

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Mike Brey

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

MIKE BREY: Well, you know, I'm excited about our group in that we've got some old guys back. I mean, we've lost four NBA players in the last two years, but we still have some experience back in Vasturia and Beachem and Colson, Matt Farrell, Rex Pflueger, guys that were part of two Elite 8s and ACC championships, so you've got kind of a confident older group. Very aware that we're playing in what I think is the deepest the ACC has been in a long time, certainly in my tenure. It really has the feel -- this year's ACC, as far as the depth and the number of NCAA Tournament-caliber teams, it has the feel of that Big East I was in not that long ago, and that one year we pulled off 11 bids, so I think it's going to be really fun to watch this league do battle.

Q. You made mention of it, Connaughton and Grant leaving and then having to go without Jackson as well as Auguste and seeing the success, but it seems like this team is always able to pick up the baton and keep running. What you can say about the atmosphere and culture you've created at Notre Dame?

MIKE BREY: I think the culture is really strong. We're really proud of it. We kind of have a very distinct style of play, and it's kind of handed on down the line.

I've always been lucky to have juniors and seniors playing major roles for me, which means you probably have pretty good leadership because you have some older guys helping you run the locker room. The three that I mentioned -- I refer to them as the big three, Colson, Beachem, Vasturia -- will have a lot of responsibility doing that.

So I think where we may not have the physicality again some nights, we do have a bunch of guys that really know how to play and know how we play, so I think we've got a shot to scratch out a bid again, and you've got to -- everybody talks about Elite 8. I said, you've got to get access to this thing first, this tournament. It'll be a dogfight to get access out of this league this year.

Q. This morning we talked to some of the student-athletes about do you have to work at being leaders, do you have to strategize. Your big three, do you have to pull them in to help coach them on how to be leaders?

MIKE BREY: I think with each set of captains, there's a little bit different -- you kind of evaluate them in the summer and you watch how they've interacted. What's helped in our culture is they've had great examples before them. Beachem, Colson and Vasturia have seen Connaughton and Grant and Jackson and Auguste develop, and so there's really a responsibility when the torch is passed to you as a junior or senior captain, where you really feel the pressure to do a good job. So it's kind of run itself that way.

Some guys are a little more natural. I think a guy like Bonzie Colson will become more of a voice as the year goes on because his role will be bigger and bigger.

Q. Last year Tyler Lydon had 15 points against you guys. What makes him such a versatile weapon on the floor for SU?

MIKE BREY: He just had a fantastic year. He's got that ability to stretch the floor and make a shot, make a three-point shot, and I thought he got more and more confident. Of course our game may have jump started him, now that I think. He got more and more confident as the year went, and then you give his athletic ability and his ability to put it on the floor, he's a gifted guy. He can block shots out of their 2-3 zone. He's one of the best players in our league, and it's been interesting. I'm glad we only play them once, let me put it that way, that we don't repeat Syracuse. He's a heck of a player.

Q. You talked about your senior leadership; tell us about the newbies coming up.

MIKE BREY: Yeah, I think some new faces that have to emerge for us as a junior, Martin Geben, who will be our starting center when we get started here in our first exhibition game. He's played behind Zach Auguste for two years, physical kid. I think he can be a better post defender than Zach. He's a very good off the ball screener to get Vasturia and Beachem open, which is going to be important this year. They need some help to get open. But there's an older guy that is going to be a new face we need to step up. We've had a lot of juniors where the lightbulb has gone on, Zach as a junior, V.J. as a junior, they really come into their own. Matt Farrell needs to continue to play like he did in March when we put him into the starting lineup. Rex Pflueger, who certainly was the hero of the Stephen F. Austin game, but really gave us great minutes defensively and energy. Matt Ryan, another

sophomore shooter. Two freshmen have been impressive, Johnny Mooney, a power forward from Orlando, Florida, can kind of stretch the defense, and TJ Gibbs, a guard from New Jersey.

a culture that's given them confidence and helped them grow up as a man.

We've got great competition in practice, which really helps you get better.

Q. You were talking about the degree of difficulty in the league. Currently you're playing 18 conference games in a couple of years. You'll get the opportunity to play 20. What's that going to be like?

MIKE BREY: Well, we did it in the Big East. We were the first team to go from 16 league games to 18 league games, and I'll never forget the league meetings in Jacksonville where the Georgetown AD said, oh, my God, we can't do that, because in those 32 games, if they're league games, we're going to be 16-16 as a league. If they're non-league games, we'd be maybe 28-4, it's going to kill our RPI, less teams in the tournament. You know what it did? It did the exact opposite. It was after we did that we started to get nine bids, 10 bids, 11, because it gave a bubble team another shot at a team with a good RPI or a lock to get in.

I think it can really play out over time, the 20 league games helps us get more bids into the tournament. I think what you have to do then is be very smart and strategic about your non-league schedule and be really careful what you do with that once you get into 20 games. It gives you maybe a little bit more of a truer round-robin. Does it give you a little truer 1 through 4 who get the byes, truer champion, a little bit of that.

But the year we got 11 bids, in February -- any time a bubble team was playing a lock in the Big East, the bubble team won. As a matter of fact, in this league I think many of the coaches were claiming conspiracy theory. It was coming pretty hard out of Greensboro, Bobby, at that time. So I think it can help us over time. But you'd just better be smart about what you do with your non-league.

Q. Coach Hamilton talks about how he knows he's a successful coach beyond the trophies. How do you know whether or not you've done your job beyond all the stats and the hardware?

MIKE BREY: I think when guys come back, your former guys come back, and now that I've been at a 17 years, I've got a lot of guys that are out there, some still playing, some out in the real world, when they come back and they talk about that they've had a good experience and they enjoyed it and you see the camaraderie amongst their teammates that they played with, it makes you feel like you've hopefully established