

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets Coach Damon Stoudamire Baye Ndongo Kowacie Reeves, Jr.

Men's Press Conference

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: First, glad to be here with these two guys. Looking forward to a different team, but I think we'll have an exciting team. We'll have a deeper team.

I got a talented group of freshmen that I'm excited about mixed with an older group that I'm excited about and excited for Kowacie being able to come back and play another year for me. You know, he's one of the guys that I think is really going to benefit this year with being with the crew that we have, so I'm excited for him. And obviously this guy right here, Baye, I'm looking forward to having him back another year obviously.

You know, these guys are here because when I got this job, they were -- Wacie was dang near the first guy that came out of the portal, and Baye was the first high school guy. So they've been with me three years. It's a rarity, but I appreciate them. I know that they're going to do big things.

But I'm excited about this season. We have one goal. We want to make the NCAA Tournament. You need short-term goals along the way, but we want to make the tournament, and that's our goal and that what we're working for each and every day.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You obviously had a successful career at Arizona and a successful NBA career. Have you showed any of your tape from the 54-point performance with the Blazers or the 45-point performance with Arizona? You showed them that you used to give guys the business back in the day?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: So I'm not going to say -- which actually it might have been both of them. These guys just



had a retro jersey room in the back, and you know, they put up a No. 34 for the Boston Celtics. They both thought it was Shaq, but Shaq was 33 with Boston when he was there.

So I say that to say this: Although that wasn't Shaq's prime years, these guys have no clue.

Now, what I will say, though -- and they'll tell you -- they'll tell you this -- I never talk about what I did as a player because I wanted to show them that I cared about them, and I knew eventually that they would go back and start to watch film.

Both of these guys have done it, and they always be, like, Coach, you don't ever talk about this stuff. I be, like, It was a long time ago.

But they know, and I think that's the beauty of it. The beauty of being a coach now is that I've sat in those chairs, and I got experiences that they're going through.

I think I tried to share those experiences in different ways. It's not necessarily talking about myself, but I will talk to these guys about those times. What I do a lot of the time is I just give them those moments and let them think about whatever that moment entail and then they will come back and talk to me about it.

Q. I like when I see guys that I grew up watching, like you and Penny Hardaway and Stackhouse and Hubert Davis, and you come back and coach in college and give them the game you guys know and give to the younger generation coming up. I think that's an awesome thing to do for the basketball community and make them great men as well. The freshmen you was talking about, will they have an immediate impact with your team, and if you played in the NBA today, how many points would you average?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: I think that we have a couple of freshmen that will impact from day one. I think that both of these guys would say that Mohamed Sylla to me would be one of the best, you know, freshmen in the country.



You know, I think that he runs like a gazelle. He gets up and down. He's really strong. He can rebound. He can block shots. Probably the only reason he wasn't in the McDonald's Games and the Hoop Summits and all these different things is because he got over here so late. So he's barely been in the States for a year.

I'm looking forward to him having an impact on our team. But just the collective energy that freshmen have -- and I remember when I was in college. We brought in five freshmen. It's just the energy that they bring each and every day, and they compete, and that's what I love about that group.

I assume that when you asked me that question about how many points I would average today, you're asking if I was 21- or 22-year-old Damon Stoudamire and not 52-year-old Damon Stoudamire. I never even try to talk about, you know, what it would be, but I will say this. You can't touch anybody. You shoot a lot of threes, and a lot of this stuff they were telling me, that's what I was doing back then when they told me don't do it, and I think my rookie year I averaged 9-19; my second was 20-8; the third year was like 17-8, 17-7.

So I would be 20 and 10. I mean, you know, I would be 20-10. I don't think that that would be out of the question.

Q. Coach, a couple of hours ago Jim Phillips came up here and talked about how important it was to get back to where the ACC wants to be. Georgia Tech has obviously had a decent slice of the storied history to the ACC, but what's Georgia Tech's role in getting back to where the ACC wants to be and what's the plan to get back there for you specifically?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: Well, I think we're a big part of the plan. I think we have a great institution, and I think that we're in a great city. We're not that far away.

In two years we've gotten better. Last year was so crazy to do what we did with essentially six players. That's what makes this coming year so exciting.

I think that not only our program, but collectively as a conference if we can win 85 to 90% of the nonconference games, I think that changes the perception. I think what happens is that perception turns to reality for a lot of people, because they don't watch TV.

So you only gain momentum when people watch TV, so if you don't win early, then you don't gain momentum. When you win early, you gain momentum. I think that just helps the conference.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. We'll take questions for Baye.

Q. What is it like now having more big men to play with and being able to not have to play that five all the time on the court for them? How has that adjustment been for you?

BAYE NDONGO: I mean, it's been great so far, because having to play like we do this year, a lot of freshmen are coming up and a lot of guys that coming from the transfer portal.

It feel good to have some players that can actually really play actually really good, and especially that they're going to help us this year a lot with everything. I just got to keep getting better and trying to help my team with everything that I could and let the freshmen do what they got to do and I do what I got to do, everybody do what they got to do, and I feel like we be better.

Q. Last year was obviously physically very taxing for you, but as you look back, is it possibly a positive moving forward because you found out what your limits or maybe you were somewhat limitless in what you were able to do physically and hang in there with all those minutes?

BAYE NDONGO: I mean, last year it was kind of different, because all the injuries we had and how we started the season. We started kind of slow. I feel like this year will be different, because we have a lot of players that are coming in ready to play, ready to make an impact right away.

I would say that you just got to do your best and we got a bench, and I feel like, Coach, like he say in practice, he will use everybody if he can.

I be like I just got to do what I got to do and just let the rest of the guy take care what they got to do.

THE MODERATOR: Last year 24 blocked shots. Obviously your size gives you the advantage for blocking shots, but what is it about your eye being able to track to the ball that allows you to be such a good shot blocker?

BAYE NDONGO: I honestly don't really know. I just be out there just playing hard as I can and just trying to help my team. It's not something that I'm looking to do every time. It's not something I'm looking not to do every time. I'm just out there playing the game, how I can help my team win every time, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll take questions for



Kowacie.

Q. Wacie, what was it like last year to get shut down early in the season and to have to watch for the year and then make the decision to come back as a redshirt?

KOWACIE REEVES JR: Yeah, it was pretty tough. I never had a season-ending injury in my life ever. It was definitely some triumph there, some perseverance there.

I give a lot of credit to, like I said before, the institution, the program, and Coach, because he just has an unwavering commitment to us as players. So my support system was super strong.

Physically and mentally I was well-kept, and I was always reassured that, you know, in whatever I decided to do, that I was going to have full support.

THE MODERATOR: Along those lines, what did you learn about yourself during that process of being injured?

KOWACIE REEVES JR: It was a real humbling experience. I learned a lot about humility. I learned a lot about manhood. I learned a lot about just -- again, I learned a lot about the humanization factor of basketball. I attest a lot of that to watching Coach lead by example.

You have to come in and maybe not be feeling the best, but you still are preparing for rehab. You still have to try to have an impact on the guys in a certain way, even if vocally it may not be hitting in depth as you want it to be because you're not physically there with them.

I just accepted that fact, and I think it helped me just displaying humility and just realizing that what I have in store in my head may not always be materialized in my reality, but what I can control is my approach and my mentality.

Q. We always ask this of the coaching side, but what's it like when you have roster turnover like teams do nowadays? Five guys come out. Four guys transfer in. High schoolers come in. What's it like for a guy brought up here as a leader, what's your role in making sure those transitions happen as smoothly as possible?

KOWACIE REEVES JR: Coach has a saying. He says when you meet in a circle at the end of practice, he says this circle will never be the same again the next year. Players are going to go to the next level. Some guys are going to leave. That's just the reality of the business.

So for me and what I have learned and how I understand and perceive it is that as the older guy, I'm the oldest on the team now, you just have to have a real mature approach into letting guys really understand in depth the seriousness of the situation.

Like there's a time and place for everything, and I think this group does a good job of knowing there's a time and place for everything. I think this group does a good job of knowing this circle will not be the same next year and knowing that you don't have the amount of time that you think you have I think gives everybody the feeling of urgency, and I think it gives everybody the feelings of camaraderie and togetherness for the time being to have a deep gratitude for that.

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