

SPORTS



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South Carolina assistant coach Khadijah Sessions dances with players during the Gamecocks' NCAA Championship parade and celebration on April 14, 2024, in Columbia. SEAN RAYFORD/GETTY IMAGES

‘It’s a trust thing’

Whether Staley is running hot or not, Sessions provides balance

Lulu Kesin
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Sunday’s Elite Eight game might have been a challenge for defending champion South Carolina women’s basketball, but it wasn’t for assistant coach Khadijah Sessions.

An intense environment, two teams battling for a spot in the Final Four and a game with an uncertain outcome until the final seconds.

As a South Carolina player and star guard for Dawn Staley from 2012-16, Session has experienced all aspects of a March Madness. So as the No. 1 seed Gamecocks (34-3) beat No. 2 Duke 54-50, Sessions knew when to yell and when not to, when to push and when to pull.

“It’s a trust thing,” Sessions said. “If

you can tell them and show them, they have to believe you. Being a player for Coach Staley makes it easier for me to relate to them. I went to the Final Four, I was No. 1 in the country, we won the SEC, it’s easy for them to believe in me because I’ve done it, I’ve lived it.”

As South Carolina faces Texas in the Final Four on Friday (7 p.m., ESPN) it does so with Sessions on the bench, as the program’s inspiration for what succeeding in Staley’s system looks like.

Prior to her arrival on staff in July 2023, Sessions dove into coaching after playing overseas in Finland, working in both AAU and high school basketball programs.

When she started with the Gamecocks, Sessions began putting out feelers to gain trust, according to redshirt freshman Adhel Tac. She showed interest in players’ lives off the court, taking the time to understand their habits,

how they tick, what makes them grow and what halts their progress.

“She’s an amazing coach,” Tac said. “I give her a lot of credit for how we do things because she does have a way of getting through to us. She always make sure, even sometimes when we aren’t putting the best in ourselves, she is going to try to bring that out of us.”

It’s not necessarily more effort than other coaches, but Sessions knows she came with advantages.

“You know what you want from your coaches,” Sessions said. “I’m a relationship type of person, I do a really good job at reading people, seeing what they need in the moment and out of the moment. It’s more about understanding players off the court to understand them on the court.”

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Johnson returning to USC if hardship waiver is approved



Guard Meechie Johnson Jr. is returning to USC after playing this season at Ohio State. JOSEPH MAIORANA/IMAGN IMAGES

Lulu Kesin

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA — Meechie Johnson Jr. announced via social media on Tuesday afternoon that he’s returning to South Carolina basketball, just one year after he entered the transfer portal to leave the program.

Johnson, a 6-foot-2 guard, began his career at Ohio State, playing two seasons (2020-22) before transferring to South Carolina for two seasons from 2022-24.

After leading coach Lamont Paris’ team to a program record-tying 26 win season in 2023-24, he went back into the portal and returned to Ohio State.

The 2025-26 season would mark his sixth year in college. He is eligible for a mental health medical hardship waiver and if it’s approved, he will play at South Carolina.

Johnson played just 10 total games this season and didn’t play

after the loss to Auburn on Dec. 14. He averaged 9.1 points and 2.7 assists.

According to the Columbus Dispatch, Johnson left the team “for what were publicly described as personal reasons.”

Johnson talked to the Dispatch in an article published on March 26 where he described the situation as mental health related.

“My therapist, if you talked to her, I was disappointed in a lot of things, not from an Ohio State standpoint but just within myself in how a lot of things went and how I wasn’t able to be there on the court with my team,” he said to The Dispatch. “I’ve seen a lot of things: ‘Oh, he quit.’ Nah, that’s just not what happened at all.”

In Columbia, Johnson averaged 14.1 points, 4.1 rebounds and 2.9 assists in 2023-24. He started in all 33 games and was the team’s leading scorer. During the 2022-23 season,

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Clemson approves alcohol sales at sporting events

Derrian Carter

Greenville News

USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

CLEMSON — Clemson will allow the sale of alcohol at its sporting events, changing a multi-decade stance.

The school’s athletic department announced Tuesday that alcoholic beverages will be available for purchase at designated stands and kiosks in Memorial Stadium starting Saturday for Clemson football’s spring game. Beer sales will commence at McWhorter Stadium (softball) and Doug Kingsmore Stadium (baseball) starting the week of April 7.

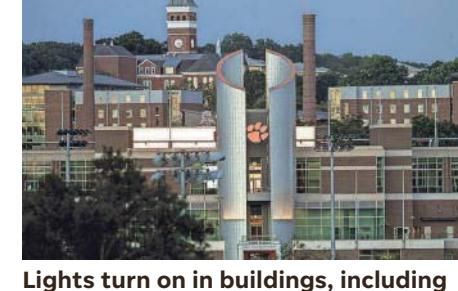
“We are excited to continue to expand concessions offerings and roll out this important change to our gameday experience, and we want to be thoughtful in doing so,” Clemson athletic director Graham Neff said in a news release. “We have appreciated the support from several key groups to begin a safe implementation that is both fan-friendly and family-friendly. We will continue to evaluate the impacts and adapt our offerings and policies to meet the needs of our fans.”

Clemson was one of three Power Four schools nationally (the others being Utah and BYU), including the only school in the ACC, SEC and Big Ten, that neither offered the sale of alcoholic beverages in its athletic venues nor accepted sponsorship revenue from alcoholic beverage advertisers.

Clemson’s in-state rival, South Carolina, began selling beer and wine at football and basketball games on Jan. 1, 2020.

Clemson previously didn’t sell alcohol to fans at sporting events, but

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Lights turn on in buildings, including Clemson Memorial Stadium and Tillman Hall clock tower in Clemson.

KEN RUINARD/STAFF FILE

ON THE AIR

THURSDAY TELEVISION

AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

4:30 a.m. FS2 – Carlton at Collingwood

4:30 a.m. (Fri.) FS2 – Melbourne at Geelong

COLLEGE BASEBALL

7 p.m. ACC – Duke at UNC

ESPN2 – LSU at Oklahoma

SEC – Ole Miss at Kentucky

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

7 p.m. ESPN – Slam Dunk & 3-point

championships

FS1 – CBC: Cincinnati vs. UCF

9 p.m. ESPN – NIT: UC Irvine vs. Chattanooga

9:30 p.m. FS1 – CBC: Villanova vs. Southern Cal

GOLF

10:30 a.m. Golf – PGA Korn Ferry Club Car Championship

1:30 p.m. Golf – Augusta National Women's Amateur

4 p.m. Golf – PGA Valero Texas Open

7 p.m. Golf – LPGA T-Mobile Match Play

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

2 p.m. ESPN2 – Prolific Prep (Calif.) vs. Long Island Lutheran (N.Y.)

4 p.m. ESPN2 – Link Academy (Mo.) vs. TBD

6 p.m. ESPNU – Bella Vista (Ariz.) vs. Brewster Academy (N.H.)

8 p.m. ESPNU – Columbus (Fla.) vs. TBD

MOTORSPORTS

10:25 p.m. ESPNews – Formula One Practice 1

1:55 a.m. (Fri.) ESPN2 – Formula One

Practice 2

NBA

7:30 p.m. TNT – Memphis at Miami

10 p.m. TNT – Golden State at L.A. Lakers

NBA G LEAGUE

8 p.m. ESPNews – Indiana vs. Osceola

10 p.m. ESPNU – Valley vs. Stockton

TENNIS

11 a.m. Tennis – WTA Charleston Open

7 p.m. Tennis – WTA Charleston Open

Note: Live events only. Subject to schedule changes and local blackouts.

Trust

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Sessions works in tandem with Staley. She brings her serenity when Staley brings her fire and when Staley goes silent, Session vocalizes Staley's thoughts. Staley said Sessions has a special bond with star MiLaysia Fulwiley especially.

In the Sweet 16 game against Maryland on March 28, Fulwiley blew coverage on defense and despite her single-handedly surging South Carolina's offense, Staley yanked her sophomore guard and let her hear it.

As Staley verbalized, Sessions stared at Fulwiley, waiting until the right second to say breathe, focus, take accountability and move on.

"They hear me, they know it's coming from a place of passion and love," Sessions said. "One has to be loud, one has to be calmer. It's a balancing act."

It's boisterous energy mixed in a timely fashion. She's always the first to

ignite the crowd but can still be the one who calmly says the right thing.

When forward Chloe Kitts won SEC tournament MVP, Sessions danced and clapped louder than anyone. When former starting center Kamilla Cardoso hit a game-winning 3-pointer against Tennessee last year, Sessions sprinted across the entire court, unable to contain her excitement.

When now WNBA star A'ja Wilson posed in front of cameras after getting her jersey retired in Colonial Life Arena, Sessions stomped, clapped and hyped her up to no end.

She's there with endless support always, but sprinkles in everything else in a timely fashion.

"She understands where the pitfalls of young players and where they are today and how hard they need to work," Staley said.

Lulu Kesin covers South Carolina athletics for The Greenville News and the USA TODAY Network. Email her at lkkesin@gannett.com and follow her on X, formerly known as Twitter, @Lulu-kesin

Clemson

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luxury suites at Memorial Stadium and Littlejohn Coliseum were the exception. With the change, Clemson will align with Power Four programs as the college athletics landscape is about to shift thanks to the looming House settlement.

A supporter for the change is Clemson baseball coach Erik Bakich. He said in January that the away team's bullpen on the third-base line will be moved into foul territory, and the old bullpen space will become a standing room-only beer garden.

"We're going to be selling beer this year, which is huge," Bakich said. "We want the rowdy crowd. We want the beer-drinking crowd. We want people to come out here and have a blast, and the opposing pitchers are going to have to get warm right in front of that section."

What alcohol sales will do for Clemson athletics?

The biggest benefit is the revenue Clemson will make, especially with schools being able to share it with student-athletes if the House settlement passes this month. It has added a student athletics fee, increased season-ticket prices for football games and unveiled a revenue-generating entity, Clemson Ventures, to help prepare the

athletic department for the anticipated changes.

Alcohol sales will be another avenue for Clemson to generate money. According to the Knoxville-News Sentinel, Tennessee sold more than 278,000 servings of beer at football games at Neyland Stadium, that generated \$3.3 million in the 2022 season.

A potential negative will be a change in Clemson's family-friendly environment. Alcohol consumption can lead to erratic and dangerous behavior from people, which can taint the atmospheres at games.

What is Clemson's alcohol service policy at games?

Clemson announced alcohol sales will begin when the venue doors open, and sales cutoff times will be posted throughout the venue, followed by the warning: "No exceptions."

For the football spring game, service will end after the third quarter. For baseball games, service will end after the seventh inning, and softball will conclude after the fifth inning.

For other sports, service will end "at a designated time no later than when 75% of the event's regulation length is scheduled to be completed."

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Johnson

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he averaged 12.7 points per game and started in 29 out of 30 games.

This past season without Johnson,

the Gamecocks finished 12-20 and at the bottom of the SEC.

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SCOREBOARD

All times Eastern

MLB

American League

East Division

Central Division

West Division

National League

East Division

Central Division

West Division

National League

East Division

Central Division

West Division

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