

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 8, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Jai Lucas

Tre Donaldson

Malik Reneau

Ernest Udeh, Jr.

Men's Press Conference

JAI LUCAS: What an honor it is to be up here to represent the University of Miami and being a part of this historic conference.

But I also want to start just before we get started is just thanking Coach L, Coach Larranaga for the last 14 years. Not only everything he did for the University of Miami, but also for the conference.

Also, as well for the game of basketball.

You know, for me starting this journey, as my first year head coach and first time running a program, it's important for me to make sure I built my foundation with guys who had pride in being at least from the state of Florida or from the area.

I think it's hard in this day and age now with this portal and how things are to really get guys to buy into the university, and that's my job to get it.

But at least this first year I wanted to start it with guys who had pride being where they're from, and these three guys I brought with me, Tre Donaldson, Malik Reneau, Ernest Udeh, were the first three guys I attacked in the portal and wanted to build it with. One, with them being from the state, but also just watching them and my foundation and how I want to play and how I want to build this team. I knew I wanted these three to be kind of the core, especially in building the first year of this program as well.

So I'm excited about where we are and where we're headed and our opportunity to compete in the ACC, and also in our schedule in the preseason as well this year. The thing I wanted to really make sure we establish right



away was just the culture of defense, and that's kind of my background and where I'm from and what I've been able to do.

So for me I wanted to build it in that vision, and I think part of that is, one, you've got to have great positional size, and that's kind of also how I built the team, and in doing that, it also gives us great versatility on that defensive end.

I felt that was the way to be most competitive right away, especially in this league, but moving forward in college basketball, I think it's a big part of it, too.

So I'm really excited where we are, where we're headed, but I'm excited where we can be once we get into conference play going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach. You in that intro talked about Jim Larranaga and what he meant to this program. To go deeper into maybe what he means to you and what that connection is if you have a deeper connection with him and then, secondly, just what does it mean that Miami saw in you as a first-time head coach that you were the right fit just reflecting on the fact that this opportunity came with such a storied program?

JAI LUCAS: Yeah, Coach L and my father have known each other for a really long time. You know, my dad was in college, in the summers they would go around and work at other schools' basketball camps. He went and worked at Davidson, and every morning at 6:00 a.m. Him and Coach L would get up and work out together. They have had a bond and a friendship ever since then.

Ever since I took the job, he was one of the first people to call me, congratulate me, and kind of talk me through it. And he was at practice yesterday. He has an open invitation, like I told him. This is really his program that he's built and took to new heights, so you know, for me just having somebody who has sat in the chair and been very successful at the University of Miami with the basketball program has been important.

Then, you know, just for me this is a great opportunity. I understand it is a big opportunity, but everything that I have



been able and been blessed to do, my time in coaching these last 12 years, one, starting with the great coaches that I've worked for, you know, but I've been able to almost do every job within a program.

I started as a GA. I was Director of Operations. I've been a head coach, associate head coach -- I'm sorry, assistant coach, associate head coach, offensive coordinator, defensive coordinator, recruiting coordinator.

So I've done a little bit of everything, and I think just being able to kind of going through the process give them my vision of what I felt the job could be and just building on the foundation that was already there and taking it into this new era. I think we kind of aligned in that.

Q. You talked about, hey, we're excited where we are and we're excited as we head kind of into conference play. Yesterday Commissioner Jim Phillips was talking about how excited he was for the vision for the ACC and where it can possibly be. What is your role in this?

JAI LUCAS: My role is to make us as competitive as possible and make sure that our schedule and our nonconference also coming into the conference where we're able to be as high of a, I guess, a NET team and a Quad team as possible and being competitive.

Where the ACC traditionally is one of the greatest basketball conferences there is, and we should be a conference moving forward that we should put at least six to seven teams.

I think, you know, it's hard because it's a reset, right? We've had all these great giants of coaches who were in the ACC that have retired in the last couple of years with Coach K and Coach Boeheim and Roy Williams, Coach Hamilton, and going on.

So there was going to be a reset and a couple of years where it needed to kind of figure out what it was going to be. I think with some of the new coaches in with Coach Odom and Coach Wade and the success they've had so many places, that we're headed and moving towards the right direction of being the premiere conference in basketball again.

Q. You mentioned that it's Coach L's program, but with basically a blank slate on the roster, it's your roster.

JAI LUCAS: Yes.

Q. Is it almost an advantage to be able to pick and

choose and build a team in your own style and image rather than have to kind of build around a returning core?

JAI LUCAS: I mean, it's the biggest thing. It's a great question, because it's the biggest thing and especially determining this first year. Yes and no.

I guess the no part is you have to do -- you have to get 13 new players, or 12 new players. If you have a few that are left over and a few that stay and maybe six or seven new players that you have to get, but then the good part is it is in my vision of what I feel is comfortable with me and how I want to play and my coaching style.

Also, you have a week, maybe two weeks recruiting period when you're in the portal and trying to figure out, get guys on campus, get guys on Zoom, and figuring out who fits and who meshes.

I think the biggest part is once you get everybody, trying to create some type of connection and some type of just relationship throughout the summer moving towards when you play your first game I think is the hardest part.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Questions for Tre.

Q. Your early experience within the ACC, how does it differ or how does it feel similar from the conference and the play where you just came from?

TRE DONALDSON: From what I know about the ACC it's a very physical league, very fast-paced league with a lot of different talent in it.

Me coming from the SEC and the Big Ten, I have a small familiarity with it. So just me being able to -- me being around the block a couple of times knowing how this college basketball can go, I feel like it gives me somewhat of an advantage.

Q. Tre, whenever you were looking for a school to go to, what was it about Miami that made you want to come?

TRE DONALDSON: Just the staff that not only believed in me, but that can help me and that I can help the staff as well. Just a staff that I'm familiar with. A lot of the coaches we have I'm familiar with, I've been around since I was little; and a staff that can help me with the little things.

They knew I can play basketball, but just help me be a better man, be a better brother, son, whatever. Just bigger aspects of life.



Q. To be in this place where you have a new head coach and a new roster and being a part of that, it essentially is that new chapter, that fresh page, that new era for Miami basketball. What does that mean to you that you get to be a part of this clean slate, so to speak?

TRE DONALDSON: It means a lot. We have a great team, but I mean, not only just a great team, a great staff. Just being able to get a fresh start and do something that's bigger than you. I mean, playing for the University of Miami, coming in after a rough year they had last year, just being able to give them a fresh slate and a new spark and a new energy is our biggest thing.

Q. You're from Tallahassee, I believe. I read somewhere that your mom played softball at Florida State.

TRE DONALDSON: Yes, sir.

Q. What does she think about you playing for the rival university?

TRE DONALDSON: My mom has been one of my biggest supporters, if not my biggest supporter. Her and my dad. My mom is going to support me no matter what. When I got in the portal, she was obviously Florida State, but she understood that it was my decision what was best for me and my future.

With me choosing Miami, she's all on board. I mean, she's going to wear Miami stuff. She won't be in no Florida State stuff. None. (Smiling).

THE MODERATOR: And that's on the record. Thank you, Tre. Questions for Malik.

Q. You spent three seasons obviously in a different conference with a different team. You had expectations for yourself there. I don't think that your expectations are going to change for you, but what do you think your role is now that you're here at Miami?

MALIK RENEAU: Just being an experienced guy, I think my role is to be the leader on the team, get guys where they need to go, and also have a chip on my shoulder when I'm on the court.

The Big Ten, the way the style of play is super physical, slow-paced, and every game is super important, especially going down the stretch, the conference play. I think that's the same here in the ACC.

I think every game is super important, whether you are

playing Duke, Wake Forest, no matter who it is. I think it's extremely important to go out there every single day and give it your all.

Q. What was it about Coach Lucas that made you want to come to Miami and play for him?

MALIK RENEAU: Yeah, I mean, Coach Lucas has been recruiting me for a while. Whether I didn't answer the phone or not, he's been recruiting me for a long time.

Just the staff he brought with him, they have a vision for me to get me better every single day, put me in the right positions every single day, and put me in positions to become a leader on the team, to put guys in the right position to do everything successful on the court.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Malik. Questions for Ernest.

Q. How would you describe the two teammates behind you right now?

ERNEST UDEH JR: They're my brothers. You know, everybody understands basketball is a great opportunity to do a lot of things in life, but I do understand that the ball is going to stop bouncing one day, and these two dudes I have behind me -- I mean, Coach included -- we're a family. The respect that we have amongst the four of us, man, it's unbelievable. I can't think of a better situation to be in.

Q. With all the new guys coming in from all different directions, what are some of the things that you guys have done this summer and moving into the fall to kind of build that chemistry, to get to know each other and become, like you said, a family?

ERNEST UDEH JR: Understand what we're here today. Every single one of us, 1 through 14, we all have a goal, dreams and aspirations for ourselves individually, but we all understand this game and we all understand what this game asks of us. We understand why we play it, and that's to win at the highest level, compete at the highest level.

The emphasis from the coach and the coaching staff and also from each other is we want to win. The question that now stands is what do we do to win?

Hanging on hats on the defensive end, buying into the details and everything that's asked of us during practice, because again, each day is valuable, each practice is valuable. We can't waste an opportunity.

So understanding where we have to start from, and that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

being on the defensive end of the ball and everything will take care of itself.

Q. You had the opportunity to see what the Big 12 was like in competition at TCU and Kansas. What can you say about what you took away from that experience and that level of competition to what you are excited about inside of the ACC?

ERNEST UDEH JR: Physicality. Everybody understands what comes with the Big 12 and playing in the Big 12. You look at the teams, whether it be Kansas, Houston, all the teams that I've played against in that conference, the one thing that's always going to stand out is physicality.

Everyone understands that basketball is a physical game, no matter where you are playing, no matter what level you're at. Just coming into this conference, like I talked about, the defensive end is something we have to hang our hats on.

Obviously, you can talk about executing sets and plays and being mentally responsive on the court, but at the end of the day another person with a different color is going to line up in front of you. You can't cower. You got to be physical. Show your physicality each and every day you're stepping out on the court and don't get out-toughed.

That's the one thing. You've got to show your tough every night you're out there on the court. The tougher team wins always.

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