

. . breaking news . . . breaking news . . . breaking news . . . breaking news . .

It's Ellis

HATTIESBURG – USM president Martha Saunders made it official at a press conference on USM's campus at 4pm (CST) on 20-Dec-2011 when she named South Carolina defensive coordinator Ellis Johnson to succeed outgoing USM head football coach Larry Fedora. Johnson, who turns 60 on 23-Dec-2011, joined Saunders and his wife, Caroline, on the podium for the announcement.



Saunders introduces Johnson as USM's new head football coach at press conference on 20-Dec-2011

Saying that it is a great day to be a Golden Eagle, Saunders told a capacity crowd that Johnson emerged as the absolute best candidate from a pool of talented individuals. Saunders also told the crowd that Johnson knew plenty about winning, something he demonstrated in 2010 when South Carolina administered a 41-13 "whipping" of USM in Columbia.



Johnson sports a USM cap at the beginning of his talk to USM supporters

USMNEWS.net sources expressed a degree of surprise that, in lauding Johnson's defensive credentials, Saunders took a shot ("whipping") at Fedora's 2010 display against the SC Gamecocks. They were not so surprised, however, to hear Johnson also take a shot at Fedora by

telling the crowd that he (Johnson) thinks that the only difference in USM's 2011 C-USA championship season and "just entertaining people" the three years prior was the team's stellar defensive showing in 2011. In making this statement, Johnson [reiterated his prior feelings](#) (from just after the 2010 SC v. USM game) – feelings that were expressed through the phrase *playing soccer with helmets on* – about the soft style of offense that has been championed by Fedora at USM.



Caroline Johnson, Martha Saunders, and Ellis Johnson lead the assembled crowd in the "Southern Miss! . . . To the top!" cheer

Supporters of Fedora, and Fedora's offensive coordinator Blake Anderson, will likely be very unsettled by Johnson's past and present comments about Fedora's preferred offensive style. Some of the wealthier among these have already indicated that their financial support of USM is perhaps tied to Anderson's selection as Fedora's successor. Whether or not Circle of Champions members like Nick Welch stick to [promises to reconsider](#) their financial support of USM will be known only in the future.

Lastly, those on the academic side of the USM house are likely still somewhat anxious about what appears to be Saunders' hyper-focus on Golden Eagle athletics. In pumping up the football supporters, Johnson revealed that, in recent conversations with Saunders, the USM president admitted that she hopes to be president of USM until she quits or dies. Thus, those in the faculty senate and among the rank-and-file faculty may need to settle in and get used to having things done *the Saunders way* for well beyond the foreseeable future. With all of the scandalous negligence occurring at USM under Saunders, this is likely a frightening thought to ponder for many among the faculty.