

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Miami Hurricanes

Coach Jai Lucas

Shelton Henderson

Acaden Lewis

Men's Press Conference



JAI LUCAS: No, it's huge. It's huge. I had the opportunity as a player -- I didn't feel that way when it happened to me, but to almost be in every seat. You know, as a freshman I started every game, played 30 games. I've transferred. I was in the portal, so I know what that feels like. I've been a rotational player. I've been a guy who didn't play in games. I've also been a guy who has been cut.

THE MODERATOR: The Miami Hurricanes are now with us. Head Coach Jai Lucas will have an opening comment.

JAI LUCAS: We're excited about year two for us this year. At Miami we were grateful enough to have two of our top players back in Shelton and Dante Allen, and then we also to be able to go in the portal and get some guys that we felt fit us and fit our needs moving forward.

You know, for us just the opportunity this year to compete at a high level again in the ACC, which will be loaded just like last year from top to bottom, but for us to be competitive and have a chance to hopefully compete for the championship as we get closer.

We need to get there. We're far ways away from being able to get there right now, but by the time we get through conference we feel we have the ability to do that.

And I'm just excited about this group this year. It's completely different from our team last year.

We have some similarities, but it almost feels like a year one all over again, so it gives me the excitement every day to come to the gym to be able to coach them.

We have a really good, receptive group, a coachable group. I'm ready to start moving forward and get closer to the games.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Because of your background as a player, how much of that experience is embedded in your coaching philosophy, and are there things you learned as a player that you now find yourself emphasizing with this team?

So I feel it gives me the unique experience to be able to talk to everybody and know what they're feeling in that moment. I always tell people, this is my favorite part of coaching because it's like therapy for me, because I'm talking to me when I was that age and what I felt I needed to hear and what I felt would have helped me get through those moments.

So it's a big part of my coaching. That's a great question.

Q. What have you taken from your dad -- I know he was a coach for a number of years -- and implemented into your own coaching style?

JAI LUCAS: For me he's kind of my foundation of everything, not only as a coach, but as a man. One of his biggest influence, and the players would probably hate him and I know Shelton knows this too, but it's conditioning. You know, I'm old-school in the sense of we condition a lot. We get up and down.

I feel like you have to be in great shape to be a good team, and that's one thing I really learned from is just the value of conditioning and being in great shape along with so many other things.

Me as a coach, he's kind of my foundation, and then the other places I've been I've kind of built off of it with that.

Q. I was wondering, you had a great first season with 26 wins. Is there something you can look back on with that season and say -- and grow as a coach and say, I think I'm better in year two than I was in year one?

JAI LUCAS: That is a great question. I guess it's kind of a TBD (laughing). You know, we'll kind of see when we get



there.

You know, for me I think the thing that's different, at least in my perspective of coaching, is your team is so different year to year. Most times as a coach and what I caught myself doing earlier is you can try to kind of go cookie-cutter, cut and paste, and think, all right, we did this at this time.

It will work, but this team this year is completely different than my team last year, so they needed something completely different. So I've had to adapt and adjust with -- some of the things we did last year they carry over and they do work, but some of them didn't.

So being okay with that and adjusting to being what's the best thing for this team and what's going to be the best thing to help them win and being okay with doing that.

Q. I know you can't -- this will be a difficult question; sorry -- but what player do you think that's returning this season has made the biggest developmental jump from last season?

JAI LUCAS: Yeah, that is a great question, and I will say this, and I'll say it will be the two players up here with me right now with Shelton Henderson and Acaden Lewis.

You know, with Shelton as a freshman coming in and having so many older guys around him, you fall into a role that gives you the ability to grow and kind of grow into your own. That's always what you want as a freshman.

This year for him, and you see it publicly, but also for us there's a little bit more expectation for him to deliver. He's shown his growth in that and being comfortable with having to deliver and having to be a little bit counted on.

I won't say he's the man because we have a really good team, but he is one of those guys that we are looking for game to game to be able to kind of carry us a little bit.

Then the second part with Acaden, he's somebody I had a relationship with prior, and I watched him a bunch last year just because you grow to like people that you recruit. He was one of those kids I grew to like.

For him, we're asking him to adjust a little bit. You know, his ability to score and his ability to be what I like to call a natural basketball player is something that he's been really good.

And now for me, for him -- and I can say this up here because these are all conversations we've had -- is just becoming a full and complete point guard, which he

already has some of that, but just showing it to him on film and getting him to grow it.

Week by week, month by month he has caught onto it and he's starting to become his own new version of Acaden Lewis.

Q. The habits that this team can create, those positive habits that you can lean on, just bring me into some of those. As the faces may change, what are some things that habitually you think this team needs to continue to do?

JAI LUCAS: Just kind of some of the things that we really showed last year. You know, the way we're built and it will kind of be how we're built moving forward. We'll tweak it a little bit. Like this year we're tweaking it, but one would be just our physicality. That leads to multiple things, but one of it is winning the glass, being able to rebound.

Second part of that is defending without fouling and using our size. Then the third part of that would be getting fouled and getting points from the free-throw line.

This year with the way we're built -- part of this has to do with Acaden also -- is our ability to play faster in transition. It's something that we really wanted to do.

Then being able to have multiple guys now being able to space the floor and being able to shoot with some of the guys we brought in, like Brent Bland, a Nick Dorn; Dante Allen has also grown in his shooting; freshman Caleb Gaskins has grown in his shooting.

So just that ability to play faster, space the floor. But I would say the physicality is kind of where we start.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Questions for Shelton Henderson.

Q. Shelton, you finished your freshman season with 18 points against Purdue. What did playing in that type of environment teach you about where you might need to grow for this season?

SHELTON HENDERSON: Playing in March Madness last year was definitely a great experience for me. I learned a lot just in myself and just how I'm able to come back this year and just be a better player all around.

So it's just a great experience, I would say, all around. It's helped me grow into what I am today. Just a lot more comfortable knowing I can compete with anybody in the country.

Q. You were really good last year driving and finishing at the basket. Is working on your three-point shot, kind of improving that some, one of your biggest goals for the season?

SHELTON HENDERSON: That's been a huge focus of mine this offseason, this summer. I think it's going to create a lot more for me being able to stretch the floor out a lot more for myself and my teammates.

My main thing is getting to the basket, play-making in the paint, and just doing what I do at a high level but definitely shooting is definitely a main goal that will get me to the next level in my game.

Q. With a lot of new faces on the roster this season, Dante Allen and yourself coming back, what can you say about how you have kind of worked together to be a leadership group and how you and Dante can move this team forward?

SHELTON HENDERSON: It's been easy to connect with them guys. We got along fairly quickly. We hang out with each other on and off the court a lot.

Just being able to carry that onto the court is going to be the main focus I think, and just when we get to that point, it's going to be hard to stop us.

Q. You tied a couple of Miami records last year as a true freshman. What are your goals for yourself this year?

SHELTON HENDERSON: Definitely just win. I want to win at a very high level this year as a team. But for myself, just carry on what I did from last year. Just play at a very high level for myself and just do whatever it takes to make it to wherever we want to be.

THE MODERATOR: Shelton, thank you. Questions for Acaden Lewis. I'll ask the first one from the podium.

I'm curious, in 2024 you started a nonprofit organization called Bucket Blessings. Can you share with us what that's all about?

ACADEN LEWIS: Yes, I can. Growing up in Washington D.C., I grew up in northeast. Northeast doesn't have the best rep for an area to live, but growing up I saw a lot of bad and a lot of good within my area.

So me and my parents came up with the idea to start a nonprofit once I had a little bit of money in my pocket so we could afford it, and since then, we've done great -- we've done great things.

It's called Bucket Blessings, and we do things in areas that struggle for kids that struggle and for families that struggle. We take care of them in any way we can. We've done Thanksgiving drives, Christmas drives. We've done photo shoots for kids in homeless shelters and things like that.

So we've done a lot of great things and continue to keep doing them. We have events coming up in Miami that we're planning now, so please look forward to them.

Q. Coach talked about, hey, for as much success as we had last season, it kind of feels like a whole different year. He talked about being coachable and he talked about being receptive. For you, mindset heading into the season, what is it?

ACADEN LEWIS: Just be the best version of myself. As he said, you have to take criticism and constructive criticism at that. There were things I didn't do very well last year at Villanova that coming into this year I don't want to repeat. One of those things was shooting the ball from the line and from three.

Just didn't have the confidence. But I've done a good job and they have done a good job of instilling the confidence in me to get that back up, and everything that we've talked about is being a pure point guard.

Then defense I tend to take some plays off, so we've really been on that, whether it be film or just being challenged in practice.

The last thing is just being a pure point guard. Sometimes sacrificing some of my shots and some of my buckets to get other people involved, because that helps us win games. Nothing matters more than winning games.

Q. To go off of the first question, just why have a nonprofit? Why go out and pay it forward? What is it about you and what you care about that makes you want to help somebody else?

ACADEN LEWIS: My question would be why not? Why not go help someone if you're in a situation and you are blessed enough to do so?

Growing up me and my parents were stable. They did a good job of taking care of me, getting me through school. It was my way of returning the favor. It's also something great to just do in the community.

You get to make a real change. I get to inspire people on the court, through my play, and that's a fully different feeling than actually helping someone in their day-to-day



life, especially when they don't have it as well as me. Just trying my best to make a difference.

Q. Acaden, you set Villanova's freshman assist record last season. When you are learning how to play with a new group, how do you figure out where each guy wants their ball?

ACADEN LEWIS: It just takes time through practice, scrimmages, games, thing like that. This team is a lot different. Like last year, Duke Brennan -- shout-out to Duke Brennan. I love him. But Duke Brennan couldn't catch a lob from an 8-foot court. It was a little bit different. I didn't have a lob threat or things like that.

He was great in the pocket, and he excelled in that regard, but with this new team I have a lot more lob threats. I also have shooters. So I think the court will be a little more spaced.

The ACC plays at a faster pace than Big East does. Big East is a little bit more grudgy, physical, and things like that. I think we'll get out, we'll run, and we'll get a lot more easy buckets, which hopefully will help to give me a couple of more assists a game, so just figuring it out in a new league with a new team.

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