

# Atlantic Coast Conference

## Operation Basketball

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## Joel Berry

## Isaiah Hicks

North Carolina Tar Heels

THE MODERATOR: We welcome North Carolina's Joel Berry and then Isaiah Hicks.

**Q. Is there anything inherent to the way Roy coaches a team? You guys always seem to have a few bumps along the road early, and then by the end of the year have found the identity and maybe are playing your best basketball. Is there any reason for that year after year, you think?**

JOEL BERRY: I think so, just because Coach just wants everything to be perfect, and I think that's the reason why you see the bumps along the way. Sometimes you guys will see Coach get on us a lot, and that's just because, like I said, he wants us to be perfect. So throughout the year we try to do different things to try to change it up so teams won't be able to scout us and see the same things every time. And while we're doing that, we're trying to learn while on the go.

So I think that's why throughout the season we have our ups and our downs. But I think pretty much every team has that same thing. But that's one thing, the reason why we see that a lot with us is just because Coach wants it to be perfect.

**Q. The news came out that Theo's going to miss some time with a foot injury. What does the team miss with him not being able to be out there?**

JOEL BERRY: Yeah, Theo brings a lot of energy for us. That's one thing we're going to miss a lot. I mean, he's a great player. I know a lot of people see Theo in the social media and in the press conferences and stuff. And I know he's an outgoing guy, but I don't think everyone has gotten a chance to see him as a player. I know what Theo can do.

You know, it just sucks because we were expecting a lot from him this year with Marcus and Brice leaving. We needed someone to step up into that starting role, or if he was going to start. He was going to have a great year. Just to see that happen to him kind of makes us a little sad. But I know when he comes back, he'll be good.

**Q. I'd love to know about the pressure you guys feel, if it's any different than a usual season coming off of that long run last year?**

JOEL BERRY: Yeah, I think so just because we got to the National Championship, and the fans are expecting a lot from us coming into this year. I mean, we're returning a lot of people, so there is still some experience there. But at the end of the day, you've just got to focus on yourself, focus on what's going on with the team and not worry about the expectations and everything, because everyone has their expectations. But as long as we're doing what we're doing and listening to Coach and getting better as a team, that's all that matters.

**Q. What's an accurate definition this year of the back court of North Carolina, and an accurate definition of the team as a whole, in your opinion?**

JOEL BERRY: I would say underrated. A lot of people are saying we don't have the back court to get to that spot that we did last year. I think that's false because we're returning me, Justin, Nate, Theo. We have Seventh Woods and Brandon Robinson coming in. So I think the talent is there, and I think we do have the back court to be able to get to that spot.

But we like to get the ball inside and we like to play inside and out. But at the end of the day if it has to come to where the back court has to carry us, I think we have the talent to do that.

**Q. You had a great sophomore campaign. Talk about what you do going into this season in order to keep your game up.**

JOEL BERRY: I just know that I'll probably be at the top of all the scouting reports. So I just have to continue to play hard and to do what I did last year. I'm not going to approach it any different. Just when it comes down to leadership, I have to be more vocal. I'm the type of guy that I just like to lead by example and not talk much. But that's one thing that I'm going to have to change this year, just being a little more vocal with not having Marcus Paige this year. So that's one thing I've been working on this summer.

But other than that, being the confident guy that I am, just going into each and every game playing my hardest.

**Q. What would you like to see out of this guy to the right here? He's such a nice, soft-spoken guy off the court but has such potential on the court, and we'd see glimpses, last year anyway.**

JOEL BERRY: Yeah, he is kind of soft a little bit. But when he gets on the court though, it's a different Isaiah. He plays hard. He's going to step into a big role this year with losing Brice. But I think he's capable of doing it. The plays that I've seen in practice, and some of the plays that I've seen him do throughout the season still amazes me. So just for him to be able to get more minutes this year and being able to step into that starting role, I think Isaiah's going to have a big year for us.

**Q. Does he foul a lot in practice, too?**

JOEL BERRY: Oh, man, yeah, he does. But sometimes we run up and down the court so much to where he gets a little tired. So to stop the play, he'll probably foul. I don't mind it, because I want to stop myself. But, no, he fouls, but he still gives us a lot.

**Q. I've heard you talk about leadership a lot and some people coming along in those roles. Who are the leaders in this year's team, and how have you seen them step up?**

JOEL BERRY: Yeah, I think our leaders are probably myself, Justin, and then just the seniors all together. They're the ones, they've been here the longest. So they know what Coach expects. I mean, I've been here three years, so I know the same thing. But I think that this year I've seen a lot of guys step up and be a little bit more vocal. Even Isaiah, he doesn't talk as much, but throughout practice I can still hear him say some things to the big men, like Tony, who is coming in as a freshman.

So I think a lot of people are stepping into that role. If we can get everyone on the team talking and trying to see what's going on the court, what's going wrong, what's going good, I think that will be great for us as a whole.

THE MODERATOR: Joel, thank you. Isaiah, your turn.

**Q. Theo had said that he's one of the more vocal leaders on the team. So with his absence, how is that going to affect your approach to leading the team?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would say just because he's not practicing or anything, he's still there in spirit. He's still there in practice. We can still hear his voice. So I would say it's just going to be like his energy out there on the court won't be there, but you know his spirit's going to be there, him talking to us and all that on the sidelines is still there.

**Q. Just what you can say about the veterans returning on this team, and your teammate just spoke about being underrated. Would you say the same thing? What can you say about this team this year?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would say the same thing, because especially after how the season ended, everybody took it hard, worked real hard on this off-season. Everybody's game really improved for the returning players. Not that many people know. So it's just us working hard since the off-season until now. So I really think it's going to surprise a lot of people.

**Q. Maybe you touched on this, from the outside looking in, we'd wonder what a Kennedy Meeks will be doing differently or better or yourself. Are there specific things you guys have worked on or specific things you're seeing in practice that are improved from last year?**

ISAIAH HICKS: Yeah, every player's not the same. I can go down the line for how much everybody has changed. But as far as Kennedy, Kennedy's gotten very stronger, he's more in shape. Just sometimes I remember me and Kennedy's freshman year, it felt like from him being that big until now, it just seems like he's moved everybody out the way, just get where you want to get. Post low anytime you want. For me, my freshman year, confidence-wise, it's completely different.

**Q. This is a team that's had success with the 2-3 zone against Syracuse. Why have you found success against SU?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would say it's just the way we play inside out, with guards that can knock down a shot. Just really puts a thread on it. Last year with me and Brice working the middle, Brice would find me baseline, and then they have to worry about that, it leaves it open for shooters.

**Q. Isaiah, how would you define a successful season this year?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would say just us just playing without regrets. Win or lose, if we can get to a spot where we can say we tried, we left everything out there, I would say that would be a successful season.

**Q. We joke about the fouling, but that's obviously a serious thing with the role you need to play on the team. Was it fatigue that caused that last year? How do you shake having a rep as a fouler, too?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would just say me coming off the bench, I was just thinking about energy and being aggressive. Sometimes I'll be too aggressive. Like denying a ball so far out by half court and get a foul, something like that. Just pointless, stupid. Don't have to be that aggressive.

**Q. What's Coach like with a brand-new knee?**

ISAIAH HICKS: I would say he's pretty happy. Coach, you know, he don't like to feel like he's weak or anything, so he has that short fuse. But I would say since he's feeling better, it's always good for us.