

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Syracuse Orange

Coach Adrian Autry

Donnie Freeman

J.J. Starling

Men's Press Conference

ADRIAN AUTRY: Good afternoon, everybody. Just want to talk a little bit about our summer. This has been a very challenging summer for our guys. We had a really challenging summer, hard summer. I thought everybody responded. All of our guys really got better, made big strides.

In particular I thought Donnie had a really good summer after recovering from his injury. Came back, changed his body, worked really, really hard.

J.J. as well.

We're just excited. This is a group that really cares about each other. The joy that they have for each other's success. That's what I'm most excited about with this team this year, is for everyone to get a chance to see how much they care about each other and how connected they are.

I think that's going to bode well for us for this upcoming season.

Questions.

Q. This, as you know, is about family. You had the opportunity to play at Syracuse, to be an assistant coach at Syracuse, to be the next in line to Boeheim and to be the head coach now with Lawrence Moten's passing and Arthur Jones as well, we're reminded of family. Just what can you say about the S being a lot bigger and being a part of this family and what it means to you to coach the future members of the family?

ADRIAN AUTRY: You know, I think obviously hearing the news about Lawrence Moten passing and then days later with Art, it really puts things in perspective. We've always



been a family. I think in tough times I think that's when you really got to pull together.

I shared with these guys, Lawrence was a teammate of mine. These times are special, and that's why you got to have true relationships and true connections and have that joy for each other. Because once you stop playing, you know, weddings, whatever it is, these are the guys that are going to be a part of that.

We've already preached family to these guys when they came here, and I think they've seen it. They've had a chance to experience it. In the summer whenever our guys come in, they always stop in, stop by, spend some time with our guys and talk.

It's been a tough week for the Syracuse family, football and basketball, and for that I want to address the two young men that passed away way too early that meant a ton, and what better individuals. Just great individuals.

Q. In today's game roster continuity is rare. How have you approached building chemistry with so many moving parts, and do you think this year's group has a different level of cohesion going into the season?

ADRIAN AUTRY: I think that's always been a challenge. Obviously it's a little bit more difficult now just because of the freedom of the players, but I think with this year bringing back Donnie and J.J. and them being a part of the process of putting this team together. You know, they were a part of the meetings, they were part of the recruiting, they were a part of the visits, and I think that helped us a lot. I think that gave us a step forward, them being able to be a part of that.

I think that's going to help this group, and I think once the group got together, I think we gelled pretty quickly, more quickly than others, other teams that I've had. This year, this team gelled pretty quickly.

THE MODERATOR: Do you lean on J.J. and Donnie more so than you would returners based on the roster makeup this year?

ADRIAN AUTRY: Yeah, I think J.J. and Donnie -- you know, Donnie had a decision to make, and when he made that decision to come back and return and J.J. as well, I thought those are our building blocks.

There was no gray area about that when we recruited and went out. We knew that we were building around them and bringing pieces in for them to play with, and they got excited about that.

To lean on them, absolutely. They were a big part of being able to attract the talent and the players that we got this year.

Q. Lessons learned in these first couple of years for you as the head coach of this program, we've seen not just Syracuse, but a lot of ACC schools be in a situation where they're following a Hall of Famer. What have you learned in these last couple of years as you step into year three?

ADRIAN AUTRY: I think you learn patience. I think I've learned patience. It is a process no matter what. No one is immune to it, and you can't skip steps.

You know, there's no success without failure, and I think we've had our failures, and I think I've learned from those. Moving forward and building this team, I think the last two years is an accumulation of what this roster is this year.

Q. You spoke on family just a couple of minutes ago. What does it mean for you to be able to bring in a recruit like Kiyan Anthony; his father, very well-known at Syracuse. What is it like to bring him in and to continue recruiting and bringing people in from that area and people maybe former players' sons to Syracuse as well?

ADRIAN AUTRY: You know, when we had a chance to recruit Kiyan, and we recruited Kiyan and watched him obviously be with his dad being an alum, being able to watch him from his freshman year on, you know, I think it was really exciting, because it wasn't about his dad. It was about his ability. He got better, and he's a really good basketball player.

He was the No. 1 player in our state when he came out, and you have to be able to retain that when you have those players in your state, and to be able to keep him home and really home is exciting.

He's talented. The thing that I love about him is he's a part of the guys and he wants to get coached and he wants to be better, and he's shown that. He's progressed every year. So we're excited to have him.

Q. I was wondering, looking at this year's team and your makeup, is there something that is obvious much better than last year's team? Also, I wanted you to touch on playing in the Players Era Tournament in Las Vegas.

ADRIAN AUTRY: When we built this team we wanted to get bigger. We wanted to get quicker. Those are the things, and obviously you maintain your skills, your shooting, and stuff like that. You know, we just want to do get bigger and quicker overall as a program, increase our athleticism and positional size. That's what we went out to do.

Our guards, they're all 6'3" to 6'5"; wings 6'6" to 6'8", 6'9". In our front court we go up to 7 feet. We just wanted to be bigger and stronger and being able to have some type of versatility, so that was the main focus in putting this roster together.

And in playing in the Players Era, that's one of the biggest tournaments they have, and we need to be in that because that's where our program is. It's been there. That's the history of our program. So for us it's a great opportunity for us to get out there and compete and see where we're at and keep building and move forward.

So we're excited to be in that. It's a great field, great event, and we're looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with Donnie Freeman.

Q. Can you take us through a little bit of your rehab after you had your foot surgery and what this summer has been like for you?

DONNIE FREEMAN: Yeah, my rehab was tough mentally and physically not knowing when I got back. From building from top to bottom, I feel better than I did before I even got injured. My foot feels better than it did before. I mean, you got to just kind of learn myself and just kind of learn what I can get better on from top to bottom.

My rehab has been great. I'm in a better place than I was before, and I'm excited to get back on the floor.

Q. Donnie, when you look at that decision to come back to Syracuse because that opportunity for you last year was cut short, what was it about Syracuse in this world of free agency that you wanted to keep wearing the S on your chest, so to speak, for the orange and be a part of this team?

DONNIE FREEMAN: Yeah, despite what other people



might say or what you might hear, it was a no-brainer for me coming back. I felt like I had unfinished business here with my team and my coaches. I believe in the staff from top to bottom. I trust them and they trust me as well. This is where I wanted to be, and I felt like I had unfinished business, so it was a no-brainer for me to come back.

Q. Is there a certain player or team that you look forward to playing this year?

DONNIE FREEMAN: Not necessarily like player or team in particular. I'm kind of excited for every team on our schedule for the most part. I can't really pinpoint one time or one player in particular.

THE MODERATOR: Through your injury you talked about it being tough mentally and physically. What did you learn about yourself through the process of rehab?

DONNIE FREEMAN: The biggest thing for me was, like, I just never held my head or I never pouted about it even though I was sad about it. But I never held my head about it. It kind of made me stronger.

But I kind of learned -- I kind of used it as an opportunity to learn from a different view, point of view from the game. Seeing it from the sideline, I got to see different things, and I got to learn more about myself in total.

Q. I wanted to know about some of the players. I know you got some moving pieces in. Who is a player -- I mean, we know about Kiyan, Sadiq. Who is a player that not many people are talking about that you think will have a breakout season this year?

DONNIE FREEMAN: I think the X factor for us -- not even the X factor, but a player that people are sleeping on can be Tyler Betsey. He's 6'8", 6'9". He's strong. Long arms. Can defend can shoot. Really versatile. I think a lot of people are sleeping on him, but he'll wake up a lot of people.

I think another player that will wake a lot of people up is Nate Kingz as well. He was at Oregon State last year. He's one of the best shooters I've ever seen. I feel like he's going to wake a lot of people up for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We'll spend a few minutes with Mr. Starling.

Q. Being in the back court with Kiyan Anthony, this is a special moment and special opportunity, but to speak first on Kiyan and what it's like to work with him, and then secondly, the overall back court beyond the two of you.

J.J. STARLING: Yeah, Kiyan is a great kid. He's a worker along with our whole team. You know, he just came in willing to learn. We got really, really close in the summer. He's asking questions. He's in the gym getting shots up. That's what you want in your back court mate.

Like I said, just touching on the whole team and the back court as a whole, everybody is just in the gym pushing each other. Even after a long practice, we're staying after, getting shots up, playing ones. That's what you want in a team, and that's what you want daily to compete.

Q. Seems like from year to year you have improved since your freshman year last year. You scored about 17, 18 points. How have you embraced being a leader on this team, especially going into this year?

J.J. STARLING: Just getting more out of that scoring perspective and just more on leading, being more vocal, buying into what my coaches are telling me defensively. I can be more than just a scorer. I can be a playmaker. I can be a vocal leader on the floor, a voice that relays whatever the coaches are saying.

This year I just really want to, obviously, improve on the things that I've been doing well and then just really buying in on that defensive role that I know I can grow into.

Q. It's been a minute since we've seen Syracuse in the NCAA Tournament. What makes you believe looking at this staff and this roster that we'll see a return to grace for Syracuse in your opinion?

J.J. STARLING: I mean, I wish you guys were able to see practices. That would answer itself. Every day we're competing. We have this guy along with the other coaches pushing us every single day no matter if we think we're having a good day, you know, they're on ourselves because they know that we can be better.

And that's what we need. We have the right pieces, the right group of guys that just want to play for each other and want to be there for each other and just compete and like you said, get to the NCAA tournament.

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