

# SPORTS



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South Carolina's Sania Feagin celebrates with teammates after winning the SEC women's tournament on March 9 at Bon Secours Wellness Arena in Greenville. JACOB KUPFERMAN, GETTY IMAGES



## Feagin emerged as the leader Staley needed

**Lulu Kesin**  
Greenville News  
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

Sherri Feagin's feet were covered with confetti. She looked to her right at her daughter Sania and as she began to speak, a single teardrop fell.

A few more followed. Glassy-eyed with a prideful smile.

Feagin wiped the tears. She was donning a fresh "SEC tournament champion" hat and shirt, standing on the court in Bon Secours Wellness Arena after South Carolina women's basketball beat Texas for the program's ninth tournament title.

Their arms intertwined, one on each back. A 6-foot-3 daughter with a mom of nearly identical height.

"I'm just so proud," Sherri Feagin said. "She stayed the course, she kept her mind clear and it all shows out on the court. She put that work in and did what she had to do."

Despite two national championships it hasn't always been glamorous for Feagin, though she's remained committed to becoming a player and leader instrumental to South Carolina's success.

### Sania Feagin's transition into Dawn Staley's starter, leader

A few weeks ago sophomore guard MiLaysia Fulwiley texted Feagin.

"We need you," she wrote. "We're not a great basketball team without you."

The next game, she had a career-high 22 points and five blocks against Ole Miss.

"When she's playing good, we're playing great," Fulwiley said. "I don't think people understand she came a long way. People think I was on the bench but she really sat on the bench. So for her to stay confident, stay true to herself, come out and do the things that she did and still don't get enough recognition, I'm just so proud of her. The type of person to always have your back, she's the post player you'll always want to play with. I love her."

Feagin's minutes were limited by stars ahead of her, but they have grown from 4.3 per game as a freshman to 7.9 to 15.1 and now nearly 20.

But when things weren't working early this season, coach Dawn Staley told Feagin she was taking her out of the lineup. Feagin texted her asking for one

more chance.

"I knew that I could do better, knew it was time to do better," Feagin said.

In SEC tournament Feagin finished with 38 points total in three games. She earned an All-SEC tournament team nod and was named to the All-Defensive team last week.

Staley said Sunday that in the last three years, she'd never let Feagin play below her own standard.

"It's kind of really cool to see someone go through their process," Staley said. "Probably the first three years of her college year, didn't quite look or feel or sound like what she was capable of."

"But this year it paid off. When she's locked in, she's communicative, she's skillful, she can stick to a game plan, she can defend. You're seeing all of her skill set that we saw during the recruiting process that we didn't see on a consistent basis her first three years."

### Sania Feagin is South Carolina's 'gentle' leader for Dawn Staley

South Carolina fans will remember

**See FEAGIN, Page 2C**

**Brownell**  
4th among  
ACC coaches  
in salary

**Derrian Carter**  
Greenville News  
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

CLEMSON — Clemson basketball coach Brad Brownell ranks in the top 40 in pay nationally but is among the highest-paid coaches in the ACC.

The 15-year Tigers coach will make \$3,505,200 in 2024-25, 37th among men's basketball coaches according to the USA TODAY Sports database. Clemson will pay Brownell \$3.5 million and he will net in \$5,200 in "other pay." His buyout amount is \$8.33 million as of April 1, 2025.

Brownell received a three-year contract extension in July to make his total contract length five years for \$20 million. His new contract came after he led Clemson to the Elite Eight last season.

Brownell will earn \$200,000 in bonuses this season for Clemson earning the No. 3 seed in the ACC tournament. He can make \$200,000 again if Clemson wins its first conference tournament.

Brownell can also net \$750,000 if Clemson wins the NCAA tournament. He earned \$275,000 in bonuses last season for Clemson making the Elite Eight.

Here is where Brownell stands among ACC coaches, according to the USA TODAY Sports database.

- UNC's Hubert Davis, \$3.75 million
- NC State's Kevin Keatts, \$3.67 million

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## Klubnik throws in front of scouts at Pro Day

**Derrian Carter**  
Greenville News  
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

CLEMSON — As five of Clemson football's seven 2025 NFL draft prospects warmed up for Pro Day at the practice facility on Thursday, quarterback Cade Klubnik arrived.

While other current Clemson players entered the building in sweats and casual clothing, Klubnik wore shorts, had his cleats in his hands and earphones in his ears. He was focused like it was a real game, conducting his warmup routine and talking with assistant quarterbacks coach Tajh Boyd.

Klubnik, who opted to return to Clemson for his final season in 2025 instead of going pro, threw to tight end Jake Briningstool at Clemson's Pro Day in front of scouts from all 32 teams, including Pittsburgh Steelers coach Mike Tomlin and offensive coordinator Arthur Smith.

"Cade's a great quarterback, great player. We had a lot of reps together, so it's cool to be able to be back in our environment (and) be able to let him get out there and swing it," Briningstool said. "Also a good opportunity for him, his time is next year, but be able to get out there and get a good feel for it."

Klubnik didn't throw at Clemson's Pro Day last season after he had an up-and-down 2023. Reserve quarterback and student coach Paul Tyson threw at the event to running back Will Shipley.

After Klubnik blossomed in 2024, when he finished third nationally in passing touchdowns (36) and threw for 3,639 yards, he showcased his arm and accuracy for scouts a year early.

### Analyzing Cade Klubnik's accuracy at Clemson Pro Day

In the early portions of the session, Klubnik was consistent with his throws to Briningstool, who was Clemson's lone

skill-position player who participated in drills. He made on-time short and intermediate passes to Briningstool, who showcased his footwork, route running and catching to scouts.

Klubnik did have two miscues though. He underthrew Briningstool while scrambling to the right on a pass and overthrew his former tight end on a 40-yard pass to the left end zone.

Klubnik redeemed himself on the final throw of the drill, launching a 45- to 50-yard pass that Briningstool secured.

Briningstool, who said teams project him to be taken between the third through fifth rounds of the NFL draft, recorded 49 catches for 530 yards and seven touchdowns in 2024. He also holds Clemson's record for career receptions for a tight end with 127.

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Clemson quarterback Cade Klubnik throws during the Clemson Pro Day on Thursday. KEN RUINARD - STAFF

## ON TV SUNDAY

## BEACH SOCCER

5:50 p.m. FS2 – Concacaf Third-Place Match  
7:50 p.m. FS2 – Concacaf Championship

## BOWLING

8 p.m. FS1 – WSB XVI: Scorpion Championship

## COLLEGE BASEBALL

1 p.m. CW – Radford at USC Upstate  
2 p.m. SEC – Texas at Mississippi State  
3 p.m. ACC – UNC at Louisville

## COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Noon ESPN2 – Ivy League Championship  
1 p.m. CBS – Atlantic 10 Championship  
ESPN – SEC Championship  
3:15 p.m. ESPN – AAC Championship  
3:30 p.m. CBS – Big Ten Championship  
6 p.m. CBS – NCAA Selection Show

## COLLEGE MEN'S LACROSSE

2 p.m. ESPNU – Jacksonville at UNC

## COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Noon SEC – Oklahoma at Arkansas  
1 p.m. ACC – Pitt at Florida State

## COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Noon CBSSN – Army at Lehigh  
ESPNU – NEC Championship  
2 p.m. CBSSN – CAA Championship  
ESPN2 – MVC Championship  
8 p.m. ESPN – NCAA Selection Show

## GOLF

1 p.m. NBC – Players Championship

## MLB

6 a.m. MLB – Chicago Cubs at Yomiuri  
1 p.m. MLB – N.Y. Mets vs. Houston

## MEN'S HOCKEY

4 p.m. NHL – AHL: Hershey at Chicago

## MEN'S LACROSSE

4:30 p.m. ESPNU – Las Vegas at San Diego

## MEN'S SOCCER

8:30 a.m. CBSSN – Rangers at Celtic  
9:30 a.m. USA – Tottenham at Fulham  
2 p.m. Fox – Nashville at Philadelphia  
3 p.m. USA – Man United at Leicester  
4:30 p.m. Fox – LA Galaxy at Portland

## MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

4 p.m. MLB – Atlanta vs. Detroit  
7:30 p.m. MLB – Milwaukee vs. Cincinnati

## MOTORSPORTS

1:30 p.m. FS2 – MotoGP Argentina  
3:30 p.m. FS1 – NASCAR Cup Pennzoil 400

## NBA

1 p.m. ABC – Orlando at Cleveland  
3:30 p.m. ABC – Phoenix at L.A. Lakers  
7 p.m. FDSNSE – Charlotte at L.A. Clip-

pers

9 p.m. ESPN – Oklahoma City at Milwaukee

## NHL

1 p.m. TNT – Vegas at Detroit  
3:30 p.m. TNT – Dallas Colorado

## SAILING

5 p.m. CBSSN – SailGP Los Angeles

## TENNIS

2 p.m. Tennis – WTA BNP Paribas Open singles final

## WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

7:30 p.m. TNT – Unrivaled: Lace vs. Rose  
8:45 p.m. TNT – Vinyl vs. Lunar Owls

## WOMEN'S SOCCER

6:50 p.m. ESPN – San Diego at Angel City  
Note: Live events only. Subject to schedule changes and local blackouts.

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## Fixing ACC hoops starts with better coach hires



**Blake Toppmeyer**  
College columnist  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Reigniting ACC basketball starts by hiring better coaches. The process doesn't end there. Good coaches require support. But, strong hires are a must.

The ACC's hardcourt hard times will come into focus on Selection Sunday. Bracket experts expect the 18-team conference to be reduced to three or four bids in the 68-team field. That bid projection is more in line with the Mountain West than the ACC's Power Four peers.

Duke offers the ACC a national championship contender, and Clemson and Louisville also rumble into March Madness, but there's just not much conference depth.

As recently as a few years ago, the ACC served as a nesting place for elite coaches. Now, I'd rank Clemson's Brad Brownell as the ACC's second-best coach, behind Duke's Jon Scheyer. I mean this as no dig on Brownell, who's done a fine job at Clemson, but Clemson possessing the ACC's second-best coach offers evidence of the conference's insufficient health.

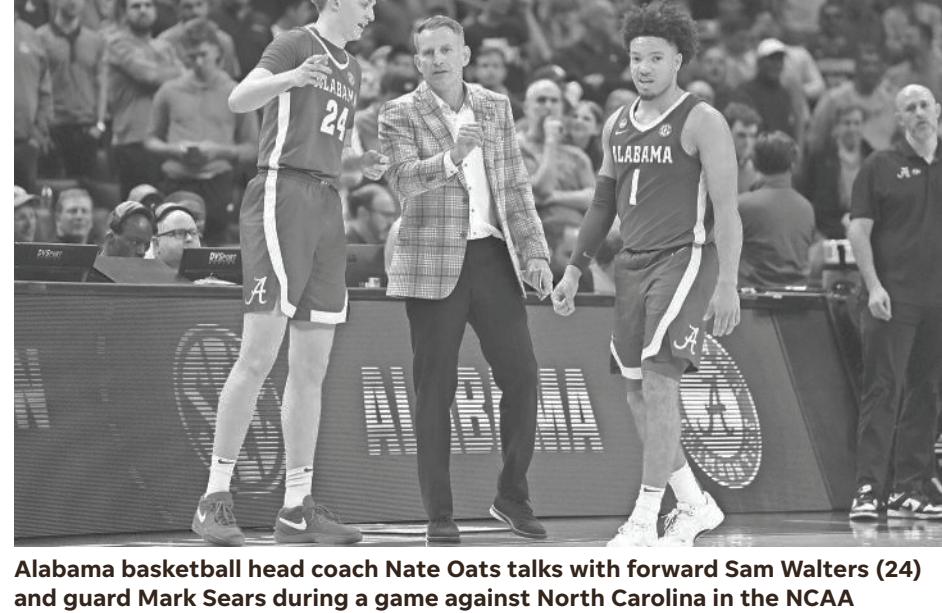
## Retirements turned ACC basketball on its head

The ACC's woes became apparent in the fall. The conference mustered a 2-14 record in the ACC/SEC challenge. And the roots extend deeper than that.

In a 43-month period from April 2021 to October 2024, North Carolina's Roy Williams, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, Notre Dame's Mike Brey, Syracuse's Jim Boeheim and Virginia's Tony Bennett retired. Legends, most of them. Career winners, all of them.

Scheyer, Krzyzewski's longtime understudy turned successor, kept the Duke's rolling with the elite. Elsewhere, Williams, Brey and Boeheim left voids that weren't sufficiently filled, while Virginia's search continues to replace Bennett.

Miami's Jim Larranaga and Florida



Alabama basketball head coach Nate Oats talks with forward Sam Walters (24) and guard Mark Sears during a game against North Carolina in the NCAA Tournament last season. KIRBY LEE/USA TODAY SPORTS

State's Leonard Hamilton retired this season. Each is the winningest coach in his program's history. Larranaga took two separate schools to Final Fours. More big shoes to fill.

"The ACC is struggling now, and everybody is searching for answers, and I say, what do you mean they're searching for answers?" Mike Tranghese, the Big East's former longtime commissioner, told me earlier this season. "I can tell you why they're struggling: They lost six Hall of Fame-type coaches."

The ACC made a go of it last season, turning five bids into a 12-5 March Madness record, before the veneer came off.

Four ACC coaching vacancies offered a chance to reset the board.

## Virginia, North Carolina State with a chance to top Miami, Florida State hires

The hires so far come off overwhelming at worst, and unproven at best.

Miami tapped Duke's associate coach Jai Lucas to replace Larranaga. Lucas spent the past few years working

as an assistant at blue-blooded programs, earning regard as a skilled recruiter.

Florida State hired Luke Loucks, an alumnus who'd been an assistant with the NBA's Sacramento Kings. He's never coached college ball.

The combined head coaching record of Lucas and Loucks? It's 0-0. Maybe, they'll become examples of buying low and striking it rich, but I'm skeptical these hires will galvanize the ACC.

Virginia and North Carolina State retain a chance to fill their vacancies with more proven coaches.

Virginia, at least, ought to possess the commitment to pursue an established coach. Marquette's Shaka Smart, whose career traces to Virginia Commonwealth, would be the proverbial home run, but uprooting the Wisconsin native from Marquette might qualify as a pipe dream.

VCU's current coach, Ryan Odom, must be somewhere on Virginia's list of options.

For N.C. State, how about Will Wade, LSU's former coach thriving at McNeese State? An FBI wiretap of a Wade recruit-

ing phone call derailed his LSU tenure. He served his time in the penalty box, and winning has never been his problem.

Other names that might be good for either Virginia or N.C. State include Furman's Bob Richey, Drake's Ben McCollum, George Mason's Tony Skinn and High Point's Alan Huss.

They're proving themselves at mid-majors, building résumés worth a look from the big leagues. Think Nate Oats or Todd Golden. They won at Buffalo and San Francisco, respectively, before turning Alabama and Florida into national championship contenders.

## Coaching hires spurred SEC. Can ACC follow suit?

The ACC should look to the SEC for inspiration of a hoops revival.

The SEC is positioned to qualify 12 or more teams for March Madness, which would break the NCAA's qualification record. Rewind to 2016, and SEC basketball called rock bottom home. It qualified three teams for the tournament that year.

Determined to elevate the conference's performance, Commissioner Greg Sankey appointed fresh personnel tasked with addressing the problem. Sankey's hires included Tranghese, as a special assistant focused on basketball.

The SEC's hoops solution featured a multi-pronged attack that included smarter scheduling, but stronger hiring formed the backbone of the SEC's ascent.

The SEC now touts five coaches with at least one Final Four on the résumé.

Arkansas' John Calipari, Auburn's Bruce Pearl, Tennessee's Rick Barnes and Mississippi's Chris Beard are career winners. Alabama's Nate Oats and Florida's Todd Golden have plenty of tread left on the tires, and they join Pearl and Barnes with top-10 teams this season.

"The whole key is hiring good coaches," Tranghese said.

ACC, take heed.

*Blake Toppmeyer is a columnist for the USA TODAY Network. Email him at BToppmeyer@gannett.com and follow him on X @btoppmeyer.*

## Feagin

Continued from Page 1C

March 10, 2024, for a long time.

The arena on its feet, 0.7 seconds left with South Carolina down two to Tennessee in the SEC quarterfinals when 6-foot-7 center Kamilla Cardoso shot a 3-pointer.

The ball mid-air and Feagin's arm raised, signaling the ball was going in.

It didn't matter that Cardoso hadn't ever taken a 3-point shot before. Feagin trusted her.

Flash forward a year later, 2.9 seconds left in the third quarter on Sunday in the championship game. Feagin caught the ball right in Cardoso's spot and drilled a 3-pointer against Texas. A head nod and chest puff followed.

Even in an elevated role this season, when she's the one making the huge shots, belief in her teammates never subsided.

In the semifinals vs Oklahoma, freshman Joyce Edwards couldn't buy a bucket and her frustration was visible. Feagin told her the shots will fall, keep your head up and keep going.

"She is such a gentle soul," Sherri Feagin said. "She's so loving and car-

ing, she really cares for her teammates, every last one of them. She would love for her teammates to excel, she puts them before her. She does things that make people better, things that don't show up on the stat sheet. Talking them up when they're down, she's a nourisher."

When the other freshman in this year's class, Maddy McDaniel, took a visit as a recruit, she shadowed Feagin and was under her wing before even committing. When she arrived to move in, Feagin was the first player to greet her.

"She's been there for me since the jump," McDaniel said.

Her mom says that's how she's always been.

"We used to call her the baby whisperer," she said. "Babies love her, we'd turn around and she'd be holding a baby, somebody's baby, anyone's baby."

## How Sania Feagin unlocked best games of South Carolina career

Feagin knows she has at most, a month left in her college basketball career. The focus isn't on the end, it's on continuing to play how she has been in the latter half of the season.

Fueling the clear-minded fire. Unblocking the brain, which has allowed

her to thrive lately.

It bottled up into one bad day, not long ago. Feagin didn't know what was going on but similar to an emotional tornado of thoughts. She told her mom, then daily texts about breaking the habit of overthinking followed.

"I went on a little run where my mind was just taking over me," Feagin said. "I realized that when you have a clear mind, nobody can stop you. I just emphasize keeping my mind straight."

Sunday, those texts morphed into celebratory tears.

She's averaging 8.1 points this season, but has scored in double digits 12 times. With plenty of scorers, Staley has never needed 30-point performances from Feagin.

Staley has always just needed exactly what Feagin is doing now.

The leadership, the fluid, effortless short jump shot, the defense.

"It feels good to know I wanted my turn, I trusted the process," Feagin said. "No matter what, I go out there and play the game I love to play. Be dominant, be a voice for my teammates."

*Lulu Kesin covers South Carolina athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network. Email her at lkesin@gannett.com and follow her on X @Lulukesin*

## Brownell

Continued from Page 1C

- Pitt's Jeff Capel, \$3.59 million
- Clemson's Brad Brownell, \$3.51 million
- Wake Forest's Steve Forbes, \$3.11 million
- Miami's Jim Larranaga, \$2.9 million
- Cal's Mark Madsen, \$2.8 million
- Virginia Tech's Mike Young, \$2.75 million
- Louisville's Pat Kelsey, \$2.37 million
- FSU's Leonard Hamilton, \$2.25 million
- Georgia Tech's Damon Stoudamire, \$2.2 million
- Boston College's Earl Grant, \$2.17 million
- Duke's Jon Scheyer, \$1.71 million
- Virginia's Ron Sanchez, \$1.35 million

No ACC coach is represented in the top 25 in men's basketball coaches' pay. The Big Ten and SEC lead with nine coaches, and the Big 12 has six.

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