

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 7, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Michael Malone

Neo Avdalas

Jarin Stevenson

Men's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: North Carolina has joined us in the room. Head coach Michael Malone will offer a few opening comments. Coach, the podium is yours.

MICHAEL MALONE: I really don't have any opening comments, so let's get to your questions.

Q. What has been the biggest adjustment coming from the NBA to college basketball?

MICHAEL MALONE: I've been asked that question many times in the last four or five months, and the easiest way I could answer that would be in the NBA all you do is coach. It's all basketball. In college the last thing you get to do is coach. You're doing so many other things to kind of build your program.

I understood that. You know, I'd coached in college many years ago before going to the NBA, but that's one thing I've realized the last five months from recruiting to fundraising, to relationships, and then when you get the hours on the court with guys like Jarin and Neo to pour into them and help them develop and get to practice and now we have a game on Friday night, our first exhibition game, that is my happy place, when you finally get a chance to do what you love and teach and develop and help pour into these guys.

But that's by far the biggest difference from my perspective.

Q. How do you approach the exhibition games? Like a regular season game or like an NBA game?

MICHAEL MALONE: Obviously you want to win every time you go out there, but more importantly, it's going to be an opportunity for us to kind of see where we're at. This is an early exhibition game when you consider we don't have our



season opener until November 2nd against Western Carolina.

So we'll make sure we get guys a chance to play, different groupings of players, and really get a chance to see where we are. I'm sure our players are so tired of playing against just their teammates every single day, so finally a chance to play against -- you know, Coach Eric Musselman, his team coming into town, will be a great kind of test to see where we're at and what we need to work on.

Q. I was just wondering, how are you balancing the classic Carolina style of play and tradition with your own brand of tactical play?

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, you know, I think I mentioned the day I was hired, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the tradition and history of UNC basketball going all the way back to a guy like Frank McGuire and Dean Smith.

And while honoring that and respecting that, at the end of the day I have to be true to myself. So we're going to go out there and play a brand of basketball that I think is going to allow us to have success, and more importantly, sustained success.

Obviously I was a part of -- a small part of a championship team that we had in Denver in 2023, and we're trying to kind of simulate the culture, style of play, starting with defense, rebounding, playing uptempo, and also most importantly, sharing the ball and being a team and being a team that plays for each other.

Q. You spoke about some of those things that led you to a championship at Denver in 2023. What are some of the intangible things away from the court that you feel build that championship culture that you can bring to North Carolina?

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, I think it's a good question because, you know, as we recruit players -- when I first got the job was through the portal, and now obviously it's recruiting high school kids, whatever it may be.



Talent is a given. If we want to be a team that can compete for a championship, talent is a given. But what's also important is bringing in players that understand the importance of being selfless in everything they do, getting over yourself. That we can accomplish a hell of a lot more as a team than as a bunch of individuals.

So players that are connectors, players that are competitors -- these two guys right here to my left are great examples of that. You know, Jarin obviously, returning player from the Chapel Hill area, and thrilled that he decided to stay when I got the job. One of three scholarship players that made that decision.

And then Neo was the first guy we got in the transfer portal. Kind of believed in the vision of what we were trying to build. When you watch Neo play, I think he's an exceptional connector. He makes everyone around him better.

I think toughness, tenacity, leadership, all things that may not show up on a stat sheet, but I think go a long way in helping you win at the highest level and the toughest games.

Q. Mentioning the portal, what has been the biggest surprise to you in day-to-day management from going from -- like, I know previously you were in college, but transitioning from college to the pros back to college, what's been the biggest surprise for you with NIL and the portal and the day-to-day management style?

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, I mean, the NIL, we have a GM. We have coaches that kind of have been around the college game that are really helpful with that.

But I think the biggest thing, to your point, is -- the greatest challenge is just the day-to-day and how I never feel there's enough hours in a day. There's always something that you have to do.

I have a tremendous coaching staff around me. I have a support staff. Eric Hoots who is here with me. I call him my chief of staff, and every day we walk in, it's not just preparing for practice, it's what do we have to do on campus, who do we have to touch, who do we have to say hello to, because I am a small part of a much bigger engine.

In the NBA you're part of one team. You come to UNC, you're one of 28 teams. What I remind everybody, as you all know, the 27 other teams at Carolina are pretty damn good. We have great coaches at UNC. We have a tremendous athletic department at UNC.

For me, I've kind of thrown myself into that. Going out to Omaha to support the men's baseball team. Going to a woman's lacrosse game to support Jenny Levy. Going to a woman's field hockey game to support Erin Matson and her girls.

It's something that my wife and I have kind of appreciated and are enthusiastic about. But yes, there are some days where I have no idea where the day went. I don't even know what day it is half the time.

Q. In this conference obviously a lot of other good teams. What are some things that you have wanted to focus on to really separate yours?

MICHAEL MALONE: Good question. Obviously we've been so focused on us, and obviously, as you mentioned, there's 18 teams in a conference. Tremendous coaches in the conference. To be a part of the best conference in the country is an honor.

For us as we get ready for our exhibition game on Friday night, it's always going to start on the defensive end. I think when you ask Neo and Jarin, if you said, well, what do we work on the most, it's probably defending at a high level because we want to be an uptempo team. We want to be a team that gets out and runs, but not at the expense of our defense.

If we can defend and we can rebound, that allows you to play that uptempo style that we want to play. I think the best teams, whether it's college, NBA, wherever, if you defend at a high level and you rebound at a high level, you're going to give yourself a chance to win a lot of games, and that's been a huge point of emphasis for us from the summer workouts into the fall and now that practice has started.

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

Q. Coming from Virginia Tech, what was it about Coach and his philosophy, his style, his leadership that really made you want to make the transition here in the ACC to the Tar Heels?

NEO AVDALAS: You know, I mean, for me it was a no-brainer to come here UNC Tar Heels. It was obviously one of the first schools that contact me. It was actually Coach's first Zoom meeting, so it was pretty surreal.

You know, just being here is a great feeling for me. Coach's winning mentality was one of the things that brought me here, see one of the biggest stage. UNC is a winning program. I want to win, so it's a mix of all three.



I guess, you know, that's all I need for.

Q. You had a lot of success with high pick and rolls at Virginia Tech and prior. Coming into Coach Malone's program, is that something that sueded you to come and his style of play as far as NBA spacing and the development of point guards that he's had?

NEO AVDALAS: I mean, yeah, obviously. Coach Malone knows how to use me. I just want to have the ball in my hands and play the pick and roll so I can find my teammates in the best position to score. It's one of my best. We have a very talented team to help me find my teammates and score.

THE MODERATOR: What's your favorite food from home, and what's the favorite food that you have found here in the U.S.?

NEO AVDALAS: Actually the best food that I found here in the U.S. is Kipos. It's near my house. It's a great restaurant. It's good to bring me some home vibes.

My favorite Greek food is souvlaki, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Jarin.

Q. What's it like for you to suit up in the argyle and blue given that your home is just a few miles down the road?

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah, it's an honor. Again, Carolina has a lot of history, a lot of prestige, and just being able to do it again, it's huge for me.

Again, I have a great support system here and just having them come to the games, help support me, and also just representing Carolina and their history is very big for me.

Q. How that is been just so many new teammates and everyone gelling together?

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah, it's definitely difficult having a lot of new guys coming in, but I feel like we've gelled together really well, built chemistry. We get on the game sometimes and build chemistry that way. Just on the court, everybody trying to support each other, get each other in the right spots and help each other succeed.

Q. How have you already seen Coach's fingerprints on this program so far?

JARIN STEVENSON: Yes. I think Coach Malone has done a great job. Again, very defense-minded, which I like.

I take pride in my defense.

I also like the fast style of play. So working from the defensive style, going into a fast style of play and transitioning there, that is very cool too.

He's held everybody accountable and in check, so I think he's done a great job so far.

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