

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Boston College Eagles

Coach Kate Popovec-Goss

Jocelyne Grier

Grace Oliver

Women's Press Conference



^ START Boston College

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS:

JOCELYNE GRIER:

GRACE OLIVER:

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am happy to welcome Boston College to the stage. In her first year we have Kate -- well, I'm going to go Coach Pop, as well as Grace Oliver and Jocelyne Grier. Good morning, ladies.

Kate, you had great success at rebuilding a Bradley program from four wins in your first season to 20 wins and a WNIT bid this past season. What lessons did you learn as a head coach in that rebuild that you plan to apply now at BC?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: Culture is everything. I think just starting there and being process-driven. I think especially your first couple of years it's really easy to get caught up in the wins and the losses and very similar to the NBC. This is a beast of a league. You're not going to come in and waltz through it.

Being willing to endure say big thing, and also just finding people who you feel like fit you as a head coach and fit the institution. I think we're off to a good start so far.

THE MODERATOR: You have three returners and you have added nine new players, of which six of those are freshmen. As you begin the transition to BC, what were the priorities as you built this team and what unique challenges do you face with nine new players?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: So I think for me the first thing was just retaining the right players and people that felt like BC was still home for them and that fit our style of play. I think we did a great job in that one sitting here with me right now. She embodies everything that's great about BC.

For me it was evaluating, okay, where do we start and what do we need? Also, having the opportunity to bring a New England kid home. Being lucky that Grace had her sights set on BC and that it was the right fit was an awesome start for us, and she fits who we are.

I think just really finding players, again, who we felt like, A, filled a need talent-wise, but B, also fit BC and saw BC as a home and really believed in what we were building.

I was very transparent through the process that it's going to be tough. You know, it's not just going to be an instantaneous flip. It's going to take some time, and I really wanted players to understand that and what they were signing up for.

THE MODERATOR: Jocelyn, why BC? Why stay? Why all of it?

GRACE OLIVER: I chose to stay at BC because...

JOCELYNE GRIER: I chose to stay at BC because it's an amazing school. The relationships you make there are out of this world. Then when I first had my talk with Coach Pop I just knew I was going to stay. She's just so really and genuine, I just knew she was the coach for me.

THE MODERATOR: Grace, what have your first impressions been of Coach Pop through the early practices and workouts?

GRACE OLIVER: I've really enjoyed Coach Pop coaching us. I think that she obviously, like Jocelyne just said, keeps it real, and that's the type of coach that I need, especially if I'm going to progress as a player both on and off the court.

Every single day we're all up in her office talking to her. She's just very personable, but then when we get down on



the court, like, it's definitely time to, like, be focused and it's time to get down to business.

I think being able to have that balance, it's been great.

Q. Coach, the ACC is known for its competitive women's basketball. What will it take to succeed at Boston College in conference play?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: Yeah, competitive women's basketball is being very kind I think when you are talking about nine teams that made the tournament, you know, five making the Sweet 16, and just the rich history in this league. This will be our 50th ACC tournament. There's just so much.

I think to be successful you have to stay true to yourself. There's 18 teams in this league. You have to understand it's going to be a process.

So I think for us measuring wins and losses, not just in the stat column, but in our progression, is going to be really, really important these first couple of years.

Listen, we're not just going to come in and waltz to the top of this league. That's not realistic. It is a battle night in, night out. I think it's more about laying the identity of our program and how we want to play and continuing to recruit the right players to BC.

Again, I think I was very candid with our players that that was what this was going to look like. So for us I think just navigating our own journey versus getting caught up in everything else, because if we do, it's going to be a long year.

THE MODERATOR: Kate, you talked about you want the team to play the right way. What does that look like? Prepare the ACC fans for what BC women's basketball is going to look like this season.

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: It starts with defense for us. I've always been a defensive-minded coach. I think defense wins you championships. No matter how much the game has evolved, at the end of the day you have to be able to guard.

I think this year you're going to see a variety of defenses from us, which was a little bit different than maybe what I anticipated in taking the job, but it's what our roster needs right now.

Then you're going to see a free-flowing, very versatile offense where everyone gets a piece of the pie, and I think that's a really fun way to play. Our kids are learning it in

realtime.

It's been fun, right? (Laughing.) We will shoot a high volume of threes, but they're predicated on being the right shots off of paint touches and off of ball movement and pace.

It will be really exciting and a grit and a joy of the game. If you are watching us and not the Xs and Os, I hope you say two things, they had fun. Something is something.

THE MODERATOR: Jocelyne, you had a big smile on your face as she was describing this style. How is it fitting your skill set? Just talk about learning this new system.

JOCELYNE GRIER: I think it's perfect for my skill set. I love to shoot threes, so that's amazing. It's fast-paced. The ball moves a lot, so it's not getting stuck in anybody's hand.

I would say it's a bit difficult to understand at times, but once you actually do it two, three times, you just got to rep it out, but it's good.

Q. What areas of your game have you focused on improving during the offseason?

GRACE OLIVER: I think a really big focus for me has been improving my perimeter play. Last year I was very back to the basket and I was able to step out and shoot threes, but just being more comfortable handling the ball, coming off screens, getting to a midrange pull-up.

It's really been an area of focus for me and especially like Coach Pop just said, offense is really free-flowing, so it was important that I start to get better at those skills and kind of progress that into my game. So I would definitely say those areas.

JOCELYNE GRIER: I would say I've been improving on my efficiency, because it's a big difference between taking shots and making shots. I think that's the biggest thing I've worked on.

THE MODERATOR: Huge maturity statement right there.

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: I'm very proud right now. I'm, like, okay, we're listening in our meetings.

No, I think Joce's willingness to score is something you look for in a player. I think for me I love that aggressive mindset. I always say it's easier to bring a player in a little bit than try and push them out, so the fact that she's got that scoring mentality is really fun for a head coach. Trust me (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: Grace, last season you led Wake Forest in scoring with 14 points a game. More impressively, you led the ACC in field goal percentage at 60%. I guess to Jocelyne's point, this is what Coach Pop needs. What did you learn about the ACC last season that has prepared you to make an impact now at BC?

GRACE OLIVER: Yeah, I think just knowing, like, what you are getting into every single night. No matter what team, you know, the players you're playing against, very versatile and kind of just knowing your strengths and how you can use them on the court.

I think that's what I was able to be really successful at last year. Kind of being able to read the defense and make those types of reads to be able to, you know, get to where I want to score and that type of stuff.

I definitely see that translating this year into the type of offense that we run, so I'm very excited.

Q. You've already mentioned culture a couple of times. Did you talk to us about what the fans are like at BC and what they add to that culture?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: I think the biggest thing in taking over a program, right, you get to read about it online. You can read statistics. You can talk to people, but until you're actually on the campus feeling it every day, there are things that you're constantly learning.

For me, one of the things that I had heard was just the BC community is so proud and so excited. The alumni and, you know, the current student body, and I think that that has been the best thing about BC that I couldn't understand until I got there was just the pride for the institution.

I think for us really tapping into that, winning basketball games, and giving them something to be proud of. Because one of the great things about BC, the big joke is how do you know someone went to BC? They'll tell you in the first five minutes they talk to you. That's the type of school you want to be at, though.

I think it's not at a surface level. It's really deep-rooted. Our fans are real. Our alumni want to help our players. So just the community that BC has I think is honestly one of the most unique and formative in the country. So now just making sure that they show up for our games, and I believe that they will.

I think if you build, they will come because they're really proud. Again, I think one of the things that was important

for us was tapping in into New England, so securing Grace and getting her back home. Boston wants to see Boston. They want to see hometown kids come play.

They're not opposed to people from North Carolina either. I think they'll cheer.

I just think the sense of community at BC is one of the best in the country. I'm excited to see how that translates to their support of our program. I'm really confident in that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Pop just hit on it. Not just North Carolina, a Charlotte native.

JOCELYNE GRIER: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: What's it going to be like to play the AC tournament at the Spectrum Center in March for you?

JOCELYNE GRIER: I think it's going to be exciting. I'll have lots of family come. I'm going to have the whole city out. I just think it's very exciting, and even to travel here three times this year: NC State, UNC, and Wake Forest.

I just think it's very wholesome.

THE MODERATOR: Kate, so many times we focus on what a team needs to be better at, but what has surprised you or maybe motivated you about what this team does well already?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: I think we're shooting the ball really well, which is exciting from a tactical standpoint, but I think more than anything, the biggest thing that we've worked on and that has evolved for me in particular over the past month is just the commitment to doing this the right way. Like, how we are practicing, what our habits are becoming, the energy when they step into the gym.

I think that had you walked into our gym in June, you would have thought that we weren't a successful program. I think if you walked in now, you would think that we have a lot of experience and we're a winning program. That's where it starts.

So just to see that translate and honestly to see them grow more comfortable being who they are, I think we have a lot of new players. I'm a new coach to everyone. So I think that that transition period for us was a little murky.

You know, I think the girls might echo that sentiment, but I think what we've found through that is really exciting. I think there's a sense of empowerment in the gym. I think players are starting to grow confident in who they are as players and what that adds to who we are as a team at BC.



That's been a really fun transition for us to see.

Q. What areas of your game have you all been working on to get ready for this season?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: So I think the thing as a head coach that's the hardest is you want to work on everything. We need to work on everything, but I think that, you know, for us defense is always a focus. We're going to focus on it every day, whether it's ten minutes a day, whether it's the entire practice, which I would love every day.

But I think that, you know, the biggest things that we've been working on are just picking what we feel is most important to our identity.

So the first thing for us is rebounding.

The second thing is execution on offense.

The third thing is managing possessions, because that's going to be really important for us to be successful, making sure we're taking care of the basketball.

We definitely have to improve our rebound, but anywhere in the game where we can control the battle of possessions I think is going to be important for us, so those are kind of the biggest points of emphasis within our practices.

Then, also, just continuing to give them confidence in who they are as players, allowing them to make mistakes in realtime in practice and adapt to those mistakes in realtime I think has been something that we've really, really tried to change in the way that we practice. I think the girls most days enjoy that (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: Kate, as you were looking to make the transition to BC, I'm sure you talked to people. What did they say about ACC women's basketball?

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: Good luck. No, I mean, I think just like our players, you know, one of the things as a coach that was really important to me was as I was growing in my career, being able to have an opportunity in what I believe is the best women's basketball conference in the country.

And so, like, the competitiveness of the league and the tradition of the league. Like, I've grown up as a women's basketball junkie. I played in the OG Big East: Rutgers, Notre Dame, UCONN, a lot of teams that are now in the ACC.

I understand the pride and tradition of those women's

basketball programs. To now see how women's basketball has evolved and continued to transition, but a lot of those programs were at the forefront of it. So I think when people talk to me about the ACC, it was about those things, how competitive it is, how much pride there is for women's basketball in the ACC, and just I think the opportunity to come in and show that we belong in the league as well was something that was important to me.

No, I'm excited. Like I said, I'm excited right now. I don't know how I'm going to feel on the road all the time, but it's just such an awesome opportunity personally, but I think it's a great opportunity right now for BC as we grow as a prime minister.

THE MODERATOR: Grace, who or what is the X factor for this team to take the next step in the ACC?

GRACE OLIVER: Yeah, I would say us as a whole. Obviously we talked about how we're very young this year. We have a lot of new people, so I think just coming together as a team and, like, understanding what the ACC is. Like especially being someone who has played in it and obviously like Joce and Athena on our team have also played in it, and using our experience to help out the younger girls so we can keep continuing to grow as a team and as individuals to get to where we feed to be.

I think just using your experience and helping out the younger players is really important.

THE MODERATOR: Jocelyne, you can't answer Grace with this next question, but who is a newcomer who has really impressed you so far that you think is going to make a big impact on this team?

JOCELYNE GRIER: I think our freshman point guard Dani is going to make a big impact on our team, the way she's so versatile, athletic, and jump. I think they do everything. I think she's going to have a big impact on our team.

THE MODERATOR: So this question is for each one of you. We'll start with you, Jocelyne. Give me a one-word answer when I say -- one word to describe BC women's basketball this season.

JOCELYNE GRIER: Dogs.

GRACE OLIVER: Hungry.

KATE POPOVEC-GOSS: Wow. One word is really hard for me (laughing). Honestly, I hope that you guys -- joyful.

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