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## SOUTH CAROLINA PARTNERS WITH MISSISSIPPI FOR COACHING FELLOWSHIP

Oxford, MS – (August 5, 2024) - After spending the bulk of 2023 studying what other states were doing in regards to coaching development, veteran Commissioner of the South Carolina High School League (SCHSL), Dr. Jerome Singleton, and the new Executive Director of the South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association (SCACA), Scott Earley, decided to make the trek out to Mississippi to learn more about an intriguing program that Dr. Singleton had learned about at the 2023 Section 3 Meeting.

“We had been wanting to do something special for the state of South Carolina,” said Earley, a former decorated athletic director and football coach from the Palmetto state. “After looking into what programs best fit the needs of our state, Dr. Singleton kept referencing this presentation he listened to at the Section 3 Meeting in Biloxi. So we then decided to travel out to Mississippi to see if it really was the best thing for our coaches.”

In early September of 2023, Johnny Mims, the Executive Director of the Mississippi Association of Coaches (MAC), and his counterpart at the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA), Rickey Neaves, served as hosts for the NFHS Section 3 Meeting that was set to take place in Biloxi.

High School Executive Directors from across the South came to the Coast, all with the goal of learning and sharing their best practices. As hosts, Mims and Neaves made the decision to give ample time for their state association’s signature program to be presented.

Nicknamed “Tomorrow’s 25,” the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship was the idea of a University of Mississippi professor named Dr. Hunter Taylor. Taylor had originally presented the idea to Mims with a plan of action that would offer an annual, ten-month long leadership

development opportunity for 25 high school and middle school coaches from across the state. After reviewing the proposal, Mims and Neaves gave unconditional support to the concept.

In Biloxi at the meeting, Dr. Taylor was then given an opportunity to speak about how the Tomorrow's 25 structure and curriculum sought to assist in three areas of growth for each participating coach:

1. Coaching the Whole Athlete (Leadership, Resilience, Empathy, and Responsibility) – each participant will be able to implement all sessions' materials at their school and share with their colleagues.
2. The opportunity to network with 24 of their peers who have demonstrated the capacity to be the state's future leaders in athletics.
3. And access to current leaders from the coaches associations and college athletics – all with the goal of helping each candidate grow their spheres of influence in their communities and across the state.

In addition to the content, Taylor also mentioned how the trio of Mims, Neaves, and himself agreed to make sure that each participating class had to be diverse in gender, ethnicity, region of the state, and sport coached - thus ensuring that it really was the best of the state.

"We wanted more coaches to get to interact with each other that normally aren't in the same room together," said Mims. "Most of the time it's the football coaches all in a room together, or everyone from the Coast in a room together, or it's only males in the room together. We wanted to change that."

In attendance for that presentation was Dr. Jerome Singleton, who then asked his old friend, Ricky Neaves, if he and Earley could make a return trip to Mississippi to learn more about the program.

"Dr. Singleton is a friend and one of the most respected leaders in high school athletics today," said Neaves. "We were honored that he asked to visit, and we are going to share with anyone who is interested in learning about this unique program that we believe is making our state better. That's what makes our profession so great."

Discussions from Biloxi turned into a longer conversation throughout the fall and spring - first by Zoom, and then by the duo flying back into Mississippi. Earley and Singleton also continued to look at other state's models, but eventually felt at peace with the way the Tomorrow's 25 program provided a clear structure, with long-term goals, and really gave another participating state the autonomy to make it their own.

"That's really the goal with this program," said Taylor. "At its core, the structure is built on a shared set of values that we believe will help elevate the work of our high school and middle

school coaches, but we have intentionally built it to allow for each state's distinctness to shine. Clarksdale, Mississippi, is not Florence, South Carolina, and it's an insult to each state's communities if the structure does not account for its wonderful differences."

In June of 2024, the two state associations finally reached an agreement, resulting in a one-of-a-kind partnership. This August, both states will have 25 coaches each beginning a 10-month journey through the same leadership curriculum, all the while still allowing for the flexibility to insert and explore each state's own unique challenges and advantages. Both state associations also go in with a shared belief that by participating in this partnership program, their coaches, their student-athletes, their schools, their communities, and their states will benefit for years to come.

"Supporting and nurturing the next generation of education-based athletics coaches is essential for the continued success and integrity of high school athletics," said Dr. Singleton. "This initiative to establish a partnership Tomorrow's 25 program aligns perfectly with our state association's mission, and we wholeheartedly endorse this effort to empower future education-based athletics leaders in our sports community."