

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Tuesday, October 7, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**James J. Phillips Ph.D.**

**ACC Commissioner**

**Commissioner Forum**



JAMES J. PHILLIPS: Good afternoon, and once again, it's great to welcome you back to Charlotte for the 2025 ACC Tipoff.

On behalf of the entire league and specifically our 36 basketball programs, thanks for your attendance in making the time to shine a spotlight on the ACC, our student-athletes, coaches, and programs.

You are an incredibly important part of college athletics. As I have said to you before, I have great respect and admiration for you and your work.

11 weeks ago today it was my privilege to speak with many of you during our ACC Football Kickoff. During my forum, I stated I've not felt stronger about this league than I have in the last five months. Nearly three months later, I'm even more of a believer in the upward trajectory of our collective future.

From a competitive standpoint, ACC programs are dominating the national rankings and our teams are looking to compete for both conference and national titles.

Academically our schools, once again, set the benchmark for excellence, topping the U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges Rankings for an unprecedented 19th straight year among all FBS conferences.

Our viewership initiative and success incentives have been fully implemented, allowing all members to benefit from additional revenue opportunities.

We've hired a chief revenue officer, Anthony Macri, a chief marketing and brand officer, Marques Zak, and a vice president of sports technology and innovation, Jay Sartori.

The three positions were created to enhance the ongoing strategic priorities of our office, and each will bring exceptional experience to the ACC.

Following incredibly intentional discussions on the future of

ACC football, our schools overwhelmingly supported a regular season schedule that now includes nine conference games and a minimum of ten games each year against Power Four opponents.

Nationally the ongoing evolution in our industry continues. Along with our peer conferences, we remain committed to working together to prioritize life-changing, educational, and athletic experiences for student-athletes and ensure the long-term stability of college athletics.

Since July, significant progress has been made in many areas. The College Sports Commission is up and working. Student-athletes are earning money from their NIL, and new rules are curbing pay for play practices.

As of September 1st, more than 6,000 deals have been cleared worth a total of over \$35 million. Over 28,000 student-athletes and 1,200 institutional users are registered with NIL Go.

Based on my conversations with Brian Seeley, those numbers have significantly increased over the last month and will only continue to grow.

In August the NCAA board of directors, chaired by Virginia Tech president Tim Sands, voted to adopt a new Division 1 governance structure. As you know, this was the result of a multi-year discussion dating back to my service on the constitution and transformation committees.

The change in governance is another meaningful step in the continued modernization of college athletics in which the ACC is very well-positioned. As I continue my service as chair of the NCAA Board of Governors and president of the Collegiate Commissioners Association, it remains a privilege to work with my colleagues during this transformational time in our industry.

We have made progress together in many areas, and we remain steadfast in our need for federal legislation. Recently the ACC sent a letter to our house representatives supporting the SCORE Act. The Score Act delivers for student-athletes by enshrining into federal law a litany of benefits and protections. This includes access



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to representation for assistance with NIL deals, post-eligibility medical care, mental health services, and career and academic counseling.

It delivers for student-athletes by enshrining that they are all competing by the same rules instead of rules dependent on what state the schools reside in.

It delivers for the Olympic movement and non-revenue sports by codifying the same revenue sharing pool to ensure that there is revenue to support those programs, and by increasing scholarship opportunities in these sports.

I hope somebody will ask me that question later. It delivers for college sports, and by extension fans, by bringing assistant to regulatory and enforcement structure that has been missing over the last several years.

We will continue to push for the SCORE Act, as it will directly benefit the more than 550,000 student-athletes who compete annually in college athletics.

As we turn our attention to basketball, I want to begin by sharing that the two conference policies that were implemented this fall in football, court and field safety and player availability reports, will also be implemented in women's and men's basketball.

Specifically related to player availability, institutions will submit a report no later than 8:00 p.m. the night before a conference game and then again on game day no later than two hours before tip.

Both initiatives are directly connected to our ongoing commitment to safety and best protecting our student-athletes.

Today we are only 27 days away from the start of the regular season, and as usual, you can sense the energy and excitement surrounding our ACC women's and men's basketball programs.

There are two new women's head coaches in Karen Blair, Georgia Tech, and Adia Barnes, SMU. On the men's side we welcome Luke Loucks from Florida State, Jai Lucas, Miami, Will Wade, NC State, and Ryan Odom, Virginia.

Speaking of head coaches, two weeks ago I was in Durham for the USA Basketball press conference announcing that Duke head coach Kara Lawson was appointed the head coach of the USA Basketball Women's National Team.

What an incredible achievement and a testament to Kara's leadership, vision, and dedication to basketball at all levels.

Kara's name is also added to a historic list of previous U.S. Olympic basketball head coaches with ties to our current ACC institutions. Larry Brown, Chuck Daly, Nell Fortner, Mike Krzyzewski, Pete Newell, Dean Smith, Dawn Staley, Tara VanDerveer and Kay Yow. Just amazing.

Speaking of honors, I want to also recognize our ACC basketball supervisors of officials. This fall, Debbie Williamson received the 2025 Gold Whistle Award, the highest honor awarded by the National Association of Sports Officials, recognizing an individual or organization that has gone above and beyond in overall integrity and has made significant contributions to the betterment of officiating.

Not to be outdone though, Bryan Kersey was honored this month with the Naismith Award Men's Official of the Year. To receive this award a candidate must display character, integrity, and dignity, while contributing mightily to the growth, success, and viability of college basketball.

Debbie and Bryan are tremendous people with the utmost integrity, and on behalf of the ACC we congratulate them on these well-deserved honors.

This season our 18 ACC women's basketball programs will be featured week in and week out on ESPN, ACC Network, and the CW. The combination of a compelling nonconference schedule, including international games in France and Germany, and our challenging 18-game league schedule creates must-see games. I applaud our media partners in once again increasing by double digits the number of televised women's games.

The 2025-26 season will undoubtedly be captivating, a direct result of the caliber of student-athletes who are once again competing in this league and the exceptional coaches who lead our programs.

Eight All-ACC players return from a year ago, including ACC Player and Defensive Player of the Year and AP All-American, Hannah Hidalgo.

Looking ahead to March, the longest running division 1 conference women's basketball tournament in the country will be played for the first time at Gas South Arena in the greater Atlanta area.

A few weeks ago we brought together executives, community leaders, administrators, coaches, and media who will be instrumental in the success of this year's 49th annual Ally ACC tournament.

Last year for the first time since 2009 we surpassed 70,000



fans, and we were the only Power Four league to average more than 10,000 fans per session. We are excited about the opportunity and possibilities in 2026.

As I've said before, ACC basketball is the premiere conference in the country both for men and women, and I truly believe that. Even after coming off a challenging last season, which was certainly below the high expectations we have for our men's basketball programs and that others have for us as well.

We have been very transparent about our ongoing strategic efforts to enhance our men's basketball success, and we are looking forward to this year and the opportunity that is in front of us.

For the first time since 2018-19 our teams will play an 18-game conference schedule. The decision to return to an 18-game conference schedule was announced in May as part of our clear and intentional approach to enhancing men's basketball and ensuring it is best positioned for the future.

One of the many positives with the change is that it will provide our schools with a better balance of nonconference and conference games, while also providing them with more autonomy in the scheduling process.

Beyond the league's schedule, our teams are once again playing in the most prestigious early season tournaments as well as meaningful nonconference events and marquee games.

Following the regular season, the T. Rowe Price ACC Tournament will be back at the Spectrum Center right here in Charlotte, and we look forward to building upon last year's successful event.

As Commissioner of the ACC, it is my privilege to witness and share the inspiring accomplishments of the young people we serve. These are exciting times for the ACC, and there is great anticipation about the future.

Thanks again for what each of you do, and now I'm happy to take any of your questions this afternoon.

**Q. Obviously there were competitive reasons for going from 20 to 18 games in the schedule format you adopted, but it also meant the elimination of some rivalry games that had been played for more than a century. At a time when schools are being rewarded or compensated for ratings in your new success model, what was the logic in getting rid of some of what are traditionally the most-watched games on the schedule?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: It's a great question. Listen, we struggled with getting to where we ended up, 18-game conference schedule, because of what you just described. The history and tradition of the league is as good as any league in the country. It just is. As I said before, it's the premiere basketball league in the country from a women's and men's perspective. So we didn't take it lightly.

I give our staff quite a bit of credit, our athletic directors, and even our coaches led by Steve Forbes at Wake Forest and Paul Brasso, who is kind of the director, obviously, of men's basketball.

We sat down, and we looked at what are the must-have rivalries that we need to try to make sure that we continue, and then where are the ones that from time to time we will reengage those rivalries before the next couple of years we may have to take a bit of a pause. That's hard to do.

What I would say to you is, it has brought us the ability to schedule a little differently in the nonconference, so I like where we ended up on that.

It also is a driver, quite candidly, about trying to get more times in the NCAA Tournament. You all know the work and the time and energy we put in with all the experts out there, Leonardi and Palm and Kevin Pageau and several others, just taking a look at it.

We spent time with the NCAA Selection Committee, Bubba Cunningham, coming off of chairing that.

We've scheduled to prepare for teams to win an ACC championship and a national championship.

**Q. Piggybacking on Luke's question about the schedule, you mentioned the May timeline. Teams really didn't have a great deal of runway to schedule the extra two nonconference games that they then had. As you look at the schedule and games that wouldn't have been played otherwise, such as Virginia playing Ohio State in Nashville in February, are you pleased with how the schools adjusted and added quality nonconference opponents?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: Absolutely. We have 72 games right now against Power Four conferences, and I think also including the Big East. That doesn't count games that will be played in these MTEs where you end up not knowing who you are going to be playing against, so I'm really pleased with that.

It also gave just a little bit of flexibility. Some of those new programs, you know, with coaches at Florida State or new



head coaches, I should say, at Florida State and Miami, it gave them a little bit of freedom to maybe schedule a difficult game in game what used to be 19 in the ACC and maybe less difficult. I'm exceptionally pleased about where this thing ended up. I think it will only get better as we go forward.

I can't tell you the amount of time that we've spent with our coaches about scheduling across all of our sports led by football and then women's and men's basketball. They understand that you better play really good opponents in the nonconference if you want to win an ACC championship and regardless of what the sport is as well as winning an NCAA Tournament. That seems to be the DNA to me as I look at our league.

**Q. I'm curious, you brought it up earlier, and you said that you hope somebody would ask you about it, but just the increasing scholarship opportunities in some of the sports and how that has to do with rev share. What do you hope is the impact of that, and what are some other maybe initiatives that you are looking at to make sure that nonrevenue sports stay protected in this era of college athletics?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: I really do appreciate you taking that hint from my words earlier on this question. Listen, I got these figures from Pearl Houck, who is our GC. We're tracking on what our schools are doing in rev share. I would say two things. I'm going to answer your question, but This conference is all-in when it relates to rev share as we looked at the numbers of the 20.5.

So if there was any kind of debate about the private versus publics or the larger brands versus the smaller brands, this group is all in.

To the testament of we have added 854.14 in new scholarships. You think about that. 457 on the women's side, okay? That ends up being about a 53% overall number. So the ability now to not have restrictions on Olympic sports and not having, you know, some of the challenges that we faced before where you haven't been able to give a person a full scholarship -- you know, there were partial scholarships in a lot of those Olympic sports.

It really is a testament. When you think about that, that equates to, I don't know, \$70 million or so in new expenses for our programs.

I'm incredibly pleased about that, but that's been the ACC. Some know the history. A lot of you know the history. For nearly 75 years this conference has been about broad-based programming for women's and men's sports and also excelling obviously in football and basketball.

I'm really pleased about that, and I think it's a testament to our presidents and our athletic directors, because these are individual campus decisions. My hats off to all of our leaders across our 18 schools.

**Q. I was going to ask about the ACC women's tournament. It's leaving the Carolinas for the first time in decades. I was curious, what was it about the greater Atlanta area's pitch that kind of stood out amongst some other cities you might have considered? Do you see the women's tournament kind of moving into the model of the men's where it rotates through a few different sites every year?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: We're trying to grow the game. This is about as good of a time since I've been in college sports to grow women's basketball in an exponential manner. We went to an open-bid process, and we allowed everybody within our East Coast footprint to bid.

So there were no predetermined outcomes, and at the end of the day the folks in the Greater Atlanta area over at Gas South Arena came up with a proposal that was outstanding. I give our head women's basketball coaches credit. We're coming off a year where I mentioned we had over 70,000 fans for our women's tournament, and we were the only conference to average over 10,000 fans per session.

So there's a high bar raised.

All indications from what we've seen and Jackie Carson, who oversees women's basketball has done a wonderful job with our coaches. So we're excited about that. We really are. The proof will be in the pudding. It's the first time we're going outside the state of North Carolina for a neutral site ACC women's game, 49 years.

All eyes will be watching to see what happens, but I have great anticipation, and I feel very confident from all that I've seen and heard and witnessed -- I was just down there two weeks ago -- that it will be a wonderful tournament as we continue to try to grow the game within our footprint.

**Q. The Score Act includes language about protecting student-athletes' rights. What specific rights need protection right now, and how can the ACC lead in this space beyond what's federally required?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: That's a great question. Listen, the SCORE Act does a few things, and I want to talk -- I'll finish with the student-athlete piece. We have had patchwork nationally. We have 36 different state laws that define what you can and can't do as it relates to compensation in





NIL. That is a race to the bottom.

When you have interstate competition, rules, laws, and how you play and how you handle competition needs to be set at the same standard. It's a re-affirmation for our student-athletes that they are students. They are students, and they are absolutely being paid and compensated. I feel great about all of that, but these are students.

There's language in This Score Act about degree completion, and it's beyond just completion after their eligibility is over. It's come back to school. If you haven't finished, for whatever reason, come back to school. We're going to pay for that. Medical care post-eligibility, which we have not had, right? Some schools have done it, but not across the board. This is across Division I.

Mental health care post-eligibility. It would also force Division I schools to have no fewer than 16 points, which there's always appeals about getting underneath. We have to have a standard and a level of sports that are being offered per institution. Codifying the House case is probably the last thing I would say that it does for student-athletes, meaning that it codifies the ruling of Judge Wilken that was implemented on July 1st. That is important.

If we don't get the SCORE Act or something very similar to the SCORE Act, I'm just stating there is trouble for college sports at a time when we're trying to modernize it and we're trying to settle it down. So we need to continue to push forward on that.

At the end of the day we've talked in here before about it's disappointing that we've had to go to Washington D.C. to help us, because we've been -- and I take responsibility -- we've been off stray in some of our decisions in the past and it's tough now to have to go to D.C. to get some of those things done, but that's where we find ourselves.

**Q. Commissioner, you mentioned earlier the new hires in the conference office, and I had a couple of questions on that. If you could maybe tell us a little bit about how you developed your restructuring plan, whether you expect any more executive additions, and then lastly, are you still going to be around 50 headquarters employees?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: One of your esteemed colleagues told me that the playoffs don't really start in baseball until somebody wins on the opposing team's field. I can't talk about your Braves, but the Cubs are going back to Chicago, so we'll see what happens here coming up.

I can't tell you how excited I am about our three new hires.

We have been in a little bit of a holding pattern. I'll just be very direct, as I always try to be with you. With some of the lawsuits and legal issues that we've had, we have not been able to move forward in some areas that we need to do. We have been now.

We've been freed up to have this massive reorganization that we went with in the spring time, but to add three additive positions, to have somebody every day looking at revenue, every day looking at branding and marketing, and every day from a sports tech, data, analytics perspective to me is game-changing for us.

Each of those individuals come with an incredible pedigree, incredible experience and achievements. So I think you'll see we'll have long-term effects in a positive way to the ACC.

We're coming off a year where we've generated more revenue than we ever have. I believe we'll reach over \$800 million this year. Made over \$700 million this year. 800 is the goal or more next year.

We've got the viewership incentives. We've got the incentives for performance. We'll start now getting schools in the \$50 million mark or so. That's advancement.

That all has come together. We've been able to do a few of these things with success initiatives and the viewership piece, but to add three critical staff members. We still stay around 50. We'll hire. I think we're about 47 or so with these three new adds, but we went through that reorganization back in March or April, which you and I talked about. Feel good about that.

So the number will remain the same. We have not outgrown our offices. We will not outgrow our offices. That's just not the size of a conference office.

When you think about 12,000 student-athletes, 28 sports, 18 amazing schools, and to do it with about 45 people, I'm proud of my staff. I think I have the best staff in the country as it relates to who I get to work with each and every day. They're so committed to the student-athletes. They're so committed to the student-athletes, so committed to the schools, and there's a passion about the ACC that's over at 620 Tryon Street.

**Q. Looking at the fact that you spoke on scheduling for football going more into the conference and going with nine instead of eight and then basketball leaning off of it going from 20 to 18, what can you say about as we look at these power conferences what these models are going to do as far as feeding more football-wise, but taking some away from the ACC**

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## **basketball-wise to be a multi-bid in both?**

JAMES J. PHILLIPS: Yeah, well, I'll start with the football piece of it. I'm proud that we were second in as it relates to getting to nine-game conference schedule and one Power Four. I would hope that all of the Power Four conferences would get there. That's meaningful.

We have been a conference that 8-2 has worked in football, and 26 games this year against P4 opponents in the nonconference. Eight more than anybody else. So we wanted to stay true to that ten-game moniker, but make a commitment that that tenth game was going to be a Power Four. Not a group of five or an FCS. So ten in football and then two that each institution will decide.

The basketball piece, that was a tougher move because we had expanded. When you expand, you're trying to play those teams more often, but I've just been so restless with men's basketball and where we've been. I've said that to you. I've used that word. I don't know of a better description of how I felt.

This is historically, historically, in men's college basketball the very best conference in the country. It just is. When you talk about the number of championships, when you talk about the number of success through the course of the 73 years, and then even most recently. The last four years were 36-18. It's the best winning percentage of any conference in the country. We don't have a problem winning when we get into the tournament. We've had a problem getting into the tournament. We've had five teams in the last four Final Fours, and four of them have been different teams. We've won three of the last ten national championships in basketball, and it's been a down period for the ACC. We're second, and we had three different teams: Virginia, North Carolina, and Duke.

We have to continue to pay attention to the legacy of this conference and the history, and it starts with men's basketball.

So that's kind of where we went. I'm excited about our new coaches. I just was talking with Sean Farnham. I don't know if he's in the room, but he does a really great job on ESPN. Everyone says the same thing. Our league is better. It's better. To what degree, we'll see. We'll see.

I hope we take a strong step forward from where we've been the last couple of years, but we are trending the right way with our returning coaches, with our new coaches, the investment in basketball on the women's and men's side and arenas and rev share and the rest of it.

So we need to get ourselves back to where we have been

historically.

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