

SPORTS

# McPhee-McCuin, Rebels in spotlight at Media Day



OPEN SEASON – Head Coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin, centre, and the Ole Miss Rebels Women's Basketball Team.

## Ole Miss opens season with Home Exhibition vs. LeMoyne-Owen on Nov. 2

**2018-19 QUICK FACTS**  
**OXFORD, Miss.** – Ole Miss women's basketball head coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin and Rebel seniors La'Karis Salter and Shandricka Sessom met with the media on Monday afternoon to discuss the upcoming 2018-19 season.

**HEAD COACH YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN**  
**OPENING STATEMENT...**  
"I just wanted to thank everybody for coming out and supporting us today. This has been an eventful ride so far, getting out into the community, meeting people, friends that we have made in a short amount of time. It has been an honor to represent the University and utilize the resources we have to hunt for the next talent for our program and setting our tone for the future."

**ON HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING WITH RECRUITS...**  
"Absolutely. That isn't just coming from me, but also my colleagues in the conference. They just couldn't believe that we were able to fill a roster in basically six weeks. That is tough to do for anybody. But we think that we did a great job and were strategic. We didn't go with a lot of freshmen and the freshmen that we went with I had a relationship with, so we knew what they will bring to the table. And it is going to really free us up to recruit heavily for the '19 and '20 class."

**ON IF THIS WAS HER MOST DIFFICULT RECRUITING TASK AS A COACH...**  
"Absolutely. I am thankful for my opportunity and experience at Jacksonville and recruiting at other Power-5 conferences in the past, there is just no way that I would have made it. The relationships that I was able to form really helped. People stepped up, and we were able to get it done."

**ON EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS TEAM...**  
"I just want us to play our game and give 100 percent, 100 percent of the time. I think that basketball minds will be able to see the direction we are going if the product is strong. Regardless, we have to get another level of talent in here in order to really be competitive in the SEC, which I think is the number one conference in the country. But one thing that you will see when our players play is that they are going to play hard, be excited to be out there, and you will see a great comradery amongst them."

**ON THE MESHING OF THE RETURNERS AND NEWCOMERS...**  
"It has been great, surprisingly, to be honest with you. You have 14 or 15 different personalities. We recruited all the way until September. It has been new people on the roster left and right and they have done a good job. They have bought in, everyone is on board, everyone has been super positive, and that is what you ask for as a coach, regardless of whether you have been here a long time or not. They have really embraced me and bought into the vision already."

**ON THE MESSAGE TO THE RETURNERS AND NEWCOMERS...**  
"The message to the returners basically was: Listen, you guys are my players now. I'm not going to leave you hanging. You aren't going to be a part of the old regime. You are a part of the new era and where we are going. And that is what I asked everyone when I first met with the team. Unfortunately, a lot of the players were on their way out and there was not much that I could do. I didn't have any animosity towards them and there wasn't any friction. They were all very pleasant and I thought that they were great kids. But the ones that stayed, I told them to give me a chance and I am go-

ing to work my butt off for you so that you can have a great experience. I told the seniors that I really wanted them to go out feeling good and proud of themselves. And for the kids coming in, they understand the pressure but at the same time they understand the opportunity."

**ON HAVING SHANDRICKA BACK FROM INJURY...**  
"Talk about a blessing in disguise. You don't want anybody to get injured but it really worked out for me. She has been phenomenal. She has been my number one advocate in the locker room as far as the returners are concerned. She totally bought in from Day One. She is not fully on the court yet, but she will be back and we expect great things from Shandricka."

**ON EXPECTATIONS FOR LA'KARIS SALTER...**  
"Showtime. They call her Big Ticket for a reason. She is just super talented. She can do multiple things, from shooting the three, to posting up, handling the ball in transition. She has also helped with the transition, which was key when I found out that she was leaving Jacksonville. Here is someone that understands me, knows what I am about, and has been great for the locker room as well. She is super talented. Her footwork is almost like (Hakeem) Olajuwon. She understands her mismatches and understands your deficiencies. If you're taller, she is going to pull you out and expose you that way. And if you are undersized, she definitely uses her size as power. She is no stranger to the SEC, last year she played Alabama, and she was four for five from the three-point line. And she is really committing this year, more than ever, to getting into top shape."

**ON POTENTIAL IMPACT NEWCOMERS...**  
"Crystal Allen is an ultimate  
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## 'COACH YO' attains milestone for The Bahamas' sports brand

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There she sat, showcased at the media sector of the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) Pavilion in Oxford, Mississippi, USA, the centerpiece of a historic press conference.



### Sports Scope

by Fred Sturrup

Yolett McPhee-McCuin, known fondly and respectfully as 'Coach Yo', was calm, collected, confident and aware of the special moment in time and every bit suited for the occasion. The scene was far removed from a day, September 1, in 1962 when a young black man, James Meredith, had to be escorted to his classroom during a highly volatile and controversial enrollment process. He was the first black student at the university. Mississippi was a much different place. A racial segregation culture was very much a part of the make-up of the United States. Blacks, largely, were considered inferior to whites and were treated accordingly. It was unthinkable for many Americans

that a black student could sit in the same classroom with their white children. Racial prejudice, especially based on incidents that continue to unfold, has not been done away with in the United States, but the country certainly is different from what it was in 1962.

Fast-forward 52 years and seven months, and a black on-the-rise collegiate coach, is hailed as the person expected to take the Ole Miss women's basketball program to a position of respectability. Also, that individual of history, is from The Bahamas. 'Coach Yo' is from Freeport, Grand Bahama. She is the daughter of parents with strong education/youth mentoring backgrounds. Reference is to former noted educator Daisy McPhee and iconic Coach Gladstone "Moon" McPhee.

So while the Ole Miss program bringing in a new coach was the main storyline, the Bahamian connection was significant. 'Coach Yo' has the position of The Bahamas' Women's National Basketball Coach on her resume and being elevated to head coach status at one of the fabled institutions in the United States, is a special dimension for The Bahamas' sports brand.

Bahamians who watch the conference has to feel proud that one of their very own will be holding court on a sports platform being presented to world viewers. In introducing 'Coach Yo', Ole Miss Director of Athletics Ross Bjork was unrestrained as he expressed delight and satisfaction on behalf of the institution that was able to entice 'Coach Yo' away from Jacksonville University.

"She has passion. We wanted someone who could grasp the potential. We have the resources and wanted someone who



YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN

could come in and capitalize on the resources. We have history. We have to rejuvenate women's basketball and 'Coach Yo' is the one to be here," said Bjork.

For her part, 'Coach Yo' was fundamental but left room for operating on occasions, out of the box. She was firm on her interest in assessing the completed roster following the recruitment phase, but promised "hard work" always.

"My story is one of consistently outworking my opponents and trying to outwork myself. I will give you everything I have and no coach in the country will outwork me. I truly believe this is a great chance and I hope you can join me for the ride. We will have a fun style of play. When you see us on the floor, it will be hard and gritty and blue-colored like but we will have a lot of fun. I intend to bring in the staff who understand my vision to work tirelessly," said 'Coach Yo'.

As pointed out in this space previously, there is the huge challenge facing 'Coach Yo' of transforming a 1-15 Southeastern Conference (SEC), and 12-19 total won-loss record team, into one that competes every time out, efficiently.

"Being better tomorrow than we were before" is the motto of 'Coach Yo' and an appropriate one to take the Ole Miss women's basketball program from the bottom of the SEC to national prominence.

All along, the underlying factor will be an enhancement of The Bahamas' sports brand. Go 'Coach Yo'!  
• To respond to this column, interested persons are asked to kindly contact Fred Sturrup at e-mail address, [sturrup1504@gmail.com](mailto:sturrup1504@gmail.com), or on WhatsApp at (242) 727-6363.