win at the highest level, to compete for championships, to be a part of a passionate fan base, to be a part of this Baton Rouge community and to be out front in the entire state of Louisiana.

For me as we get started, I can't wait to build relationships with our players. Always have believed that you win in life with people. We're going to have high-character people in our organization.

We always start with the culture, and culture is the most overused word in sports. People just throw it around and have no idea what it means. Our culture will be clearly defined. We will lead through simplicity, clarity and intentionality in everything we do.

I look forward to establishing that from day one.

I think that culture precedes positive results. The culture precedes championships. It all begins with culture, and we'll fight for that every day.

There's a quote, Eric Thomas, a great speaker, he said, you have to take advantage of the opportunity of a lifetime within the lifetime of the opportunity, and I certainly plan to do that here at LSU.

We'll get to work right away. We believe in outworking the competition. Those core values for us: Hard work, unselfishness, toughness, accountability and joy. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. I'm going to have the time of my life having the privilege to lead the Tiger basketball program.

I can't wait to build relationships with our players, to recruit elite coaches here to be a part of our staff, and my family



and I cannot wait to be a part of this campus and Baton Rouge community.

With that said, I'm ready to get to work. There's a lot to be done, and I'm in it for the long haul. We're going to get to work right away in building a championship program in everything that we do on and off the basketball court and in this great community here in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I'd love to take any questions and get rolling.

Q. A lot of people thought this might be a tough job to sell to somebody because of possible sanctions and whatnot. How big of a hurdle was that for you, and how much did you have to think about it? And maybe part two, how tough could it be to get transfer portal people in here because of the possible sanctions?

MATT McMAHON: This is LSU, one of the great brands in all of sports. This is the SEC. We've built a program with elite players, and we're going to continue to do that here at LSU.

I'm excited to move the program forward, and we're going to build it with great players, great people, and everyone in our organization.

No concerns there at all. I'm excited about this opportunity of a lifetime, and we're ready to roll.

Q. Your staff, I know it's been a whirlwind for you the past few days. Will your staff be a mixture of current staff members and maybe some LSU staff members, or have you just been besieged with texts and emails from people trying to get in?

MATT McMAHON: Oh, we definitely have been besieged with texts and emails. Everybody wants to come to LSU. As I said, it's one of the great places in all of college sports. I'm going to put together the best staff, not necessarily because of the name on where the front of their jersey was, I'm going to get transformative people on my staff who are going to impact our young people.

Every coach comes to these press conferences and says we're going to win National Championships, we're going to win. Everyone wants to win. It's about the processes of how you go about doing that on a daily basis.

So I'm going to have great people in our organization who are going to invest in our players and help them maximize their opportunities here at LSU to get a world-class education, to play in the best league in America, and to compete at the very highest level.

We've developed pros in the NBA, the G-League, the Euroleague for many years, and we're going to recruit the very best here at LSU.

Back to the staff, it'll be a mixture of everything.

Q. I guess have you had a chance to talk with any of the players on the current roster and what are some of the boxes you want to get ticked here in the first several weeks of your tenure here?

MATT McMAHON: That's the most important thing here. We've hit the ground running. We've hit the ground running. Going to invest a lot of time with our players. I want people who want to be here. I want people who want to be a part of something special because that's what we're going to build here. We're going to do things the right way, and we're going to make sure we're developing young men, not only on the court -- I know everyone wants to play in the NBA. But the average career is three and a half years, so it's going to be an all-encompassing program.

My favorite part of the job is seeing players not only become the best player they can be but the best man they can be. It's my responsibility to grow leaders here at LSU. That's what we're going to work to do.

The results, the winning, all that'll take care of itself because of the daily processes we'll maintain.

Q. You talked about the culture, but what is something that you hang your hat on in your coaching tenure? What is something that you like your teams to represent when they're out on the court?

MATT McMAHON: Joy. Joy. I mean, most every kid who gets here, every young man who gets here has worked their entire life to have the opportunity to play at LSU, to put on that jersey, to play in Pete Maravich's house, to walk past Shaq's statue going into the arena. I believe I was 12 years old and I saw Chris Jackson play in Knoxville, scored I believe it was 49. This is an unbelievable place. Why wouldn't you enjoy it?

Yeah, we're going to work, but you have to have that balance. We're going to have high-energy people. I want players who want to be the best they can be. I want players who are going to be all about winning. We're going to have a lot of fun along the way in doing so, and I think that starts with building relationships, not only with the players but their families. Really enjoy that part of the job. Some of the best people I've met in my entire life have been my players' families, and so I'm excited to get started on that right away.

Q. I saw you took your team to Auburn this year, played a competitive game there. I'm sure you'll talk about basketball is basketball, but what are the challenges of the league, the Southeastern Conference and how much they've improved in recent years?

MATT McMAHON: Well, I think you look at the elite coaches in the league, historic programs in the league, and you've had some people who have gone into places like Auburn and have generated a lot of excitement. That's what I'm fired up to be here for. We have a passionate fan base. We're the state school. People of Louisiana take great pride in LSU. So I'm excited to get out in the community, get out across the state and continue to build upon that passionate fan base.

Q. It sounded like you said the specter of sanctions didn't concern you at all, but does that mean that -- a lot of coaches are concerned about their legacy, their career, win-loss record and so forth, and it can be a hamstringing thing in the early years. Did you think about the plan to deal with that or is that something you'll think about when you need to?

MATT McMAHON: I couldn't tell you anything about my career record. That's not why I coach. I'm thankful it's led me to this unbelievable place here today, but I coach to make an impact on people, to have the opportunity to be in great communities, to be of service to young people. That's what I'm going to continue to do, and we'll do a lot of winning along the way.

Q. You've talked about obviously recruiting guys to come here to the program, but how important is it to kind of re-recruit some of the guys that are already here and make sure that that talent that they have here stays?

MATT McMAHON: Oh, it's top priority. Hit the ground running from the second I got the job, so I think that's very important. It's all about getting the right people in the bus, and we're going to work to establish those relationships. I don't expect someone to walk in and shake my hand in 30 seconds and have trust established, but we're going to work to do that.

I'm going to lay out a vision for how we're going to run our program and how it's going to benefit these young men on and off the basketball court. I have great confidence in that.

I want people who want to be here. I don't know why you wouldn't want to be here. That's how we're going to build it.

I think that's a critical piece. Roster management, who you hire on your coaching staff are my two biggest priorities, with number three being, and I've already gotten to do a lot of this, meeting great people here, meeting great people who really care about LSU and want to see LSU be successful. I want to be a part of that.

Q. I know you've been busy. I don't know if you've had a chance to see the comments with D.J. Burns in the paper. He was happy for you. How gratified are you to have your players at Murray State saying that they were happy for you with this opportunity?

MATT McMAHON: I didn't get to see the article. It was a privilege to coach D.J. I was going to save my thank yous there to Murray State for later, so I don't break down because we had some special, special people there. I spent 11 years there, and that became home for me and my family.

The players we recruited and coached there are family forever for me. Those are guys that will be a part of my life for the remainder of my life, and their families the exact same way.

It means a lot. I haven't had a chance to scan the social media, but I've had multiple people tell me that former players, staff members, members of the Murray community, the Murray State campus have been very kind in their words, and that means the world to me because that's why I do this is hopefully to have a positive impact on people.

I'll check out the article. He's a character, too, so I'll be interested to see what he had to say.

Q. I saw you walking into the PMAC on Monday. What was your first impression of the fans here?

MATT McMAHON: It was loud. It was loud. The student section looked awesome. Fans were incredibly generous to me, coming up, taking pictures and all that. So we're excited. The PMAC, LSU, the SEC, I'm very honored and grateful to be here.

Q. I was curious, do you have a certain philosophy or style you think is conducive to winning basketball games?

MATT McMAHON: Yes, very detailed. I'll give you the overview. I believe in balance. We were one of three teams in the country this year that ranked top 20 in offensive and defensive efficiency. I think you have to play both ends of the floor.

But style of play is incredibly important.

We're going to play an up-tempo style, but we're going to be efficient with it offensively. We're going to be aggressive and physical and tough on the defensive end of the floor, and we're going to play a style that enables elite players to come here and develop into NBA players.

I always laugh, sometimes people say they want to be a pro and then they'll go to a school where they walk the ball up the court and try to win games 48-46. That's not very conducive to the NBA.

So we have an aligned player development system that we operate with on a daily basis to help players max out individually on and off the court and prepare themselves not only to get those NBA and professional opportunities but to go there and be very successful, and I think you've seen that with guys like Ja Morant, Cameron Payne, and I could continue on down the line.

Q. I imagine the transfer portal will be key in many ways in Baton Rouge going forward. What has been your experience with the portal? How do you like to attack it, use it, et cetera?

MATT McMAHON: Yeah, I think whether you like it or not, the transfer portal is here to stay, so you'd better embrace it and use it to the best of your ability, and that's what we've done.

For example, this year at Murray State our top six players, three were foundational pieces who had been a part of our program for a long time, the other three were first-year transfers into the program.

My favorite part of the job besides seeing players max out individually and become the best men they can be is building a team. "Team" is once again a very overused word in sports; oftentimes it's just a collection of individuals. A true team is a collection of people who are united together, connected as one and pursuing the same dreams and goals. I enjoy that part of it. I think it takes a lot of time and investment, but I'll have an unbelievable staff here to help me get that done, and we're going to enjoy it.

That's the one thing I would say to recruits: If you want to play at the highest level, you want to have your skills developed to the absolute fullest so you have professional opportunities, you want to win and you want to be around great people who are going to invest in you, you won't find a better place in America.

Q. I was going to ask you earlier who was the better

player, you or Mary, but you cleared that up earlier. In college were you more of a defensive player? And also, when you go to recruit now, guards especially, how much does a Ja Morant kind of help you a little bit? Obviously I know you're a good recruiter, but how much do players' eyes get a little wider or something like that because I know you had two good ones this year.

MATT McMAHON: Thank you. Number one, I was a very average player, but I wanted to win, and I wanted to do whatever I could do to help the team win, and so it was very fortunate to get to play in the NCAA Tournament as a small piece of that team.

But I do think in today's world, Ja Morant is one of the five best players in the world. He's the most electrifying and entertaining player in the world. I think that only helps from a program identity standpoint and a brand.

We got labeled at Murray State, Point Guard University, for all the elite point guards that we've had come through there over the years, but this past year our shooting guard Tevin Brown was the all-time leading three-point shooter in the history of the league. He went over 1,900 points, 400 assists. He's top 10 in every category that matters at Murray State.

Our 6'10", 240-pound big man K.J. Williams was the Player of the Year in the league. Came to us from Cleveland, Mississippi, worked like crazy. We invested a lot of time to grow and develop his skills, and now he's poised to make a great living playing this game for a lot of years.

It's not just about the point guard play. We believe in balance. We believe in balance at every position.

Q. Do you remember when you first heard the name Ja Morant and how you got to recruit him and sign him? It's amazing that he was so unknown early on.

MATT McMAHON: Well, he was young. Ja was a young senior. But sometimes people forget he played on an AAU team with Nic Claxton who was a first-round NBA Draft pick, so it wasn't like he wasn't seen.

I think when I saw him first, you saw right away obviously the physical tools, but then when you get to know people and you can then judge the heart, the toughness, the competitiveness, will to win, his ability to impact and make the people around him better, you've got to be thorough there.

Anybody can walk in the gym and see who can dunk and who can shoot. That's how a lot of those stars get



assigned in the recruiting rankings. But you have to have a very thorough and detailed evaluation process for what you're looking for in your program to find special people like that. We'll look to continue and do that here at LSU.

Q. Given that there is going to be some time before there's resolution to the case, are you approaching your first season in anticipation that there will be some restrictions, and if so, how will that affect your preparation?

MATT McMAHON: I haven't even looked that far down the road. We're just here to get to work, build relationships with our players. We get back in the gym starting on Monday, and we're going to start establishing the culture of what LSU basketball is going to be moving forward.

I don't ever going into a season with goals of, hey, we're going to win this many games or that many games. We're going to work, we're going to do things the right way, we're going to build the program the way I want to build it, and that's how it's going to go.

I think that'll lead to a lot of winning. We're going to invest in our community. We're going to invest in the state of Louisiana, and LSU basketball is going to be one of the great brands in all of college basketball.

Q. The other night you said you were familiar with Collis from the AAU circuits. How familiar are you with Louisiana basketball and kind of the state in general?

MATT McMAHON: Well, obviously very aware of the success Louisiana players had on the LSU Final Four team. It's an area we've always recruited.

I got lucky when my college career ended; the third assistant spot in college basketball made \$12,000, and they couldn't recruit. Not many people took those jobs so I got to get right into it at age 22 as an assistant coach. So for the last 22 years we've recruited the South extremely hard. Great relationships, and that's what it's all about.

I'm excited to get into the state of Louisiana, meet all the high school coaches, spend time with the AAU coaches, those that we already have relationships established with, and certainly meet new people, as well.

But this is the state school, so we're going to be everywhere in Louisiana in the recruiting.

Geaux Tigers!

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