

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Duke Blue Devils

Coach Jon Scheyer

Dame Sarr

Patrick Ngongba

Men's Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Blue Devils. We'll begin with opening comments from Coach Scheyer. Coach, the podium is yours.

JON SCHEYER: Thank you all for being here. Could not be more proud of the group that we have. Proud of these two guys next to me in Dame and Pat. I think they represent the core of how this team has been built. It's been built on guys making different decisions to come back or come into Duke.

These two guys could have gone pro. Obviously any player could have transferred. The guys coming in could have gone somewhere else. They all chose Duke, and they all chose Duke with understanding that we have to continue to earn and that we're not entitled to anything.

So I have a lot of confidence in this group and where we can get to. Right now we're working through some things in practice and we have a long way to go, but I could not be more excited about these guys, that I get to coach these two guys for another year, and the group that we have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. You've had a lot of beloved freshmen the last couple of years, really endearing personalities. How would you say this current group of freshmen are unique or how are they the same to the previous classes that have come through, personality- and mentality-wise?

JON SCHEYER: You know, they've been great to coach. I don't know if they're going to have an immediate impact at the level that we've seen. I mean, we've seen historic impact with our freshmen, but they're going to be contributors to winning.

I think they really have had -- they're fortunate they have more experience in the building to look to where guys can help guide them. I think there's been great -- there's not separation between freshmen and upperclassmen. I think these guys have really connected. They're going to grow and be big parts of what we do going forward.

Q. We've seen the interaction with your players over the years. You're relationship-based more transactional-based coach. Coach, just to speak to that in the transactional world to build those relationships and have that connectivity.

JON SCHEYER: I just always hope our guys feel that at the end of the day I care about them. My kids get to be around the program and they treat them like little brothers, little sister. Noa ignores them, but my boys.

That's what matters. They're on an incredible journey, and for them to trust me and trust our staff means the world.

Again, I think that's why I'm doing what I'm doing, and I'm grateful that I get to coach guys that let me have those relationships with them.

Q. In an interview with Jon Rothstein you talked about the love that you have for the defense and the offense was kind of a work in progress. I think you and your staff do a good job of blending concepts and style-based defense -- traditional-based sets. So what do you think kind of allows you to work with those concepts versus the traditional sets with a new team pretty much every year?

JON SCHEYER: Well, you have to have a lot of patience because, you know, it looks ugly right now. Our guys, we haven't put in very many sets or actions at this point, although we have ideas and concepts, to your point, of how we're trying to play.

I just think when it comes down to it and you're in January, February, March, you're playing against really good defenses, you have to have continuation of how to play when your first action doesn't work.



We spend a lot of time working on that, a lot of time understanding who you are playing with and how to play to strengths. And then at the end of the day, if there's randomness involved, hopefully that can't be scouted and game planned for as much because even for us it's going to be reads, not plays.

Q. Coach, you know, where do you see the biggest jump just from the half court execution and the ball movement from last season to where you guys are right now?

JON SCHEYER: Well, right now it's behind. I mean, we're just starting. We've got a long way to go. We've had a top offense the last couple of years, but I think there's another level of the hardest thing I think for any team, whether it's -- I don't care what level -- is the continuation of how to play, of the ball not stopping, the ball not sticking, continuing to -- not letting the music stop.

For us we have a long way to go. It's rough right now because we're just -- it's our early stages. It's going to take us some time, but I feel very confident that our versatility -- we have thinkers that can be on the floor, and we're going to be a very dynamic offense that can hurt you in a lot of different ways.

Q. Given the roster's length and defensive switchability this year, how do you see the rotation patterns taking shape early in the season, and how much experimentation should we expect in the nonconference slate?

JON SCHEYER: There's going to be a lot we have to work through, and, frankly, that I have to get a feel for with our team. We have great depth. Our depth is already being tested. Caleb Foster is out with an ankle injury for a short period of time. He'll be back very soon for our first game.

Drew Scharnowski is out for the time being. We've had a couple of guys miss practice, whether it's sickness or just smaller injuries. So there's that aspect of just covering that.

But, also, I say this even for our returners for Pat and Dame, they're going to continue to grow and develop. There's always an evolution. Just because a lineup worked last year doesn't mean it's going to work this year, and that's something I've found in the past where you can't assume anything.

So it's going to be -- I wouldn't be shocked if second half of the year we're just starting to figure out what our rotations or what our group is.

I would expect to see multiple starting lineups, multiple different starting lineups in the second half. We can go small. We can go big. I think that's the strength of this team is the versatility, but at some point we have to find our core of who we're going to be.

I hope to do that sooner rather than later.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Questions for Patrick Ngongba.

Q. Not to start on the injury note, but last time we saw you you were down with a head injury. I just want to do check in on how you're doing after countdown.

PATRICK NGONGBA: I got some stitches, but everything is good.

Q. (Off microphone.)

PATRICK NGONGBA: I don't know what these are, but something just holding it together right now. I don't know.

Q. The freshmen in the front court for Duke this season, just what can you say working with some of these young guys and what you have taken away from them as you get set for the campaign this year.

PATRICK NGONGBA: Yeah, it's definitely been fun competing against them in practice and what not. I'm just trying to just do my best to just show them the ropes of college and what not, just trying to get them as ready as possible.

Q. You're a really good passer for a center. Is that something that you worked on over the years, or is that something more you just having a feel for the game?

PATRICK NGONGBA: I feel like it's a feel thing. I feel like -- I mean, I feel like I watched a lot of basketball growing up, so I mean, I just feel like it's more of like an instinct thing than something I have worked on.

THE MODERATOR: There's been a couple of people thinking that your nickname might change to Little Pat given all the size that Duke has this year. How do you use your size and your experience to teach the newbie that is are in the program?

PATRICK NGONGBA: I mean, I'm still one of the bigger guys on the team, even though there's three guys taller than me (laughing). But yeah, I mean, I just try to use my size and my strength to my advantages and just try to do



what I can with it and just try to impose my will, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Pat. Questions for Dame Sarr.

Q. Dame, you came in last year from overseas, got acclimated to the college game, and have a full summer under your belt. What have you been working on this summer for your game?

DAME SARR: I have just been working a lot on my body, just being in shape and being strong. Overall just on my skill set. You know, I know my core being a great defensive player, so just trying to be better every day on that side of the floor and offensively just trying to make the right play and just trying to be strong with the ball.

I know Coach doesn't like when I turn the ball over, so just trying to do the best on that end for sure.

Q. To speak about that back court, like you said, defensively you lean on that personally, but just what can you say about the talent of the back court that we have at Duke this season?

DAME SARR: I mean, just how talented we are overall. I feel like the guys we have coming back and the guys we've brought in are super talented guys, but I love the mentality that everybody has. I see how much people care, and I feel like that's what matters. As long as we care and we want to get better every day, we're going to be fine.

Q. Now that you've experienced the whole ACC season, what's something that Coach Scheyer is asking you to do this year that he might not have asked you to do the first time you arrived?

DAME SARR: I mean, just setting the tone. I feel like I'm one of the not older guys, but I've been here already and I know what Coach wants and I know how much -- how important is the energy in the gym, so just trying to set the tone with my voice.

Just trying to bring my teammates along with me and just making sure that we never have a quiet gym. We should never have a quiet gym at Duke, so just trying to be as loud as I can and just try to bring energy to the team.

Q. Dame, defensively you bring a lot of intensity. Where does that come from?

DAME SARR: I just think it's a pride thing. It's instincts. I just have a lot of pride in guarding the ball, and I feel like I let my team down whenever somebody score on me, so I just try to prevent that from happening.

Mostly just, yeah, trying to help my team win. If I can stop my man from scoring, I feel like I'm helping my team win, so that's how I try to do every time.

Q. Your season ended last year with a heart-breaking game. What did you learn from that and your team that you think will help you this year?

DAME SARR: I mean, I learned a lot last year. We had 35 wins. I feel like any time I step on the court, I believe me and my teammates are going to win. Just learning from, you know, the losses we had and understanding that it was all about details and about the little things.

Coming back, I feel like we have a great team, we have great staff. I have a chance of winning a national championship. It's just about the little things. I feel like, understanding the little things matter, and that's what it comes down to. So it's just doing a better job this year and hopefully winning one this year.

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