

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Monday, October 6, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets**

**Coach Karen Blair**

**Catherine Alben**

**Ines Noguero**

Women's Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2025 ACC Tipoff Q&A. I am happy to welcome Georgia Tech to the stage with me. Karen Blair in her first year leading Georgia Tech as well as Inés Noguero and Catherine Alben. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

KAREN BLAIR: Thank you for having us.

THE MODERATOR: Karen, former associate head coach at Maryland where you were part of three Big Ten Championships over seven seasons.

Tech is going to dress out ten new players in uniform, eight transfers and two freshmen. A lot to be excited right now in Atlanta. I'm just going to ask you this first off, Karen, 25 years as an assistant. Why now? Why Georgia Tech?

KAREN BLAIR: Yeah, the thing for me with Georgia Tech is, you know, the academic piece of the school was a big draw for me. Then, secondly, just being in Atlanta.

The high school basketball is elite. The coaching is elite. The AAU program. It's really just this recruiting hotbed. I think when you can find universities that you don't have to go far from home, you know, to be able to find what you need from a talent base, and that's what we have here at Georgia Tech.

So that was the main thing.

Then, secondly, the thing that's been great for me is the administration has just been so supportive. And just the coaches. The other coaches from the other teams just for me being there have been phenomenal.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the recruiting in Atlanta. Six players from the Atlanta area are suiting up

this season. Why was that so important, and how did that process come about for you and your staff?

KAREN BLAIR: Yeah, I think, as any university, like at Georgia Tech, we want to keep the talent home. We don't feel like you have to go outside of Atlanta. You talk about having elite level academics and a competitive basketball that plays in a premiere conference. Our question is, why not Georgia Tech?

We've got everything that you could possibly want. At Georgia Tech we're getting different kinds of student-athletes. You've got to be ready to compete. On the academics it's going to be a challenge, as well as on the court.

But for me that's what's enticing. That's what I love about the quality of student-athletes that we get at Georgia Tech.

THE MODERATOR: Inés, I know that you've been good at shooting the three, but I didn't really understand the genesis of the three until I realized you were a triplet.

INÉS NOGUERO: Yes, I am.

THE MODERATOR: What are your siblings' names, and how has that affected your ability to lead and be a good teammate on the floor?

INÉS NOGUERO: So my sister is called Cova (phonetic), and my brother is called Jesus in Spanish; Jesus in English. Then I have a little brother too that is David; David in English.

Then going back to your question, I would say that we are a big family, and you've got to work through things around. Like maybe doesn't go your way, maybe it's not -- like you're not right, and you just got to try to get to a point that is, like, in between things and maybe you're not comfortable with, but it's for, like, the good of everything, like the environment like all the other ones. I think that that help me a lot in basketball.

THE MODERATOR: What does it mean to you to come home and play your final season in the Atlanta area,



knowing that you're going to have friends and family in the stands? I'm assuming every home game.

CATHERINE ALBEN: Yes. I already got people fighting over tickets as we speak, but it's obviously just super exciting. Super blessed to be able to play back home.

I think this will bring a lot of fans out with it being so many kids from Georgia and the tournament being in Duluth. So it's just amazing. Free food every now and then from Mom. Super excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: If there's six of you, then only one night should you have to eat on campus. Just rotate.

CATHERINE ALBEN: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: We talked about this is a transition for you becoming a head coach for the first time. Has there been anyone in the ACC that's reached out or has been offering advice as you begin this huge transition year?

KAREN BLAIR: Yeah, this is a -- the one thing I do appreciate, the camaraderie of the ACC coaches has been great. You know, it's like even in our first head coaches' meeting, sitting down with Shawn Poppie and him explaining to me what he kind of went through.

Same thing with Tricia and even today just having a good discussion with Megan. So the support has been phenomenal. Like they say, as you go through that first year, you just got to go through it. There's a learning curve that you just have to go through.

I've blessed to work with these student-athletes and really, really happy with the group that we've been able to put together and the staff that we have in place.

THE MODERATOR: Inés, you're the most experienced player on this team with regards to ACC play. What's your message been to your fellow teammates in terms of preparing for what we know is going to be a gauntlet of a conference season?

INÉS NOGUERO: So, I was saying to them, be patient. Like, we're going to go from up to down. Like, it is what it is. It's not easy. It's always every night we're going to compete. Like, we're going to go play hard.

Now we're trying to learn each other, like, build that chemistry that is going to help us work hard and, like, compete in our games.

The most important thing is, like, be patient, trust your

work, trust the work you putting in, and then listen to your coaches too, because they have the outside look of the game, and they can help you, too.

THE MODERATOR: Karen, you've talked about a lot of the cultural pieces. Give me some of the good stuff. Give me some of the Xs and Os. What can we expect from this team? What kind of style of play?

KAREN BLAIR: One of the things we talked about, you know the ACC is a phenomenal league, and you have really, really good guard play. What we've been focussing on so far is we've been trying to hang our hat on our defense, and that is finding ways to be disruptive, to have really good ball pressure.

The second thing is the rebounding. It's like we talk about, we do want to play at a fast pace, but if we can't get stops and can't finish the play with a rebound, it's really hard for us to get out and run. Those have kind of been our main areas of focus that we've been on in practice.

THE MODERATOR: I think, Catherine, this might be the first time someone is asking this question, period, but what's Karen like as a head coach?

CATHERINE ALBEN: Honestly, Karen is honestly a joy to be around. On and off the court, she's continuously pouring into us, letting us know how great of people we are as basketball players and as athletes.

It's really just been a blessing to be coached by a coach like this, honestly. Obviously she gets on us, especially about rebounding and things of that nature, but it's just good to have somebody that honestly believes in you and wants to coach you hard, but it's our job as the players as she's pouring into us, to have that belief and just to continue to believe in ourselves, because that's really where it starts.

**Q. This is a question for all three of you. Obviously there's no place like home to play. What are some of the arenas you guys are looking forward to playing in this year other than at home?**

CATHERINE ALBEN: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?

**Q. What are some of the places you're looking forward to playing on the road this year? What are some of your favorite on the road arenas?**

CATHERINE ALBEN: Oh, me? We are playing my previous school, Charleston Southern. That's obviously really exciting for me to be able to play and go against the people that have kind of built me up in a way for the past



couple of three years. That will be exciting to see Coach García and her little baby boy again.

So, yeah, I'm excited for that game as well as every other game.

INÉS NOGUERO: For me I would say NC State has a good environment. Duke is historical, so it's always like a great environment to play there. Also, I cannot forget like about Cayman Islands, we're taking that trip and I'm ready for it.

KAREN BLAIR: I like where Inés is going with that. I think the Caymen Islands should be nice scenery and some really good competition. There is a lot of historic places in the ACC that I know I haven't played at that I'm very much looking forward to as well.

THE MODERATOR: Catherine, we've mentioned the rebounding and defense because you want to play fast, but what's that X factor that you feel like? Obviously you have a lot of experience under your belt. For this team to be successful this year, what's that X factor?

CATHERINE ALBEN: I feel like just having that mentality. As we talk about the confidence piece, it's going out there and just playing hard. Every time we go out there, playing hard on defense, be intentional about it, because defense is not always just a playing hard type of game as well.

It takes smarts. It takes closing out at the right spots. It takes being at the being in the right place at the right time.

Just continue to be coachable and doing what the coaches are telling us to do and trusting in that and bringing effort and energy every day in practice.

KAREN BLAIR: Shout-out to close-outs. Appreciate that.

THE MODERATOR: Karen, I'll put you on the spot. From what you know of the ACC head coaches, who would give out the best Halloween candy?

KAREN BLAIR: Best Halloween candy... this is going to be a fun one. I'm going to go with Felicia. Yeah, you know, Syracuse, I don't know if there's going to be a lot of trick-or-treaters, but I feel like she's a good time, right?

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely.

KAREN BLAIR: I feel like she's got the holiday celebration, so full Snickers.

THE MODERATOR: What do you think?

INÉS NOGUERO: For me? I don't know. Honestly, I would like to know what type of candy they have up in Duke, yeah. Kara Lawson? Yep.

THE MODERATOR: If we see Kara, we're going to have that question. All right, ladies, a lot of new places -- a lot of new faces for your team. Give me that one player that you think no one knows about or is talking about that you think in the next couple of weeks everyone is going to be talking about that's impressed you.

CATHERINE ALBEN: For me I would say Nezzy, her, just being here all this time at Georgia Tech. Me looking at the outside in, you wouldn't really know Inés, who she is as a player, her skill set. I'm just really excited for her. I think it's going to be a break-out year for her as well. Just excited to see her get the recognition that she deserves, especially that three point.

INÉS NOGUERO: For me I got to go ---in, I'm from Spain, and we have a freshman working her way through it. She's playing hard. She's watching her on film because she's trying to fit in our style of game. Also, she's trying to figure it out how to find her voice and talking English, it's like a barrier that you've got to go through.

I would say Leyre, our new freshman. I think she's making great things, and I think she's going to be a surprise.

THE MODERATOR: Karen, it's still early, but for anyone out there thinking about Georgia Tech women's basketball, what's that nonnegotiable for you with this program?

KAREN BLAIR: Yeah, I think the nonnegotiable for me is, like, it's two things. They have to be connected, and this is what we've always talked about. We're going to judge ourselves this year on us being a connected team.

Secondly is they know they need to be confident. It is okay for us to make mistakes. They know that. They have freedom within our system. But it's like just keep playing hard and do things confidently.

Then if we're able to do that, then we'll be able to make it through the season. Kind of like Inés says. Every season there's going to be the ups and downs, and you have to have the resiliency, but if we stay connected, that's the main thing, and confidence.

THE MODERATOR: Last question for all three of you. It's a one-word answer. Inés, we'll start with you. You're the most experienced ACC --

CATHERINE ALBEN: You win.

THE MODERATOR: Ready or not. When I say "ACC women's basketball," what's the first word that comes to mind?

INÉS NOGUERO: Competition.

CATHERINE ALBEN: I would say fast.

KAREN BLAIR: Yeah, excellence.

THE MODERATOR: Georgia Tech women's basketball.  
Good luck, ladies.

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