

# Minority Coaches Association of Georgia has big plans for future clinics

Association expects to bring in head coaches from Power 5 conferences outside Southeast

BY RYAN BLACK

rblack@ledger-enquirer.com February 28, 2015



Alabama coach Nick Saban signs an autograph before speaking at a football coaches conference at CSU put on by the Minority Coaches Association of Georgia. DAVID MITCHELL



**Mark Richt** wasn't on the original list of scheduled speakers on the final day of the Minority Coaches Association of Georgia's annual clinic. But in a rare instance for the head coach of an SEC football program, Richt's day was relatively open. So he called the association's staff out of the blue to see if he could make an unannounced appearance Friday.

When the association obliged, Richt made sure it was worthwhile.

Along with himself, Georgia's coach brought six members of his staff.

"We wanted to make sure we were representing Georgia," Richt said, "We were excited about coming down here today and enjoying it."

It was a similar story for Tennessee coach **Butch Jones**. He had agreed to serve as a speaker well before Friday arrived. But Jones said "some things came up that were unforeseeable in our program" that required his attention. At one point, Jones was worried he might have to cancel his appearance. It wasn't going to happen, though.

The event was important enough to him that he shuffled things around in his schedule to make sure he'd be able to keep his word.

"I'm excited we were able to do that," he said, before forging on and describing what impressed him about the clinic. "Everything — the organization, (and) when you look at the speakers and the individuals they've had come in and speak, it's really overwhelming. It's very, very impressive to say the least."

That it is.

This year, aside from Richt and Jones, the clinic brought in three other SEC head coaches in Alabama's **Nick Saban**, Florida's **Jim McElwain** and Texas A&M's **Kevin Sumlin**. And Auburn was on hand as well, as new defensive coordinator **Will Muschamp** spoke and had all three of his position coaches (defensive line coach **Rodney Garner**, linebackers coach **Lance Thompson** and defensive backs coach **Travaris Robinson**) in tow.

And this year's two-day lineup followed up a star-studded 2014 affair, when Saban, Richt and Auburn coach **Gus Malzahn** came to town on the same night.

Just how did this annual clinic — which just completed its sixth year, including a two-year detour in Atlanta before it was decided to make Columbus the permanent host — turn into an event so coveted that the association actually has to turn down some Power 5 coaches due to time constraints?

If you guessed recruiting, you're right.

"Georgia is a very fertile state when it comes to recruiting, so coaches want to get in and they want to have the opportunity to come in and build relationships with the high school coaches," said **Ahmand Tinker**, the association's executive director and a former head coach at Kendrick High School. " ... I think sometimes people, when they see the names of (these big-name college coaches on the schedule), they're a little hesitant. Like, 'Are they really going to come to Columbus?' I think that now, with this being the second year in a row we've had high-caliber coaches come in, we've answered that."

As prestigious as it's already become, the goal is to continue to grow. Not in a physical sense, however; Tinker said there are no plans for it to extend beyond two days at this point. Where he and his staff plan to expand is in a geographical sense. Yes, the SEC is going to be the anchor every year.

In 2016, Tinker said they'll have even more SEC head coaches than the five they had this past week.

That's not just because word of mouth surrounding this event continues to keep it on the forefront for the league's coaches. It's because Tinker said they will move it up a week in the hopes of avoiding any conflicts with spring practice. (Vanderbilt, for example, held its first session Feb. 16.) Tinker said he and his staff have already touched base with every school in the SEC.

So how many SEC head coaches will take part in the event next year?

While he didn't want to give a specific number, he said the format would involve having the Eastern Division coaches clustered together one day and the Western Division coaches the next. When asked whether people might begin to view the clinic as an abridged version of SEC media days, Tinker laughed.

"We wouldn't publicize it as such, even though that might be what some people want to think," he said. "For us, it's more of an empowerment session for those coaches that come in and try to help high school coaches become the best they can be."

But Tinker said they don't want to limit the event exclusively to the Southeast. For next year, Tinker said he's already received commitments from a "big-time Big Ten coach" and another in the Pac-12 who have assured him they will attend.

"We want guys who can come in and teach us things from all over the country," he said. "We want to give them an opportunity to also reach out to our state's coaches."

One point Tinker made sure to stress was that while head coaches are the ones in the limelight, it's the assistants who come to the event that are more important on a grassroots level.

"Those are the guys who we're closer to. You usually can't just pick up the phone and talk to a head coach," he said. "That's why it's good to make connections with the assistants."

It is those ties — and the ones that bind the members of the association together — that will remain at the crux of the event no matter how big it eventually becomes.

"We're just trying to help one another be as successful as possible," Tinker said. "In turn, we can help student-athletes and the other students we deal with at our respective schools. It's all about service. In doing so, that helps people get from Point A to Point B in their careers."

Read more here: <http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/2015/02/28/3590047/minority-coaches-association-of.html#storylink=cpy>