Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

Ace Buckner

Carter Welling

Men's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Clemson joins us. Coach Brad Brownell has some opening comments.

BRAD BROWNELL: Year 17. Super excited about it and grateful for this opportunity. Glad to be joined here by Carter Welling, Ace Buckner, two guys that I think are going to have big years for us.

Love my team. We have been battling some injuries this summer, to we're probably a little bit behind schedule from where I'd like to be. I think we've got great potential.

I'm really proud of what we've been able to accomplish at Clemson, especially here probably over the last decade. I think we've made tremendous strides both not only really in terms of wins and losses, but also just what our program looks like.

We've got unbelievable facilities now, a winning culture and tradition, and super excited about the challenges ahead.

Still want to try to win an ACC championship. That's the goal. Hope to do it with the '26-'27 Tigers. With that, questions for me.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. You've had three straight NCAA Tournament appearances. What do you think this team needs to do differently to take the next steps?

BRAD BROWNELL: Get healthy, first. You know, again, we've had a bunch of guys. We took a trip to Italy this summer, and it was a great experience. Not only the basketball, but really the off-the-court bonding and things that we got to do together.

But we did it with a group that was really, really only about half the team. Both these guys were out. Zac Foster was out. Dylan Faulkner was out. And so it's been a little bit of a challenge to try to put the pieces together.

I think we'll have great depth when we all get there. We might be different in how we play in terms of I think we're a little more guard-centric than maybe the last few years, and so we're trying to open the floor a little bit more, playing some spread ball screen stuff a little earlier in the clock and see how that goes.

I think we've recruited some really good shooters and worked really hard in that area to be able to space the floor. If we can come together and be connected and defend like most of the Clemson teams that I've coached, we have a chance to achieve the kind of things you talked about.

Q. Last season you had one returner, two if you counted RJ. This season you've got a handful of returners coming back. How does that preparation differ?

BRAD BROWNELL: Last year was challenging because you didn't have as many guys who were returning, and we lost a bunch of scorers. So it was really kind of what's our identity going to be.

This year I think we kind of have an idea of what our identity could be. We just haven't done it yet because we haven't had everybody out there practicing every day.

Zac Foster just recently got back and has started practicing a little bit.

Carter obviously is still a couple months for sure away.

Ace wasn't available all summer. That was hard for our team. He's a big vital part of what we plan to do.

So I think as a coaching staff with a big turnover in staff, it's just planning how we want to exactly play, what is it going to look like, and then getting the reps necessary for these guys to get comfortable. That just takes time. It takes

practice.

I think I'm very optimistic on our talent level and what we have the ability to do, but we've got to put it all together and get together out there on the court together to do it.

Q. A couple of weeks ago the state of South Carolina did something really unique in Charleston where they play three exhibition games, two men's and one women's, but they played it outside in the tennis center. Would that be something you would be interested in, or what are your thoughts on that?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, certainly something we would look into. I haven't really watched the games yet, but I've heard about it, seen clips here and there. It looked like a really neat atmosphere.

Certainly we love going down to Charleston. We go down there and play in that tournament every four years. We've got a strong fan base in the low country, so going down there would be certainly an opportunity that we would have to look at a good bit.

Q. You spoke about injuries and going through, guys getting healthy. How has that aided this team and will aid this team this season with creative and competitive depth?

BRAD BROWNELL: We did have a bunch of different guys that got more experience probably in Italy than they ever have. A guy like Trent Steinour, Chase Thompson, two sophomores that got to play a lot; Dallas Thomas is another guy.

I thought those guys got really good game experience, 20-plus minute games overseas, which I think was great.

Harris Reynolds is a good freshman who got the benefit of playing with a ball in his hands probably a little bit more than even he has been used to.

So I do think it was really good. We had a couple of our transfers that got to play a good bit. LT Lelevicius, Cole Certa, David Fuchs are all guys that got good experience.

There's several starters or potential starters that just weren't on the trip in terms of being able to play or weren't available.

That can be hard because it was most of our summer. I think our program, we've done an unbelievable job in the summer of really identifying the strengths and weaknesses of our team, getting our team connected during that time, and then when we get to September, we kind of really hone into our playing and make a lot of progress really quickly.

This year's team is just a little slower. We're going to get there. We just need more practice time with all the guys available.

THE MODERATOR: Four seniors, three juniors, four sophomores, three freshmen. About as balanced of a roster you could have in the portal era. Was that the intention?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, we still believe greatly in high school recruiting. The All-Conference players that we've had recently at Clemson, the PJ Halls and Hunter Tysons, Ian Schieffelins, Chase Hunters were all guys that we recruited out of high school and developed and those guys worked tails off and became great players in the ACC.

Then we've supplemented it when necessary with older guys from the portal or guys that we thought could make a difference, like Carter Welling right next to me, and certainly the guys I mentioned on this year's team. We want to have that blend throughout my time at Clemson in terms of building the culture and doing it with a roster that has that kind of makeup.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Questions for Ace Buckner.

Q. Injury-wise, first of all, how are you doing with that recovery process? What kind of a next step do you feel like you're capable of taking this year?

ACE BUCKNER: I'm doing well. Shoulder surgery went well as well. I was disheartened I couldn't play in Italy, but I was out there and had a good time with my guys. This year I'm really trying to step into that leadership role.

Just do whatever I need to do for the team this year.

Q. Coach talked about the reps or rather lack thereof. Does that worry you? Same question to you as I asked him. How do you prepare for this?

ACE BUCKNER: It doesn't really worry me, to be honest. I believe in the guys that we have in the locker room, and I believe in myself. I feel like Coach will get us there. He's done this for a very long time, and I got trust in him that he'll make sure we are where we need to be.

Q. What do you think your responsibility is behind what you do on the court?

ACE BUCKNER: That's a good question. Like I said, just

being a leader in the locker room. You know, being one of the returners, I've been here for going on my third year here. Knowing what it takes to be a Clemson basketball player and just showing the new guys what that really takes.

Q. How have you elevated yourself when it comes to your deep shooting ability? What have you done to make sure that we have some more layers to the game as you step forward?

ACE BUCKNER: I spent a lot of time in the gym this summer. The summer is the time you get better, and I spent countless hours in the gym, whether it was here at Clemson or down in Orlando with my family, and I just really worked.

I realized what my weaknesses were, and I tried to fix those this summer.

Q. Ace, you mentioned wanting to become more of a leader this season. You got your first starts during the ACC Tournament last season. What did that experience teach you about handling this new maybe bigger role?

ACE BUCKNER: Yeah, it was a greet experience, honestly, being able to play in front of that many people and with the guys from last year's team in Spectrum Center. It was fun. It just showed me that I'm here. You know, this is what you dream of as a kid, and this is the position you want to be. So I'm excited for it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Ace. Questions for Carter Welling.

Q. When you look back at your team at Clemson, is there anything that stood out to you?

CARTER WELLING: Some things that stood out to me this last year is just, you know, taking my game to the next level and playing in the ACC, one of the best conferences in America.

I think it's been a great blessing and God blessed me to be here, and I'm so grateful that I had the season I did, even though it didn't end the way I wanted it to with an injury.

Grateful for another year and that I'll be able to play this year, and along with hopefully a lot of basketball --

Q. You just spoke a little bit about leaning on your faith, rising through adversity, going through that injury what&what that's taught you and how have you been able to lean on your faith to get through it?

CARTER WELLING: Yeah, absolutely. I think I served a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. It just told me to be an everyday person. I had a weakness. I got hurt and it caused me to be humble.

With that weakness, I turned it to God, and he's helping me to make it strong again. That's something that I'm super grateful for and some of the things that my family taught me and my faith taught me. Just put my trust in him and to keep moving forward day by day knowing that I can get through and return to where I was and even better.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of family, what was it like growing up with three brothers knowing that all four of you guys were highly competitive?

CARTER WELLING: It's awesome. It's awesome. I'm sure you guys can imagine a house full of four boys is a little rowdy, and it's a great blessing to have three best friends who are all ultra-competitive.

All of them I've been able to be super close with. I'm super fortunate in that regard. They're all just great human beings. I reach out and talk to them often, and they're a huge blessing in my life.

Q. While you're out and you're rehabbing, the season is going to get underway. What do you see as your role on the bench with the team while you're rehabbing and waiting to get back into game action?

CARTER WELLING: Yeah, I think something that I've started to do over these last couple of months is learn how to be a vocal leader. It's really easy to show the guys on the court, but now that I'm not on the court for a little bit, I've had to learn and to watch and learn the game even better and help the guys come along.

They've made great progress, and they're looking really good, so I couldn't be more proud of my team right now.

THE MODERATOR: I'm sure you don't know, but you are the last student-athlete at the podium for ACC Tip Off 2026. You get the last question. Fill in the blank when given the choice people should tune in to watch Clemson basketball. Why?

CARTER WELLING: Because we're exciting, and you can expect big things this season.

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