

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Missouri Tigers

Coach Kellie Harper

Women's Media Day Press Conference



Missouri Kellie Harper

KELLIE HARPER: Thank you. Just like everyone else getting up here, we're excited about the upcoming season. I have thoroughly loved coaching our team in this fall period. I think we have a really good blend of returners and newcomers, both freshmen and transfers, that have made a huge difference in our competitiveness on the court and in our practices.

Our staff's doing a great job. I think there's a lot of optimism in our program. We're just continuing to try to elevate the program and the team and hopefully get ourselves back in the NCAA tournament.

Q. Do you have a different style now that this is your second year where you can acquire players? How would you describe the style offense and defense?

KELLIE HARPER: Stylistically we recruited to our style, where we want to be. We were extremely intentional with building this roster. If you look at our roster makeup, we have five freshmen, three sophomores. We're very young. But offensively I think we'll look similar in what we're trying to do, which is share the ball, high assists. We want to play fast. We want to take advantage of our ability to shoot the three but also get paint touches, whether that is passing or putting the ball on the floor.

I think the biggest difference you will see with our team will be on the defensive end. A lot of that has to do with the competitive nature of our new players. We wanted to acquire more athleticism in particular on the perimeter. I think you'll see that. We want to be a better rebounding team than we were last year.

Hopefully stylistically we're moving in the direction that we want to be as a program.

Q. Retaining Grace, who has been within the program for a few years now, how big has that been for you? How much have you been leaning on her?

KELLIE HARPER: Grace is a true Tiger. Let me say that. She loves Mizzou. Loves all the traditions that come with our university.

She's been great to coach. One of the exciting things as her coach to watch has been her comfort level and where she's at now as opposed to this team last year. You can only get that by experience.

One of the biggest challenges that we have given her is to have a bigger voice on the team. She's extremely respected as an athlete. She works so hard. She has great habits. But she was quiet.

I love that she has taken on this new vocal leadership role. Her teammates love it. I think they're benefiting right now from Grace's leadership.

Q. After playing and coaching for Tennessee, what is it like going into that game coaching against them now?

KELLIE HARPER: Anytime that I've played my alma mater, whether it was at Missouri or other institutions, there's always an emotional attachment to it because it's where you went to school, where you loved.

I think things -- when I played there as a coach against Pat Summitt, things probably a little bit even more emotional. I'm a pretty calm, collected coach. I don't get too high or too low during a game. I can kind of take that all out when it's time to play the game.

Q. The connection between Sydney and Natalya, what you've seen with those two this off-season.

KELLIE HARPER: So we have two players from Knoxville, Tennessee. I think they knew each other during the recruiting process. So for Natalya Hodge to have someone on campus that she knew I think was really good for her

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recruitment. I think there was a connection there.

But they're both extremely personable young women. They have found some friends within our team, outside our team already. They've been great.

I do know that they have connected a couple times getting back and forth. Travel buddies. I think for them it's really cool.

Q. As someone who watched Khloe Ford win all those state championships at Hoover High School, how is she fitting in so far?

KELLIE HARPER: You'll be happy to know she is fitting very well. We are very happy that Khloe is on our team. She's going to have an opportunity this year to have a very big impact on our team.

Coming from Hoover, winning those state championships, playing for Crystal, she is very prepared. Every freshman comes in at a different level in terms of their preparation and their experience. She's going to have as good of a head start as any freshman that we've coached. She's ready.

Super talented. Exactly what we need.

Q. How do you think you're a different coach now than you were when you first started in the game?

KELLIE HARPER: Oh, my goodness (smiling).

When Tiffany introduced me, she said this is my 22nd year. I'm over there counting. That can't be right (smiling).

I remember when Pat Summitt had that question, people would ask her about how long. She said, and I'm going to just borrow the line from her, she started when she was 12. So did I, I also started when I was 12 (smiling).

It does seem like an eternity, a lifetime ago, that I started coaching. Back when I started, I was 26 years old. I had no idea what I didn't know. I learned a lot on the fly. I learned how to be a coach from some of my first players that are still probably going to text me after this press conference because they know I'm talking about 'em.

They influenced my coaching career as much as anyone.

But the game has changed. I think the way we coach has changed. I don't think you have to change your philosophy and your beliefs, but man, you better figure out how to coach this generation. I think that changes. There's always new techniques and new strategies on the court

that we learn as coaches.

One thing that hasn't changed, we want to do it the right way. We want to run a program we know is respected, that we know we can be proud of.

Q. Not that it's ever easy, but the second time around, the second year as a new job, how much smoother is it, and how much did you learn? Was the first year a learning experience?

KELLIE HARPER: This is my fifth program to take over. I really do believe it takes a full calendar year to understand all the workings at a university -- your off-season, pre-season, summer, your season, tournament play, how things are done.

The word that I would like to use is 'comfort'. There is just a better comfort now because we know what to expect, we know what it's going to look like. I'll use it also for our players, in particular Grace. I think she has a comfort level about her now that's going to allow her to even expand her game more.

Yeah, you're right, it's not easier, but you understand what's ahead maybe a little bit better.

Q. You're in the western edge of the SEC. What do you stress in recruiting for your school compared to what other schools in this conference do?

KELLIE HARPER: I think just like everyone else in our league, we're going to recruit to the SEC. You have an opportunity to play at an SEC school. I think because of where we are located, for some of our region, we are the closest SEC school to some of those recruiting areas.

It's a great opportunity to play in the best league, be relatively close to home. I do think we can, because of our brand, because of who we are, because of the league, recruit nationally to a certain extent. We try to really hit home that regional coverage in our recruiting.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks very much.

KELLIE HARPER: Thank you, guys. Have a great day.

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