

Tennessee football coach to skip SEC media days

KNOXVILLE, TENN. — Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer will not attend this week's Southeastern Conference media days after learning that attorneys in a lawsuit against the NCAA plan to subpoena him at the event in Alabama.

Attorneys representing a former Alabama assistant coach have accused Fulmer of conspiring with the NCAA in bringing down the Crimson Tide football program by speaking to an NCAA investigator four years ago. Alabama was placed on five years probation in 2002 after the NCAA uncovered recruiting violations that included payments to players from boosters.

"I am not attending media days because of the legal circus that has been created by an isolated group of attorneys. They want to hijack media days for their own benefit, but I am not going to allow that to happen," Fulmer said in a statement Monday. "This day is for the players. They should be center stage instead of this small group of lawyers who intend on attacking the integrity of the NCAA's enforcement process."

University president John Petersen and athletic director Mike Hamilton defended their decision to protect Fulmer from an onslaught of media attention and the threat of being served a subpoena.

"I don't think this is tucking and running," Hamilton said at a Monday night news conference.

One of the attorneys notified SEC commissioner Mike Slive that Fulmer would be issued a subpoena at media days if the coach did not agree to give a deposition, the Tuscaloosa News reported Monday on its Web site.

Fulmer will be fined \$10,000 by the SEC for not attending media days, but will be available to reporters Thursday via teleconference during the time he was supposed to appear in person. Players Michael Munoz and Kevin Burnett will attend as scheduled.

Petersen tried to persuade Slive not to fine Fulmer.

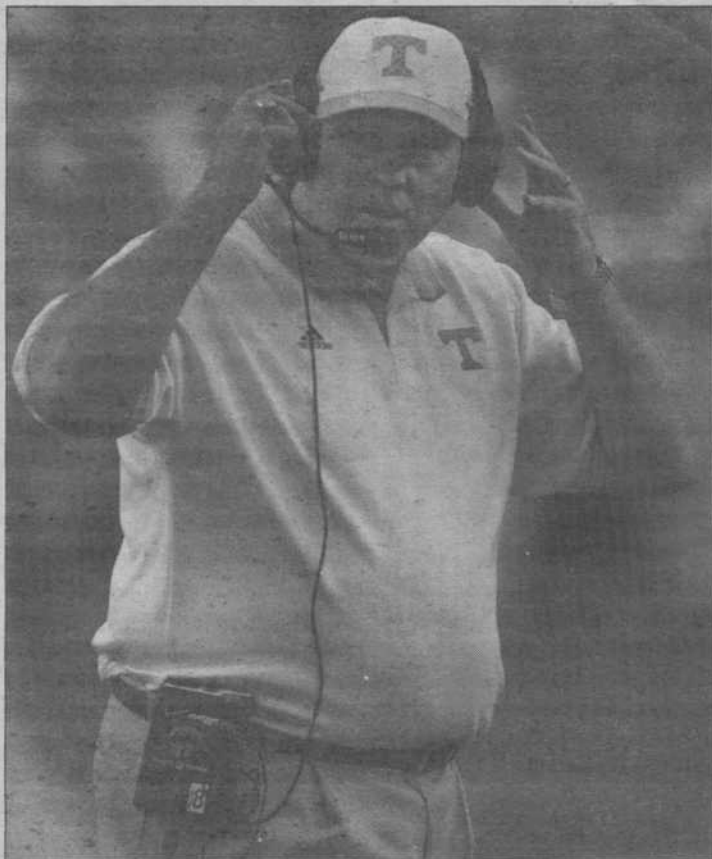


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UT head coach Phil Fulmer will not attend SEC media days due to the threat of subpoena by attorneys in an NCAA lawsuit.

"I think we will potentially avert something that would not be in the best interest of the NCAA, the conference or the coach of the University of Tennessee," Petersen said.

Tennessee officials voiced their concern last week about Fulmer's safety in Birmingham while meeting with reporters at the annual SEC event. Fulmer was scheduled to appear the same day Alabama coach Mike Shula and two players are on the agenda.

In 2000, Fulmer was interviewed three times by an NCAA investigator looking into possible recruiting violations at Alabama. Other coaches from the SEC and the Big Ten conference also spoke to investigators, according to NCAA documents. Some, including Fulmer, also testified before a grand jury in Memphis that indicted Alabama booster Logan Young allegedly paid \$150,000 to steer prospect Albert

Means to Alabama in 1999.

Attorney Tommy Gallion and his colleagues, who are representing former Tide coach Ronnie Cottrell in a lawsuit against the NCAA, have alleged Fulmer provided information to the NCAA in exchange for the NCAA overlooking violations at Tennessee.

"When you get behind all the smoke and the big pile of lawsuits, the truth still stands: rules were broken, an investigation proved it, those who broke the rules admitted their guilt, and a university paid the price. There are a few people who cannot accept the truth, so they file lawsuits hoping the truth will go away," Fulmer said.

Former Alabama recruit and Tennessee player Kenny Smith also has filed a defamation lawsuit against Fulmer for telling the NCAA investigator he heard there were rumors Smith's mother was involved with a Tide assistant.

Briefly

USC divers place at U.S. championship

USC divers Andy Bradley and Allison Brennan placed seventh and eighth, respectively, in the three-meter springboard final competition over the weekend. Bradley, who's entering his senior season at Carolina, finished with a score of 504.72 at the U.S. National Diving Championship. Brennan finished with a score of 445.08 at the Speedo 2004 U.S. Outdoor Diving Championship. Both competed in Mission Viejo, Calif.

U.S. Olympic diver Troy Dumais won the men's competition with a score of 707.07,

while Kimiko Soldeti took the women's title with a finish of 515.04.

Football players read to children

About 25 members of the USC football squad teamed up with Cocky to entertain 325 children Friday at the Richland County Public Library's Pigskin Poets event.

The team stressed the importance and fun of reading. The players also signed autographs. Taqiy Muhammed and William Brown read passages from Mary Ann Hoberman's "I'll Read To You, You Read To Me." The players joined in songs and games as well.

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worst. If Carolina falls to another bowl-less season, especially with another late collapse, USC fans' darkest fears could come true. Lou Holtz could actually no longer be a part of the program. Whether it's by his decision, another losing season after so many assistant coaching changes could spell doom.

Just for one minute, fathom where USC football would be without Holtz. It'd be right back where it was seven years ago — a loser.

And what would the Holtz era have to show for it? The two bowl wins are nice, but they wouldn't compare in any way to the agony of Holtz's wasted years in which he supposedly had more talent.

The Southeastern Conference is a monster unto itself. This team cannot continue to win its non-conference games, surprise a stronger SEC opponent, lose in a close one to Tennessee like always, lose a game it should win like always and expect fans to be happy. That adds up to eternal mediocrity.

In no way do I believe Holtz should be fired right now. I'm just letting you know what could happen if the Gamecocks fall like they have the past two years. It would just be a fitting, chicken-cursed end to an era that promised so much.

Holtz came here to win SEC titles and compete for national championships. He wasn't looking for a job to pay the bills. Winning and turning around a struggling program was his motivation and goal, but I've watched him suffer the past two years with questions that are still not answered.

Maybe the loss of defensive coordinator Charlie Strong was the beginning of the end. Maybe he needs to one day fill Holtz's shoes on the sidelines. It doesn't seem that demoted assistant coach and son Skip Holtz will. Whatever the answer is, hopefully the Gamecocks won't have to find that out for several years.

The Gamecocks have talent, plain and simple. They've just got to find a way to come together. And if the new set of coaches can't seem to make the difference, fear the worst. The Gamecocks might never get a coaching legend again.