

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Syracuse Orange

Coach Felicia Legette-Jack

Uche Izoje

Angelica Velez

Women's Press Conference



Coach. You still look like you're in your 20s.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: The big 60 came and went in September.

THE MODERATOR: Well, you look great.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am happy to welcome Syracuse to the stage with me. I got to start off with the greatest personality in our game, Coach Jack, Felicia Legette-Jack, entering her fifth season at Syracuse, Angelica Velez, and Uche Izoje. Ladies, welcome and thank you for your time today.

Coach Jack, you have led this program to three 20-win seasons and three post-season appearances during your four years already at Syracuse. You doubled your win total a year ago from the previous year. What are your expectations for this year?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: We want more. We always want more. What does more look like?

I think more looks like better practices. More looks like camaraderie. More looks like, you know, sisters getting after it and competing a little bit harder. We can do that with the talent that we have in our gym right now. I think that we could be an exciting team in the month of March.

THE MODERATOR: You're now going into your fifth season in the ACC. What are the foundational pieces you must have in order to have success in this league?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I think the word has to be character. It's a lot of things that a lot of coaches are doing that doesn't fit me well, and you got to stay true to who you are. Not to say they're right or wrong, but what's your standard? What do you stand for? How do you think that you can be the best version of yourself as a coach and as a team?

This year being my 38th season, I'm pretty comfortable --

THE MODERATOR: I wasn't going to throw that out there,

THE MODERATOR: Angelica, you improved your scoring by almost nine points a game last season. What was your area of focus this past offseason to continue to elevate your overall game?

ANGELICA VELEZ: My area of focus? I've changed my pace. Learning how to, like, get the ball up the floor in less dribbles. Being able to throw that ball out, it's allowed me to flow and just allowed me to be free. Like let go of the ball, being able to pass it. Yeah, I feel like playing with a lot more pace has helped me.

THE MODERATOR: Uche, ACC rookie of the year, eight-time rookie of the week, ACC first team, WBCA honorable mention All-American. Lots of accolades and well-deserved, as you led the team in scoring, rebounding, and blocks.

Same question: What was your area of focus this offseason to continue to elevate?

UCHE IZOJE: Just to be more confident and understanding the game more and be consistent every day, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: So Coach Jack, I'm going to say it, watching and seeing -- obviously ACC rookie of the week awards come her way, but on the national scene do you think that this young lady got the national recognition that she deserved a year ago?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Absolutely not. Well, she's been overseas, so she's not really a true freshman or, well, they didn't play great talent. It's always a reason why, you know, Uche didn't get whatever. We know what we have in our locker room and when you play her she's going to

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shine. We don't need other people's permission in year 38. We know what talent looks like.

I think that after our first year quietly the way they came after her, even though she wasn't even in the portal, it showed that they actually do see what she can do, and what we have to do is continue to make our mirror proud and make our teammates understand that we have the best player in the country on our team, and every single day we're going to go out and represent that, and we're going to bring that momentum.

THE MODERATOR: I'll just say this: At Harvard, you have Southern, Wisconsin, Auburn, Oklahoma. That's your final stretch run prior to ACC play. Can you discuss this nonconference schedule and the genesis of how you put it together and why?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Calculated, because we have, in my opinion, arguably the best conference in the country. Nine teams went to postseason. Five went to the Sweet 16. I have to prepare this team for that kind of strenuous stretch on a consistent daily basis. And how do you do that? You try to build up that nonconference schedule.

We certainly didn't know who we're going to play in the SEC Challenge, but I thought the way we finished there was going to be somebody that's going to be amazing. And Oklahoma is no slouch. I love what that coach has done over there as well in a short period of time, and the talent that she has brought in from the portal is going to be tremendous.

That will be a huge challenge for us. But Harvard and all of those schools, we set it up in that way so we can prepare ourselves for the onslaught of the ACC.

Q. You spoke about really character and relationship base and what matters to you. In the world we live in today with NIL and the transfer portal and a lot of a "me" society, just staying true to who you are, your pillars and your foundation and making sure that it is about relationships with this program, just to go a little bit deeper into that.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Yes, it's important, and we went after a lot of talent, if you will. Our administration really poured in our NIL and our rev share.

So we had choices to make. We could go after the kid that want to be rich or we can go after the kid that's yearning to become more character-based.

I told my coaches to go after players that they thought that can play for me. The first thing they had on their mind is

are they character-based kids. I think that we did a tremendous job of bringing in Tyi Skinner and Sara Rambus and Jaleesa and Emely Rodriguez of the world, and we lost some, but we gained more.

We got a young freshman that's going to be pretty interesting too named Madison Howard. So they all come from good families and good understanding. The neat thing is I had three out of those group of young ladies that committed to me and not ask for a penny and was given, but didn't ask. That says a lot about what we're building here.

It seems like people want to be in the locker room with us and hear this crazy lady talk about their tomorrows and their phenomenal woman days when they become 25 years old. I'm excited about pouring out to this group because they first poured into me by saying yes.

Q. Today is National Coach's Day. Can you talk about your supporting staff and what they mean to the program?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Oh, my goodness. I have a great staff. I love to talk about all of them. We have a video coordinator. His name is Sam. He's fun. He was my analytics guy. We move people up. He's with us right now.

Our DOBO was on my scout team, and that's Charlie, and Charlie is with us now. It's his first season right now. Caleb is their big brother who was our video coordinator, and now he's the assistant coach. He gets on their nerves like I big brother.

I got a good core of people. Our general manager/coach is Mykala R. Walker who negotiates all the money things and does a tremendous job.

You love Coach Natasha Adair, who may be one of the best head coaches in the country that happens to be my associate. So I'm going to wring out as much as I can and keep her as long as I can, because she's an ear base that I use all the time. She's the ying to my yang. We call ourselves Golden Girls, because our staff is, like, 12 years old.

You can't say enough about a guy named Khyreed Carter who stepped into my seat when I had brain surgery and we didn't miss a beat. Matter of fact, the first time since Hofstra that I became Coach of the Year on the backs of what he had done to support us.

My staff is my backbone. They understand what my why is, and why I do it and what it's all about. They go after that



why very seriously and bring some talents like them to offset me being crazier-er.

Q. You heard Coach talking about people feeling like they want to be this program and want to be in that room. Speak to the atmosphere of Syracuse and why you want to be a part of this mission and this vision for the orange.

ANGELICA VELEZ: I mean, you want to be a part of Syracuse because it's a great place to be at. Coach Jack talks a lot about character, but that goes beyond measure. Like to be a good person -- it's how you show up, not just as a basketball player, but how you show up in life.

I think we're trying to reach our fans with that as well. You know, trying to draw our fans to come to us. It means a lot to be a part of orange.

THE MODERATOR: Angelica, we got to watch Uche a year ago. You get to watch Uche. What makes her so unique and so special on the court?

ANGELICA VELEZ: Man. What makes her so special, I feel like just her personality, who is she is off the court. She enjoys each moment. I think that's something that I really admire to be ACC freshman. She has all of these accolades, and it could put pressure on a lot of people, but she embraces it.

She just tries to be free and enjoy, and she understands that she's right where she's supposed to be. So I love that about Uche.

THE MODERATOR: Uche, Coach kind of referenced it. You got a lot of attention in the offseason, but you stayed loyal to Syracuse and to Coach Jack. What is it about Coach Jack that makes it such a joy to play for her?

UCHE IZOJE: I will say this, like, Coach Jack, she's just, like, the nicest person I've ever seen. Anything she said, that's what she's going to do. Like, she keeps her promise and that's what I love about her.

And she always care about you. Like inside the court she's straight basketball, but outside she's, like, oh, like more the mother figure. Yeah, that's what I love about Coach Jack.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Angelica, what is Coach Jack's super power as a head coach?

ANGELICA VELEZ: Her super power? That she did it. Like, her -- when we play games, you can see her jersey

retired in the rafters. She's been in the position that we've been in.

But to also speak to her super power, I feel like her speech. Like she can motivate. I mean, she motivates me. I know she motivates my teammates. She gives me chills a lot. She makes me want to run through a brick wall for her.

It's how she speaks and how she carries herself. I feel like how she speaks is really her super power.

Q. Coach, coaching is not an easy job, so the question is, why do you coach?

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: I just want to help young people believe they can become. I was a young lady that walked with my head down until the 10th grade, and my mom was busy working; brothers and sisters busy trying to not get in Mom's way. I just tried to figure this thing out called life.

Then this basketball game made me be able to look people in the eye. What a magical moment that was in the 10th grade. Just so many young people, boys and girls, don't really have confidence, but they're out there playing and hoping that somebody can see them.

So being in the gym, I certainly coach my kids all the time, but I see the men's players over there, and I watch them. I find out what kind of music they listen to. Sadiq was struggling with the weights one time and I put on Anita Baker because he has an old soul. I started walking with him. He could have lifted the whole weight room. It's just something really ignites in my spirit when I see a young person emerge and decide that, ah, I do matter, I am worth it, somebody sees me, so I'm going to see me too.

That is really why I coach, is to lift that up. My carrot is the basketball. If they're going to keep score, if they're going to do that, then we're going to try to do some tougher things too in the meantime.

Outside of all that winning and "for the Gipper" and all that stuff, I love to see young people's eyes lighting up about their life and what they're going to become.

THE MODERATOR: Uche, who is the one player or newcomer to this program, or maybe a returner who has improved so much that you think is going to make their mark on the ACC this season?

ANGELICA VELEZ: That's going to work?

THE MODERATOR: A newcomer to the team or a returner

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who has really improved. Who is going to really make a mark on the ACC, really going play well in the ACC?

UCHE IZOJE: I say Jello. Jello, she's been putting in the work. She's hard-working. Obviously, Olivia Schmitt. Yeah, you guys, I can't wait for you to see her game. She's going to put that one in the hole for three. She's coming.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Notice she said point guards that can pass her the ball. She's understanding this game way more than she's enunciating.

THE MODERATOR: You get the rebound, right?

UCHE IZOJE: Everyone do. Everyone is putting in the work, yeah.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Everyone that can pass her the ball.

THE MODERATOR: They're a value for guards. In closing, I'm going to ask you to give me one word to describe Syracuse women's basketball this season. We'll start with you, Uche.

UCHE IZOJE: One word? We have warriors, yeah, because we have this book that we read, so I would say warriors, yeah.

ANGELICA VELEZ: One word? I'd say fierce.

FELISHA LEGETTE-JACK: Passionate.

THE MODERATOR: We have warriors and fierce and then Coach Jack true and true, leading from the heart.

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