Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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NC State Wolfpack

Coach Justin Gainey

Paul McNeil, Jr.

Ven-Allen Lubin

Men's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: NC State and The Wolfpack have joined us. Head Coach Justin Gainey will take to the podium. We will take questions for Coach.

I'll start from the podium. You're a two-time graduate at NC State, a degree in business administration, with a concentration in marketing. You've got a masters in sports management. Academically speaking, how have these degrees helped you as a head coach?

JUSTIN GAINEY: That's a heck of a question at a basketball media day. You know what, it has taught me that, number one, the relationships and the connections that I built throughout that process of getting those two degrees, it's probably done just as much for me as the degrees.

What I think about is me coming back and at my press conference where, you know, I'm meeting people that I engage with on campus, whether they were students, whether it was faculty or staff, that was excited for me to be back, right, because of all those relationships that I've built.

Obviously going through school, it teaches you about being process-driven and chasing goals and chasing that end result, but the steps to go along with graduating.

So it taught me a lot. To do that at a place where I am now the head coach, it allows me to speak to these young men that are currently in the program and to the guys that I recruit. I can speak to them on a level of I've been through it, I know what getting that degree looks like, I know what going to class at 8:00 a.m. looks like at NC State and how important it is and how much it can help you as you move forward.

Q. What has been the difference between when you left NC State to when you got back to NC State about the program, and what have you embraced the most about it?

JUSTIN GAINEY: A lot has changed. A lot has changed. When I left as a player, Lenovo Center was called the ESA Arena. The locker room was barely finished, and you go in there now, and it's an amazing, beautiful facility, and the locker room is great.

It has grown a lot. When I think about the university, it's interesting because I was a player there, and I came back as almost like an intern within the athletic department, so I saw things continuing to grow. I saw the Dell Center being built and changing from an indoor football practice facility where it's our practice facility now.

So to come back after that, I'd say that was about 20 years later, to say see the growth and development it continues to make, I see an athletic department led by Boo Corrigan that's forward-thinking, that's moving forward in a direction of, one, for the student-athletes, the betterment of them, but also just driving NC State and pushing them forward.

Q. Obviously this program has been through a lot as of recent and a lot of Wolfpack fans feel slighted by some past transgressions. How do you plan to restore that trust and faith in the program, especially with the fans?

JUSTIN GAINEY: You know, I won't speak on the past. All I know is on my return back, on my reception, it's been amazing and the fan base have really welcomed me back.

I didn't expect anything less than because I'm one of them, right? I am NC State. There's not anybody in this country that knows NC State inside and out the way that I do, from a player to a guy that interned there in the athletic department to a guy that was director of basketball operations on a coaching staff and now coming back as the head coach.

A lot of people there that are still in that university saw me come in as an 18-year-old 30 years ago, and they were a part of and helped shape who I am today, helped me

develop, helped me grow and mold me.

With me coming home, it's like, you know, a son coming back to lead the program. That reception has been amazing, and we have great fans with high expectations, and we have high expectations.

Q. In this full-circle moment for you, what are some of those lessons learned along the way that you feel like you can implement right away with the Wolfpack that you feel will work here and have immediate success?

JUSTIN GAINEY: We talk a lot about our identity and who we are. It's centered around three things.

Number one, connect. We want to be the most connected team in the country. Being connected is centered around having a relationship, right? Being relationship-based.

I'm proud of how connected our guys are. We've been together since June, and to see how they've grown and see how they've come together and they're all about one thing, and that's winning. They're all about winning and doing what it takes to win. So we're going to be a connected unit.

Development, we talk a lot about development. Not only do we talk about it, we do it. We're in the gym, working, we are developing on the court. We're also developing off the court.

And then competition. We compete in everything we do. There's a winner and a loser in everything we do. Guys that compete, they take winning to a whole other level.

From a competitive standpoint these guys have done that ever since they stepped foot on campus.

Q. You are well known for your defensive tactics. Bringing in a guy like Kyle Evans, how has he adjusted and how is he going to help the defenses from protecting the rim?

JUSTIN GAINEY: That's a good question. Kyle has been great. You know, he's been great. He was a little banged up a few weeks back, and so he's working his way back to form. He has that reputation of being a big-time shot blocker, big-time rim protector.

I was surprised at how well he moved and how quick he was and how he can play in a lot of different ball screen coverages. So not only will he be able to protect at the rim, but he also will be able to protect out on the floor and be able to help our guards in those different ball screen coverages and even at times be able to switch.

But, to answer your question from a defensive standpoint, yeah, he has really helped our defensive profile.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Questions for Ven-Allen.

Q. Ven-Allen, you decided to stay with the coaching change. Just talk about what led to that decision and what NC State means to you.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, once I left here, you know, I just felt like it was just a little unfinished business, the way that the season ended. Obviously I was still grateful and for feeling the way that I just went out there and just did the best I could with the teammates that I have and the season.

When I heard that Coach Gainey was coming back and I was granted another year to play, I just think that it was only right for me to kind of come back and play with a coach who understands the game and understands what it takes to win here at NC State.

The guys that he brought in, the guys he recruited, they're all about winning, they're all about playing team basketball, and that's going to be the most successful team.

So once I looked at that and had conversations with Coach Gainey, it just felt right to kind of come back and finish what I started with the right group.

Q. Piggybacking off of the defense, what have you seen in this team with Coach coming in to really elevate your all's defense, primarily the rebounded that struggled last year?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: He just really emphasized rebounding, guarding the ball well, and just making sure that all five guys is guarding the ball. Because the ball scores, and we want to make sure that the team knows that you're not just going against the guy in front of you. You're going against the guys behind him.

We play as a team, and we want to make sure that we really emphasize and just guarding the ball and rebounding, finishing possession and being out and going out and running.

We have a great defensive coordinator with Ogi and Coach Brooks. They've done a great job and just knowing what it takes, and being able to teach us in these moments of what winning looks like. That's sprinting down the floor, getting our gaps, having high hands, talking on defense, making sure that we're connected in every possession.

So that's really important for us to make sure we emphasize that as much as skill we have and talented we are on the offensive side, we want to make sure we are on the defensive side as well.

Q. Granted that fifth year. Just going through the process and what you learn from that and the appreciation of this moment?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: I really just appreciate all glory to God for just giving me this opportunity. You know, I was really big on my faith and this opportunity and wanted to come back and make sure I make the most of it. Now I'm focused on just making sure that I make the most of this opportunity, making sure I'm being the leader, who I am, and knowing I can do for these guys, for this younger group, and just being that spark.

I just want to make sure I bring the right energy, the right motivation to these guys and know what it takes. Because I've had my experience here in the ACC, and I've only known it -- besides Coach and the coaching staff, they know what it takes to win, so that's why I want to make sure this opportunity is granted for me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Paul.

Q. Paul, how different has this offseason been for you compared to last year where you were a bit of an unproven prospect, and now you're expected to be the leader this year?

PAUL McNEIL JR.: Yeah, no, I think I took mental reps honestly. Obviously I worked on my body, worked on my game. The game come down to a mental aspect of it, and I feel like I have a lot of mental reps of getting my mind right, understanding what Coach Gainey wanted me to do as being a leader. Having (indiscernible) with my pops in the off season, my leader in my life, so just taking leadership from him and understanding what Gainey wanted me to do.

Q. You received a lot of interest obviously coming back. I think you were the first priority from fans, coaching staff, administration. How does receiving that love and being wanted feel, and how are you planning on paying them back for that love on the court?

PAUL McNEIL JR.: I feel good. All glory to God to give me the opportunity to play basketball for this university. But honestly, we want to win. That's my -- we paying back the fans and the love that I have been receiving, but just winning games and making everybody happy around Raleigh is my biggest thing.

Q. Coach noted that, hey, we want to be one of the most connected -- or the most connected team in the country. Where is your role in that connectivity aspect as a returner?

PAUL McNEIL JR.: As a leader, knowing the ins and outs of NC State, I think I have a big role. We do a lot of team bonding. We go golfing, bowling, going to teammates' house, play the games, have lunch together. So that's just off the court situations going to lead to on the court. We understand what Coach want us to do.

Like I told Coach from day one, we'll get the job done for you. Whatever you need, we'll have it for you.

Q. What have you seen from your team? What do you think some of the strengths are?

PAUL McNEIL JR.: Their personality, honestly. No egos. Everybody put their egos to the side. We all treat each other as one, one big whole family. We all don't look over each other. We all equal. That's really our biggest thing. Us being together also but just loving each other genuinely.

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