

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Mike Elko**

**DeWayne Carter**

**Shaka Heyward**

**Jacob Monk**

Press Conference



teams didn't play each other as much under the previous scheduling model. It will be nice to bring NC State onto the schedule, get an opportunity to play another of the Triangle schools and just kind of keep that going as the years to come.

**Q. Coming into this team this season just what can you say about what you took away from the four seasons with Jimbo Fisher as defensive coordinator at Texas A&M, and how you can move that over into leading this program?**

MIKE ELKO: I think I've had a lot of unique experiences over the years. Certainly the last four working with Jimbo and he had a lot of background in high-level football, Florida State, ACC, being at Texas A&M and the SEC in the last four years. I think it really helped me kind of refine who I was as a coach. When you are in that pressure cooker and the stakes are as high as they were at times for us, you just kind of take your game to a new level.

I think I walked away from that experience really prepared to come into Duke and kind of build this program and build this culture the way we want to do it.

**Q. You've had experience coaching in the Coastal Division before when you were a defensive coordinator at Wake Forest. What's different about the Coastal Division now versus before, and kind of what's your assessment of the teams in this league?**

MIKE ELKO: You know, it's funny because it's been a hard to get an assessment, right, because there's been so much turnover. We've got four new head coaches in the league this year. It's been hard to get a really deep dive into the offseason studies.

I think it's going to be as wide open as the Coastal Division has been over the years. I think this might really go out with a bang this year. Just so much new flavor, so much new scheme, philosophy, people, and I think what we're doing at Duke is completely different also.

I think we're in a position now to really end this year with a really crazy year in the Coastal and see what happens.

**Q. I want to focus on the defense. The defense last year specifically the secondary, 200 yards on the ground, 300 through the air, 50 points per game during ACC play. How do you plan to revamp the defense? A lot of it seemed to be miscommunication on the back end and players giving up on plays. How do you plan to turn the whole Duke program around?**

MIKE ELKO: I don't know how much time we spent going back watching last year. We know the stats, and we know the results. I think we just kind of came in and started to establish our culture.

I think we've done that a lot over the years defensively in the different places I've been where you just change the philosophy, you change the demeanor, you change the temperament. You kind of change everything you are trying to do in your culture. We focused a lot of our time and energy on that, and I think what you'll see this year is just the starting point of that. Us building a culture, a foundation for how we want to play defense and what we want Duke football to look like moving forward.

**Q. Coach, how satisfied were you with the 3-5-5 model with your three permanent opponents, Wake Forest, North Carolina, and NC State?**

MIKE ELKO: It's such a great thing for our fan base and our school. Any time you can keep those traditional rivalries in state, get an opportunity to play all three of our in state opponents every year, I just think that brings a lot of energy and excitement to football and the state of North Carolina.

I think we always looked at it a little bit odd that those three



**Q. Commissioner Phillips yesterday spoke on regulating the NIL. I just want to get your thoughts on the NIL and how it's basically changed collegiate athletics.**

MIKE ELKO: Yeah, I think everybody was in agreement that the players had to get something. I think if you poll coaches, their ability to make something off of the game of college football was something that I think we were all in favor of and certainly I was. I think everybody likes regulatory as opposed to wide open. I just think that is human nature.

I think a lot of us would love for there to be some set of guidelines, some set of rules, some set of standard regulations that we can provide our student-athletes with the things they deserve and the things that they've earned and certainly are entitled to just in some type of uniform way across the sport, so it's a little bit more competitively equitable as you go from state to state, from conference to conference. I think those are the things that are just a little bit unique about it right now.

**Q. To this team and having a quarterback like Riley Leonard, obviously vying for the job. What can you say about the quarterback battle and specifically about Riley, what you have seen away from his skill set at this point?**

MIKE ELKO: It was a unique thing in the spring. We've got two kids finishing their freshman year. Riley Leonard, obviously, one of them, and Jordan Moore, the other. They end their first year, new system, new scheme, new way to practice, new way to do everything. You put them out there, and you kind of ask them to compete for the job. We certainly saw some highlights from both guys. Riley included.

I think what we need this camp is a little bit more consistency. I think we'll get that. They've had great summers, both of them. They're great kids. They've worked extremely hard. We're just really looking forward to them in fall camp consistently being themselves.

I think they're way more comfortable with what we're doing schematically now that they've got a better pulse on what we're trying to get accomplished. I think we'll get a much better quarterback product in fall camp and ultimately that battle will get decided somewhere around the opener.

**Q. Mike, you've been a head coach now for about eight months. I'm curious if there's anything that has kind of surprised you about being in this position after being a defensive coordinator for so long or anything**

**that you didn't see that was maybe easier or harder than you thought going in?**

MIKE ELKO: I don't know if there's anything necessarily that I would say was surprising. I just think the volume that falls into the head coaching chair. I don't know as an assistant if you ever truly can understand that.

Not that you didn't know and not that you didn't have people tell you and prepare you for it, but when you get in that chair for the first time and you really go into undertaking all that is running a college football program, I think there's some learning curves for sure.

It's been an enjoyable experience for sure for the last eight months, building this infrastructure at Duke and getting this program sets up to the level that we want it moving forward.

**Q. I want to know what you feel about these players. How have you gotten an impression from them, the guys who stayed around after Coach Cutcliffe left. How have you been impressed by the way they decided to return and play for you?**

MIKE ELKO: It's been an unbelievable culture shift for us. A lot of times when you take over a new program, you get a lot of resistance. You get a lot of fight back. I think these three guys on the stage with me kind of represent our entire program. They've just done an amazing job buying into what we're trying to do. We've asked them to do a lot of different things. Not necessarily better, worse. Just different. I think they've kind of jumped at the opportunity. Really had a lot of fun with what we were trying to do and have just kind of bought into the fact that we're going to try to get this program as successful as we can be, as quick as we can be. I think they're certainly all in to do that.

THE MODERATOR: You put in place a position entitled recruiting general manager. Take us through the combination of those words and exactly what Derek Miller's responsibilities have been since coming on in January.

MIKE ELKO: Obviously, recruiting is the lifeblood of our program. I think as we've transitioned into the modern era of college football, especially at a school like Duke. We're trying to recruit national. We're trying to get ourselves marketed all over the country, and you kind of need somebody in your office that's doing recruiting 24/7. You've got an offensive coordinator that's kind of doing offense. Defensive coordinator doing defense. Derek kind of serves in the role of recruiting 24/7. He has a team that works with him every day, and obviously, in conjunction with our plan and our vision.



You just need somebody recruiting every minute of every day, and that's the role that Derek takes. It's been very productive for us so far in the '23 class. We're really excited about what we're doing.

**Q. I'm just curious, how do you get your fan base to buy into this football program after the last few years?**

MIKE ELKO: I think it's a couple of things. I think, one, we've got to engage them. I think we've done a really good job and a really intentional job with our social media department and social media team to create a presence of Duke football that people in the Research Triangle and in the Durham community see every day. I think that's really important.

I think we have to do the same thing on our campus with our student community and our faculty and get them the same way. Our alumni base, the same way.

Then, I just think we've got to provide a product and an experience that people want to be part of. I think when people come to a Duke football game, we want them to walk away and are like, yeah, I had a great time. That was a great experience. I want to come back. I want to do that again. We watched a team that competed that had a lot of passion, that had a lot of energy about playing for Duke. I want to get behind those guys. I want to get behind this coach. I want to get behind this program.

I think as we do that, it kind of snowballs to ultimately where we've got a game day environment that we're very proud of and that our alumni base can be very proud of as well.

**Q. Coach, you were able to bring in some new staff with you, but how important was it to keep some existing staff, like Trooper Taylor on to really get some continuity in the Blue Devil football program?**

MIKE ELKO: I think any time you're putting a staff together, you're trying to find the most diverse staff you can in terms of who they are as people, where they come from, their experiences, where they've coached, and then you want to have some guys that our kids have a certain level of familiarity with.

Trooper did such an amazing job in the interim as they were going through the process of trying to identify the new coach and ultimately me getting in there and getting my feet underneath me, and so it just felt like he was the right fit.

Certainly over the last six months of him working with us it's been great. Trooper has a lot of energy. He is an

amazing coach. He does a great job with our guys. We're really excited we've got him.

**Q. Duke ran the ball really effectively last year but had trouble finding the end zone largely because of turnovers. Turnovers, in fact, have killed this program for the last two or three seasons. Is there a mental process to eradicating turnovers? How do you cut back on those things?**

MIKE ELKO: That's been an enormous emphasis point for us since spring ball started. I think if you look at the history of Duke football, the last time we had a positive turnover margin was 2014. It was 2013-14 were our two best years, which were the two best years of Duke football in recent history. I think we've done a lot to try to get our kids educated on not only how important it is, but also how they happen and how we can create them.

I think turnovers, if you look year in and year out are the single biggest factor in wins and losses. I think it's just establishing a mentality of how important it is, how valuable those things are to not only not have them, but also to create them with your defense and to put yourself in more positions to have a positive turnover margin and be successful.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. We'll have you switch places with DeWayne Carter. We'll spend about five minutes with our redshirt junior defensive tackle.

**Q. DeWayne, you led the conference in forced fumbles this past season. What steps have you taken in the offseason to keep that up and improve upon that number?**

DeWAYNE CARTER: Good things happen when you swarm to the ball. That's the culture we're trying to create at Duke. It kind of touches on our foundation in the weight room. One thing we do specifically is when we finish our warm-up drills, conditioning drills, whatever tests, if you don't finish at least two yards behind the line, you're going back and doing it again. That's the standard we want to create. A lot of times, like you talked about forced fumbles and turnovers and things of that nature, it comes from extra effort on the field. That's kind of where we're starting at.

**Q. Coach Elko coming into this program, like he was talking about, about eight months ago, what have you seen as far as the positive difference thus far?**

DeWAYNE CARTER: I mean, it's been a lot of positive change. Honestly, the biggest thing and worry for me, being a vet in the program now, was kind of, like, how the transition was going to go. It's been very smooth.



We've laid a good foundation, and most importantly, the best positive change is it's really like a player and coach relationship partnership almost. We're working together, like he said. He just got into being the head coach eight months ago, so we're working together trying to figure out what works best for this program, what we're going to do to win, and how most importantly, we can be successful on and off the field.

**Q. Can you just speak on implementing the freshmen within the Duke program, that you guys will not be having a losing mentality, losing attitude, and mediocrity is not accepted? Can you just speak on that, please?**

DeWAYNE CARTER: Most definitely. I think it's kind of easier this year because it's a whole new staff, right? We're kind of all freshmen in the fact that it's a new program, it's a new camp, it's a new style of play, it's a new defense, it's a new scheme.

It's kind of we're in it all together, which in years before, you know, you know what to expect. As an older guy coming in, you know how things go. We're all learning together. The freshmen are engaged, they're excited, and most importantly, just can't wait to get out there on the field.

THE MODERATOR: A question here from the podium. You were academic All-ACC last year. What's the secret in blending academics and athletics?

DeWAYNE CARTER: So really it's about your priorities. It's about your priorities. Time management, of course, plays a huge role, but you have to prioritize what you can.

As a student-athlete, especially football student-athlete, we have meetings, film watching. I mean, we have a numerous schedule, and also at the end of the day we get to go home. You have to make your priorities. You can either hop on the video game or take your naps but you got to get your homework in there at some point.

It goes from my home background as well. My mom always told me, you have to have it up here as well as on the field. That's kind of where that stems from.

THE MODERATOR: Also here from the podium, we know it's one game at a time, but how far into a schedule do you look at a season to get your mind straight?

DeWAYNE CARTER: In terms of, like, just opponents?

THE MODERATOR: I'll let you answer how it is you think

you would like to.

DeWAYNE CARTER: Really we take one week at a time. That's cliché. That's a basic answer, but in order to be successful, you have to take it one game at a time. If you overlook an opponent, they'll sneak up on you. If you underlook an opponent, you won't be as successful as you can. You have to put your all into preparation for each week one week at a time.

THE MODERATOR: On July 8th your Twitter post had you showing some pretty solid dance moves. Who taught you to dance?

DeWAYNE CARTER: I like to claim that I'm self-taught. Honestly, I watch a lot of videos. I'm a big TikTok guy. I've always been a dancing type of person.

My parents, they can move a little bit. My dad will claim that he is the best dancer in the house, but, unfortunately, that's not true. Maybe back in the day, but now I think I'm more self-taught than anything.

**Q. DeWayne, going off of that, being a vet on this team, how do you all have fun? What is it off the field that you do to keep that camaraderie, because when there's a coaching change, obviously, that family has to stay strong and stay together, so how does Duke have fun?**

DeWAYNE CARTER: How we have fun, so we're a stereotypical family, right? We all have our roles: We have class clowns, we have this, we have that. A lot of times our relationship-building is just basically in the locker room after workouts.

You finish a hard run, and there's ten guys laying on the floor, and there's some guys laughing at him because some guys had a better day than others, and things of that nature. Family-building. We play a lot of video games. We hang out places and just being in each other's presence, and that's the best way. The best thing you can give somebody is your time, and that's the best way to get to know somebody.

**Q. DeWayne, you represented Duke in the ACC on the Football Oversight Committee, Student-Athlete Connection Group. In your opinion, what do you think is the most pressing issue facing NCAA football both on the player level and on the institutional level?**

DeWAYNE CARTER: That's a great question. Obviously, a lot of the big topics right now are NIL and how there's not really a specific legislation. That's a lot of our conversations that are about NIL legislation.





Of course, we talk about different practice rules. Our biggest goal, like role, in that committee is to speak on behalf of the players, right? If we think maybe an extra practice or so is beneficial or extra day in camp, an off-day, things of that nature. So there's not really one overarching issue, but the issue we talk about the most has been NIL legislation.

THE MODERATOR: You can switch places now with Shaka. We'll have him up for about five minutes or so.

**Q. Shaka, you and your comrade on the Duke defense have had a couple of difficult years. Talk about the excitement of this new system and Coach talked about putting more emphasis on forcing turnovers. As a linebacker that's around the ball a lot, how do you feel about that philosophy?**

SHAKA HEYWARD: I feel great. Just taking a look at Coach Elko's history and what he has been able to do at his previous schools, Texas A&M, Notre Dame, Wake Forest, it does come down to the players and what we're willing to do, and obviously, we are bought into the program, what he is teaching to us day in and day out. So we're excited.

THE MODERATOR: From the podium here, career-wise you have 26.5 career tackles for losses. What makes you such a good ball hawk? What allow you to get there at that time each time?

SHAKA HEYWARD: A lot of great linebackers I would just say just having a good instinct for finding the ball. Watching film, obviously. Then just the fundamentals and doing what you are being coached to do.

**Q. Shaka, from your point of view what life has been like having head coach here with you, Mike Elko, and the staff that's been brought in, what has the atmosphere been like, and how is it positively changing Duke football as we step forward?**

SHAKA HEYWARD: It's just a new energy. Just a new -- just different energy. Fresh start for everyone. We're all just embracing it together. It's just been fun embracing it with each other.

THE MODERATOR: Again from the podium, you're majoring in evolutionary anthropology with a minor in psychology. What interests you about both of these fields?

SHAKA HEYWARD: For me evolutionary anthropology, I just like studying the human body, the way we function. That was just most interesting to me.

**Q. Besides yourself, of course, who else do you see as the best linebackers in the ACC this year?**

SHAKA HEYWARD: I would say Nick Jackson from Virginia, and Dax Hollifield.

**Q. Shaka, you were a candidate for the Lot IMPACT Trophy last year, and you are on the watch list again this year. How does it make you feel personally to know that you were being recognized for both your on-field and off-the-field impact?**

SHAKA HEYWARD: It feels good. We are athletes, but we are also more than athletes. We do things within our community day in and day out, and it's just nice to be recognized for something also accommodating football.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. You can switch it up with Jacob. We'll finish our time with Duke with our senior offensive lineman.

I'll ask it from here at the podium. Your father was a four-year letter winner at Duke. What's it been like for you also to play for the Blue Devils?

JACOB MONK: It's really been a dream come true. Growing up watching Duke football and seeing how the facilities have just changed from there being a track around the field when I was going to games to actually running out of the tunnel on Saturdays. It's really a dream come true.

**Q. Jacob, sometimes being an offensive lineman is a thankless job. What can you say about having that role and how you feel on this team leading it forward and if being an offensive lineman for you has almost made a chip on your shoulder knowing that the credit typically goes to quarterbacks and running backs? You don't always hear about the offensive line.**

JACOB MONK: Really it is whatever. I don't really need credit. I just enjoy playing the game of football. The biggest step for an offensive lineman is a win, so it's just what we work for each and every day.

THE MODERATOR: Again here at the podium. On July 1st you re-Tweeted a Duke weight room video, and you added a one-word caption. It read "culture." What did you mean by that?

JACOB MONK: I feel like what that video stood for is how this culture has changed. There's been a high placement on competition right now. There's rewards for winning. There's consequences for losing. We're just learning how to love to win and hate to lose right now.

**Q. So much of the weight room stuff has been amplified on social media. How have you seen results from the weight room translate to on-field stuff throughout the spring and summer?**

JACOB MONK: I'm sorry?

**Q. How have you seen production in the weight room transfer to on field just because there's been such an emphasis on it all offseason?**

JACOB MONK: It's what we work for each and every day. We work for results for on the field. We're going to see how that's going to turn out in August and September and throughout the season. That's the common goal is just to work as hard as you can this summer, this spring, this winter for those results to show up in the fall.

THE MODERATOR: Your last question, fill in the blank for us: This will be a successful year for the O-line if...

JACOB MONK: If we're consistent. I think that we had a decent year last year. I feel like it was a good place to build off of. We're bringing back four of the five starters from last year, and we just need to be consistent in everything that we do consistently tough, consistently physical, communicate consistently, and I think we'll be in good shape.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Duke. Good luck this season.

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