

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**NC State Wolfpack**

**Coach Kevin Keatts**

**Michael O'Connell**

**Jayden Taylor**

Men's Press Conference



hair. I was, like, man. I'm jealous because mine can no longer get that long, so I don't know.

Say that again. I'm sorry. I apologize.

**Q. The eight new guys that you have brought into your program, how have you been able to get them to buy into your culture and identity at NC State?**

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, we have talked about competing every day. These guys will tell you everything that we do has a consequence, and we have a lot of games that we play in our practice.

That being said, you win, you win. If you lose, then obviously you have to run. One of the things that we want to do is we've got to build a winning culture.

I think we did a really good job, assistant coaches, going out and getting guys in the transfer portal and then the young guys that we have in our program, but we have a standard of how hard we compete. Might not win every game at the beginning, but the way we play is different.

So we talked about you can't take practices off. We don't have but 30 practices total in the 42-day window that they give us, and so during that time we don't have the ability to waste any practices. We want guys to get better from practice to practice.

**Q. I wanted to ask you specifically. Jim Phillips earlier today said he felt like part of the issue for the ACC has been the fact that the brands of the ACC and sometimes across college basketball get overlooked or get all of the publicity while when some teams, like yourself, or others are stronger teams in the conference and may be looked at as a weakness of the conference. What are your thoughts on that, and do you feel like that has led to the ACC getting overlooked when it comes to NCAA Tournament time?**

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, I think it's several things. I'm very disappointed at the amount of teams that we have gotten into the tournament. And it doesn't really make sense because when our teams do get (audio cut out)

THE MODERATOR: We will start with questions for Coach.

**Q. My question is, after last season's appearance in the Final Four, has there been any major changes within the team to ensure success of another Final Four appearance and the possibility of a championship?**

KEVIN KEATTS: So I pride myself in not changing and being the same coach that I have been meaning before the Final Four run being culture-wise and everything else.

The one thing that I will tell you about our guys, and starting with J.T. and also Michael, is we've got eight new dudes, but they've done a good job of really pushing our culture on the new guys. I think that's important.

We lost some really good pieces, but we've got three guys that played a lot of minutes, those two guys and Ben. The one thing I've asked them two is teach the other guys how to compete and play hard. It's my job to teach them the system. That's winning and losing and running plays and everything else.

But the biggest part of it is we play so hard. I think that's one of the things that we have to show the new guys that's coming in, how hard we compete every day.

**Q. How have you been able to get the eight new guys to buy into your identity and culture at NC State after your Final Four run?**

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I don't know if anybody can see you, but somebody get a picture of him, man. That's some big-time hair you have right there. You are going to have to repeat that question because I lost it when I saw your



example, the number (audio cut out).

The reason we're going to the Final Four is because we have a great conference and we're battle-tested. I think there's a couple of things that we've got to do as coaches in our league, is for whatever reason, the committee, the particular committees in the last three years have put a lot of emphasis on November and December.

As a conference we have to try to go on and schedule better November and December if that's going to be a major criteria as far as how many teams we get in there.

It's a little frustrating because you know you're playing 20 ACC games, and those 20 games are pretty tough. I would invite anybody outside of our conference to come and play in any of our home venues. They're tough to play in.

I hope that we have a great November and December where they can no longer use your non-conference against you, and that's been one of our biggest issues is our non-conference according to the talking heads hasn't been great.

The last thing I will say about it is that I think we lost some really unique Hall of Famers that have been into our conference over the years. I think everybody has kind of taken it for granted. I think we're getting a little bit punished because we don't have the Hall of Fame coaches in our leagues as we did in the past.

Hopefully they forget about that. They were great coaches and everything else, but we've got a great league, and we should be getting in my opinion nine or ten teams into the conference -- into the tournament every single year.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Questions for Michael, please.

**Q. Michael, Coach talking about obviously some of those guys from last season's run no longer with the team, so who have you seen on the rise in the pack that you believe will step up this season and create potentially another strong season?**

MICHAEL O'CONNELL: I think it's kind of hard to pinpoint one player at this point. We've had a lot of good guys come in. They're all proving themselves each day. Every guy is getting better.

I would say Dontrez Styles has been performing every day I would say at a high level offensively and defensively, rebounding. So just all aspects of the game he is playing really well.

Our big man, Brandon, has been playing really well too. Our guards, Marcus, Trey. It's hard to pinpoint one guy that's going to be super helpful throughout the season. I think everyone is going to contribute at different levels and help us win some games.

**Q. With the likes of DJ Burns and DJ Horn being gone, I know you've had to step into that leadership role. Can you talk about stepping into that leader role as well as leading the new young guys that have come into this program?**

MICHAEL O'CONNELL: I would say just being a point guard you have to be more vocal and try to be a leader on the floor. Obviously you're running plays and trying to help guys be in the right spot and talk through things on defense.

I think you just kind of have to be a leader in a sense or be at least vocal. I think my voice has grown from when I first got here until this point. I try to just continually be vocal, talk to guys, whether just helping them out, whether understanding things, or just trying to be more comfortable with the team and the program.

Especially with the new guys, the biggest thing is I've been in their shoes. I know how it is to be a new guy, be a transfer and just helping them understand it's want going to happen overnight. It's not going to go well every day. It's going to be a struggle, and just being there if they need to ask questions or just be a guy to talk to.

**Q. Last year over those nine postseason games you stepped up your game offensively. You shot 50% from three. Were there any changes that you made to your shot in particular for that, or is that just about getting more opportunities?**

MICHAEL O'CONNELL: Yeah, I wouldn't say I necessarily changed anything. I think the biggest thing for me was just staying consistent throughout the whole year. A lot of times getting in the gym with Coach Justice and just working out, making sure no matter if I had a good game or bad game, I was always in the gym the next day working out getting shots up. I think just throughout the whole year kind of always getting those shots up, just compounding days, compounding hours helped towards the end of the season.

It's never going to happen over one game or one day of just getting shots up, but I think just continually putting my head down and continually working and just trying to get better every day led to some good things at the end of the season.



**Q. The shot that led to that huge post game run -- you know I'm talking about the one against UVA -- do you still get jitters from that moment? Is it ever when you fall asleep you think about that moment?**

MICHAEL O'CONNELL: I don't know about when I'm falling asleep, but it's definitely a cool moment when I see the video where people bring it up. It's something that I kind of get to relive a little bit in my head and talk to people about or just see the video and just kind of think about what was going on in that moment and what it's led to.

I'm definitely grateful for that moment. It's definitely something I'll carry with me forever.

THE MODERATOR: From the podium, last question, when you watched that video, do you ever think you're going to miss the shot?

MICHAEL O'CONNELL: Never (laughing). It's always going in, and thankfully I'm always right at the end of the video.

THE MODERATOR: Michael, thank you. You can switch places with J.T. Questions for Jaden Taylor.

**Q. What is it about Coach Keatts' leadership style that has really spoken to you personally and brings the best out of you?**

JAYDEN TAYLOR: I would just say his confidence that he walks with and the joy that he comes in every day with. It just kind of inspires you to just play hard for somebody that can be so passionate about the game. It's kind of like we're playing for him. He believes in us, so it gives you a different type of level of confidence every day.

**Q. With NC State being one of the three schools here in North Carolina in the triangle area specifically, can you talk about that rivalry with Duke and Chapel Hill?**

JAYDEN TAYLOR: Obviously it's a competitive sport. We all want to be the best, and I feel like we kind of established ourselves this year as a team not to be looked over just because we're in a triangle with Duke and North Carolina. We're NC State. That's just the attitude that we have. We're here to play. We're here to compete.

**Q. For you what is the culture and identity of NC State?**

JAYDEN TAYLOR: Yeah, I say if you're coming to NC State, non-negotiable is playing hard and just talking every day and being confident. You can't come here if you're not

going to play hard. That's one thing that Coach K harps on every day, is at least come out and compete.

I would say that's really what the culture is, honestly. If you're not making shots, how can you impact the game in other ways? How do you get the deflections, rebound? I feel like just competing. That's the culture we've built here.

**Q. With as great as you performed last year with how highly active the transfer portal is, it would be easy to go that route after everybody leaving. What is it about NC State that made you stay and say, I'm a Wolfpack until the end of time?**

JAYDEN TAYLOR: After doing some of the specials that we did with the guys that I came in, it's like why would you not want to come back and do the same thing over again? We won five games in five days. That's never been done.

I want to come back and try to repeat it and win the big thing this time.

**Q. Can you just talk about the importance that coaches pretty much made your team realize that, hey, the Final Four is last year. Let's build on that and just keep building the momentum.**

JAYDEN TAYLOR: What we did last year, that's last year. Carrying the momentum is going to be huge. It did happen, so it's not like we can just say it's last year and just forget about it. Like, it happened, and it was a good thing.

We want to carry the momentum. Knowing it's a new year, we have new players, it's going to be a different story, new adversity, but it's like keeping your eyes, like, just ahead, you know. We didn't have a great, perfect season last year, but at the end it all clicked at the right time, and we kept our head down and just keep working.

THE MODERATOR: Jayden, thank you. NC State, good luck this year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports