

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Tuesday, October 7, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Stanford Cardinal**

**Coach Kyle Smith**

**Benny Gealer**

**Chisom Okpara**

Men's Press Conference

KYLE SMITH: We're really excited to be here our second year in the ACC, coming off what we thought was a very productive year. Our goal was to become a relevant program in this league. It's an honor to be in this league. We think it's the best college basketball conference in the country, and it's a testament of just the history of the league and Tobacco Road and what not.

We won 21 games last year. I think we finished seventh, which was better than predicted. Our goal after becoming relevant was to retain as much of our roster as we could. We brought 11 guys back from last year and five guys that started games, three consistent starters. I think we are returning the most minutes in the league.

So as far as being on schedule for what we're trying to build, which is a program where guys want to be at Stanford, want the Stanford experience, and trying to get Stanford basketball back to where it was 20 years ago. We're excited about it, and these guys behind me are doing an awesome job of trying to get us there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for Coach.

**Q. When you look at the ACC going from 20 to 18 conference-wise games and giving you more nonconference opportunities, how do you balance that with being one of the West Coast teams within this Atlantic Coast Conference, and what do you look for? Do you look to kind of lean into rivalries, stay on the West Coast? How do you manage it?**

KYLE SMITH: Well, we think it's a decent deal because it might be one less trip, but I think we added Colorado as one of our games, another one. So I think there's some old rivalries in there with the old Pac-12 and Mountain West



that probably makes more sense doing that, because they're good programs and will give us opportunities to get some Quad 1 wins and get us ready to play our East Coast partners in the league.

**Q. Coach, last year was a learning experience with all the extra travel. How did that affect your team, and do you make any plans this year to do something different?**

KYLE SMITH: We're not going to do too much. The school has invested in making it a little better on the travel, which I mean, like I said, I came from Washington State, and that travel was harder, I promise you. I just think second time around we'll be more prepared.

Like I said, we're Stanford. We have some of the best technology in sports science as far as hydration and compression and our strength and conditioning. Michael Robinson does a great job of getting these guys prepared. Even for this trip out here for Media Days he had them huddled up taking some kind of liquid. They were doing their thing.

I should have got in on it. And our trainer, Larry Jones, is great too. He gets down to it. You don't want to make it too big a deal. We like to look at it we get to make those trips playing in this league. A lot of people would trade places with us in a sec. It eventually gets down to putting the ball in the basket.

THE MODERATOR: On a lighter note, you are known for nerd ball due to your interest in analytics. With the way that analytics are exploding through so many vehicles throughout the country, throughout our society, are you going to have to repurpose yourself as being a nerd baller, because everybody is going to be playing nerd ball, right?

KYLE SMITH: Well, that's true. I'm at the place where it's king of the nerds. There's no doubt about it. Look who is running our football program. He's the ultimate. Andrew Luck, so we're good there.

We'll zig when other people are zagging. They're getting on the analytics. We'll dive into the heart and minds of



getting these guys because coaching gets down to that relationship and motivating people to get down to their why, why do they do it. I'm sure these guys have talked about it a lot today.

To lean into the Stanford experience. We're lucky to be there. It's an awesome university and kind of living in an Olympic Village with other athletes that are Olympians. We'll move to that direction, too.

It's tough to catch us on Nerdom.

**Q. You mentioned analytics. Could you describe the hustle points per possession analytic that you used to kind of critique the players and stuff in practices and games, what goes into that?**

KYLE SMITH: Yeah, as best I can. There's about 55 statistical categories, and it's basically quantifying intangibles is what we're doing, stuff that won't show up on a box score that we value, and it's our own internal efficiency rating. These guys get to know it better year-over-year.

Essentially winning plays minus non-winning plays divided by possessions is your HPP. It gets a little complicated, because you're basically grading every decision they make and what their responsibility is. If they do well, they get positives. If they blow a coverage or make a mistake, that's going to be punitive. I think it tightens up our margins. It's a way to improve the team.

Helps in individual growth, too, but really focus their concentration on things that matter.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Switch spots with Benny. Questions for Benny.

**Q. You're a former walk-on, and you earn your scholarship starting in '23-'24. That's a massive transition. What did going from being nonscholarship to scholarship teach you?**

BENNY GEALER: First of all, I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity even to walk on at such a great school like Stanford. As soon as I got the opportunity I jumped on it because it's just the combination of athletics and academics, you really can't beat it.

Yeah, it's just been a great journey. A lot of self-belief. I keep telling people, I never felt like a walk-on. I was just a player paying my way, and every day just show up, do the right things, and I'm grateful to be in the position I am and just kept working, kept believing.

Now I'm in a leadership role, which is great.

**Q. Benny, going off of that, like you said, going from a walk-on, never really seeing yourself as that, and now having this leadership role, what does that say to a road that maybe less traveled in this journey of collegiate athletics? What would you say to somebody out there in high school that's trying to find that opportunity and maybe needs that pick-me-up through adversity?**

BENNY GEALER: Yeah, like you said, the road less traveled. I think everyone has their own path. There's no one way to do it, right? We all have different experiences. So there's not one formula for anything in life.

For me it was like I kept mentioning, hard work and self-belief are the two things and just falling in love with the process, are something that Coach Smith is always telling us as well, right? You just have to surrender to the outcome. If you have the right habits, the right work qualities then good things should happen to you.

**Q. Coach noted that his goal kind of was to get Stanford back to where it was 20 years ago. Obviously having not played 20 years ago in this program, but as far as your goal for this season, where does your role and your responsibility lie for that goal?**

BENNY GEALER: Yeah, just incredibly grateful for what Coach Smith did to the program so far. He came in and we tied our most wins at Maples with 17. Just bringing in that culture has been incredible. Looking up to him as a mentor and how he brought all our guys together when we entered a new league, and he was obviously a new coach with a ton of new players.

Last year was just an amazing, amazing year for us. Projected 17th; ended up finishing 7th. He has a formula that we all believe in and trust with the hustle stats, the nerd ball, and a great staff behind him.

Then, like you said, 20 years ago we also have a staff member, Eric Reveno, who has been incredible. He coached with Montgomery when Stanford was a very successful team. I don't think anything changes as far as the process. The coaching staff, they have a great formula, and we just follow that every day. I foresee our team being successful, really successful.

The goal is to make it to the tournament and go as far as possible. I think we have the group to do it and the staff to do it.

THE MODERATOR: Benny, thank you. We will finish our



afternoon with the big man.

**Q. You're a sociology major. Your head coach has been able to turn programs around in his three previous stops. What is it that you're learning about sociology and your coach that you believe allows him to make these big switches?**

CHISOM OKPARA: Yeah, no, first is habit building. Definitely what I learned in sociology is how certain leaders have certain habits that they follow, and Coach Smith has great habits. He has great habits that he instilled in all his players. I know some of his previous players from his previous stops, and they all bark on the same things of his hustle stats, and his ability to instill confidence in his players I feel like has led him and led his players to great outcomes, including here at Stanford.

**Q. I believe your sister transferred from Dartmouth to Stanford for women's tennis. What has that experience been like for you to not only be at Stanford and be a Cardinal, but to have it be a family affair?**

CHISOM OKPARA: Yeah, it's been awesome. It's been amazing. Yeah, last year she was at Stanford playing tennis, and then ultimately got a scholarship to finish out the season.

So, yeah, it's been amazing having another person from home. She's like a mother figure to me, and she's always there to support me, guide me. Yeah, she always there when I feel down. When I feel up, she's always right there staying consistent.

It was another thing that helped me decide to come to Stanford out of the portal, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Chisom, last year you were a CSC Academic All-District honoree and ACC All-Academic team member in 2025. What's the secret? What's the trick in balancing athletics and academics?

CHISOM OKPARA: The main thing is just time management. My father always barked to me and my siblings to manage your time, make time for what matters, and then you'll have time for what doesn't later.

Just making sure you're on top of your work, making sure you go to bed early, all the little things that add up to equate to a good outcome, which is pretty good grades and playing well on the basketball court.

THE MODERATOR: I am curious, you just finished up an internship with a commercial real estate firm. What do you want to be when you grow up?

CHISOM OKPARA: Outside of an NBA player, probably get into real estate, too, like Arrillaga. If you know John Arrillaga, he damn near owns everything at Stanford, so I want to be just like that guy (laughing.)

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