

# Atlantic Coast Conference

## Operation Basketball

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### John Swofford

Commissioner



COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Let me first of all welcome all of you. We look forward to this time of year, as I know that you do. It's a busy time of year for all of you and all of us with the overlap of the two sports, but it's also a very exciting time of year.

I want to spend most of the time today with your questions, but I do have a few priorities to talk about first with you.

First of all, as you know, basketball has been and continues to be very, very special in this league. Historically and traditionally, we have an extraordinary group of basketball programs, and we're fortunate to have that.

Last year was a continuation of a very high competitive standard that has been established in this league over decades. It was the first time in our history that three different teams won the regular season, the ACC Tournament, and then the National Championship, with Virginia, then Notre Dame, then Duke.

We had five teams advance to last year's Sweet 16, with three advancing to the Elite 8, those being the most of any league, and unfortunately for us, two of our teams matched up in the Sweet 16.

Duke is the reigning national champion, which means our programs that are here today have won seven of the last 15 national titles. That's more than twice as many as any other league.

Our league also leads all conferences in trips to the Final Four and three of the top 5, five of the top 11, and six of the top 25 winningest programs in basketball history are in the ACC, with Carolina third, Duke fourth, Syracuse fifth, Notre Dame eighth, Louisville 11th, and North Carolina State 25th.

I've said this before, and I will say it again: This league is brutally competitive. And I mean that in a very positive sense, because that's exactly what we want with ACC basketball, and that's exactly what we expect with ACC basketball.

Game in and game out, there aren't any breaks, whether you're playing on the road or whether you're

playing at home, but particularly when you're on the road.

From a TV standpoint, just very quickly, ESPN, the ACC Network, the ACC digital network and our regional network partners, the RSNs and particularly FOX Sports South that coordinates that continue to be terrific partners. As part of our relationship with ESPN, I do want to mention about the fact that whether it's the ACC Big Ten challenge, whether it's Big Monday, whether it's College Game Day and all that goes with the regular season, there's terrific coverage for our teams and our fans, and that's important to our leagues and our programs.

That includes the ACC Tournament that will head to our nation's capital this year in our first visit back to the Verizon Center since 2005. Washington and that area has been a periodic stop for our tournament since 1976, and we look forward to returning there.

Following the tournament -- as I think most of you know, following the tournament being held in Washington, it'll be held in Barclays Center in 2017 and '18; here in Charlotte at the Time-Warner Cable Arena across the street in 2019; and back in the Greensboro Coliseum in 2020.

As we look ahead to the season, there are a number of rule changes. In fact, there are 25 that have been issued by the NCAA men's basketball Rules Committee for this year. These focus on increasing the pace of play, reducing the number of stoppages, and providing better balance between offense and defense.

The committee also issued a directive to the officiating community to reduce physicality in order to create more freedom of movement in the game. These new rules, as well as the emphasis on certain current rules, are supported by the NABC board, the NCAA men's basketball oversight committee, the Division I men's basketball committee, and the Collegiate Commissioners Association, and the point I'm making is that the full basketball community seems to be collectively on board with these changes. And one thing I think you can expect, just coming out of a meeting with our coaches and with the national coordinator of basketball officiating, is that there will be an adjustment period in the early part of this season,

as players adjust, as coaches adjust in terms of how to play and how to teach with the new rules.

This is the last year that John Clougherty will be our coordinator of officiating in the ACC, and many of you know John, and I want to acknowledge his career, both on the floor and off of the floor, and the tremendous job that he has done, not only for the Atlantic Coast Conference but for this league. He will be available all day after this forum to discuss the playing rules more in depth.

I'll mention that it was a year ago that we experimented with using a 30-second shot clock during exhibition games, and that is now one of the new rules that will be in place for the 2015-16 season.

J.D. Collins, the NCAA's new national officiating coordinator, is also visiting with us and will be available this afternoon. He is currently meeting with our head coaches.

Paul Brazeau will be entering his second year as senior associate commissioner for men's basketball, and Paul has been a terrific addition to our staff. He had big shoes to fill in replacing Carl Hicks, who is now at Florida State, and he has done that extraordinarily well and is prominently involved from a national standpoint in terms of men's basketball in every area of men's basketball, and as our representative on the NCAA Men's Basketball Oversight Committee.

So feel free to engage any of these gentlemen while you are here this afternoon.

Beyond the games this year and the season in front of us, there are a number of topics that we should collectively consider in order to grow and enhance the game of basketball and the Atlantic Coast Conference.

These are all concepts that I think are important to fully vet to see if there's widespread support and merit, but I don't think we should shy away from the desire to constantly look at possible ways to make this great game better and evolve with the times.

I'm not necessarily championing these at this point in time, but I'm an advocate for discussion about them. For example, as we look at our ACC basketball schedules, should we consider playing more conference games? Would that enhance players' experiences while they are in the Atlantic Coast Conference?

It seems clear that there is increased fan support for conference games, and from a fan's perspective we probably haven't reached that max. It would create a more balanced schedule, but on the other hand, how

would it affect the number of teams selected from our league to NCAA Tournament play? Would it help us or would it hinder us?

On the topic of schedules, should we look at a more formal opening weekend for college basketball, as well as a more formal opening weekend for ACC conference play? I'd love to see more excitement and buzz given to the start of college basketball like we see in so many other sports.

The ending is climactic, as we all know. The beginning, not so much. Is there a better way to celebrate the opening of the season in college basketball? If that means we have to alter the start of the season, we should take the time to consider whether it works and is worth the growing pains that it may bring.

As we further look at the playing rules, we've taken great steps, yet I think there's probably more to discuss. We need to evaluate the current shot clock change. However, let's not close the idea of possibly going to 24 seconds.

Looking at the best of the NBA and international rules, should we widen the lane? Should we consider the quarter system? Should we consider advancing the ball to the front court when a team takes a time-out in the last two minutes of the game? Is there merit to moving to six fouls before a player is disqualified? We want the officials to continue to whistle illegal contact, and that's an emphasis this year, as we just talked about, but we don't want players disqualified prematurely. Which direction would six fouls take us?

Finally, as it relates to the student-athlete experience, for the few, relatively speaking, that have the opportunity to explore the professional ranks, and there are probably more generally speaking in our league than just about any other league, it seems we're making positive strides with the current discussion surrounding the NBA Draft.

The NABC and several of our coaches in this league have worked with the NBA and others to propose a new draft entry model that would be voted on in January. That model provides better and more complete information to the student-athlete by allowing him to participate in the pre-draft combine and gain feedback in order to make the most informed decision possible for him.

Personally, I would prefer a model that combines what Major League Baseball does and to a very similar extent the NFL, where you can be drafted out of high school, go pro, or if you don't, go to college and remain there for three years.

So there's plenty, I think, to talk about in terms of enhancing an already great game, and I'm hopeful that we will all do that together moving forward and build on the rules changes that have been navigated so effectively, I think, by Dan Gavitt at the NCAA going into this year.

We anticipate a terrific year in ACC basketball. I hope you'll have a lot of great things to cover, and I suspect that you will. We appreciate the coverage that you give our programs and our athletes.

With that, let me stop and see if you have any questions.

**Q. Obviously a lot of your comments today are about the future and really what I sense is an advocacy rule for the ACC and college basketball. Is this something that, one, is based on the strength of the league? Do you see the league with its stature being a leader in some of these changes, and does it have to to get them through?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, I don't know if we have to to get it through, but I think with the status that this league has earned over a long period of time and the prominence of the sport in this league and the leadership at the coaching level that we have in the Atlantic Coast Conference, that certainly it's appropriate for us to play a leadership role in taking a look at any changes that should go forward. And I think periodically we need to do that, and we've seen scoring go down in recent years. We've not necessarily -- probably less so in our league than in some other leagues, but some attendance issues there.

I just don't think you can ever become too complacent no matter how your league has done or no matter the quality and support that people have more the game. There's usually a way to do things better, and we should play a role in that discussion and in moving those things that we feel would enhance the league forward and see if we can gain support from other conferences across the country in terms of making the game better.

**Q. Kind of piggy-backing on your notion of the possibility of more conference games, whether you stick with 18 or perhaps go to 20, do you anticipate future schedules being as in the past where there was an established rotation, several seasons out, or to an old Big East model, which Paul is familiar with, where it was more fluid and it was more of a season-by-season type of structure?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Yeah. Well, at this point, my response would be that we haven't changed

what we've done the last two years. At this point that would continue. We put out a two-year cycle at that point in time. This will be the second year of that cycle. And then unless something changes in terms of votes from our athletic directors, we'll continue with that. But we will be discussing it without question.

You know, in a more global sense, and I think you'll find my colleagues at the other conferences that have grown to 14 or even 12, probably the biggest challenge and certainly one of the biggest and I suspect maybe the biggest in being a 14-member conference, or in our case a 15-member conference, is how do you schedule. It's challenging. You know, we're still -- we discuss that a lot. Trying to look at it, evaluate it, ask ourselves whether we've gotten it right or not. I don't think we feel like we've gotten it wrong, per se, but I think the question is more can this be better and what can make it better.

One of the things about being a conference, at least from my chair, is I like models where you play within the conference as much as you reasonably can, and we don't want to do anything that eliminates -- I mean, our programs are national programs, obviously, and we don't want to eliminate that. We want our programs to continue to play intersectional games that are attractive. ADs think a great deal about scheduling in a manner that was effective when it comes to NCAA Tournament time and the selections that go with that.

And then we also have to think about what's good business in terms of putting people in the arena, in terms of our television packages. All of those things come into play, including what I said earlier. If you're a player in this league, what do you want to be doing from a schedule standpoint?

So all of that goes into play, and I think you've heard me talk about this in regard to football, as well, that we continually are evaluating that. We're just a few years into, in basketball, being a 15-member league, and it's just a good thing to evaluate it. It helps us to get feedback.

Periodically I read ideas that many of you have put in stories or offered, and those are noticed. But we're not to a point yet where we're significantly changing anything, but we are continually talking about that, and certainly the possibilities exist that there may be some changes.

**Q. As you know, the transition of high school players to the NBA has been a point of controversy for decades, so I wanted to follow up on your idea of three years more directly to the NBA, which certainly seems to work well in baseball. How**

**much support and where do you see support for this idea, and where is resistance likely to come from?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, I think the resistance comes from the NBA Players Association. That's where the real strength in changing all of this lies, quite honestly. You know, the NCAA can't do it. The NBA can't do it. It has to involve the Players Association.

So I don't know that we'll ever get to that point. But I think it's sound. It's not perfect, and nothing you do in this regard is going to be perfect. You know, I understand the argument that we live in the United States of America and you could have -- you should have the freedom to do whatever you need to do and want to do, whenever you want to do it. So long as it's legal, and I get that.

But I think as educational institutions, if we had the baseball rule, then those players who are not particularly interested in education necessarily and would rather go professional could go ahead and do so. Those who decided to go to school would truly be there for long enough to have an experience as a student-athlete and grow and develop as students do during that period of time.

You know, that's just a personal feeling after looking at this for years and years and years. That seems to me to make the most sense and seems to work very well for baseball in particular and football, but understanding that football is a different animal because of the extreme physicality of the sport.

**Q. Coach Pitino is not here today. Is it mandatory for coaches to attend, and was he excused, if it is? And what's your level of concern with the situation at Louisville right now?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, in terms of Rick, yes, it generally is mandatory that coaches be here. But we did not feel it appropriate to try and stand in the way and negate legal counsel advice that was given to the University of Louisville. We had discussions. Louisville knows that our strong preference is that all of our coaches be here, but these are extenuating circumstances, and I think you have to respect the legal advice that President Ramsey and that athletic director Tom Jurich and Coach Pitino were given, and we respect that.

**Q. Your level of concern with the situation?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, I think the first thing is that -- and I think this is pretty obvious to any of us in the room, that what has been alleged has absolutely no place in college athletics in any way, shape or form. There are multiple investigations going

on to try and get to the truth of this issue, and I think we've all seen situations in recent years where things got out of hand in the wrong way initially and then things turned out to be very different than what was reported or appeared to be the case at the beginning.

So I think we have to wait and see what comes out of those investigations and hope that they get to the truth of it, and then -- I have a lot of confidence in President Ramsey and Tom Jurich, and in Coach Pitino. So we'll just have to see how this plays out, but I think the fair thing to do is to see, is to wait and see how this plays out and where it ends, and that's exactly what's happening at this point in time.

**Q. You mentioned bringing more prominence to the start of the regular season. One of the things that's been written about is possibly moving the start of the season until after fall semester exams. But with events like the Maui Invitational, is that even feasible or something you'd be in favor of?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, you hear about let's make it a one-semester sport. You know, from a practical standpoint, just my opinion, I don't think that's doable, for a lot of reasons, both at the beginning of the year as well as at the end of the year, because you run into an awful lot of other big events later in the spring if you're going to try and move the Final Four much later. So just practically speaking, personally I don't think it's reality that we'll get there in terms of making it a one-semester sport. I understand the intention, but I just don't think that can happen.

I think it has to be more along the lines of could we start a specific date, such as Thanksgiving weekend, and that's the start of college basketball, and everybody plays.

You know, there are a lot of the events that you just mentioned that are terrific experiences for players as part of playing college basketball. You don't really want to take those away, either.

You know, I would tend to look at maybe starting a little bit later and making a big deal out of one weekend that in essence is a celebration of the start of the college basketball season. You know, right now it kind of just sort of slowly rolls out of the bucket, so to speak, I guess.

You know, the game, I think, deserves better than that.

**Q. John, in your opening comments, you mentioned the relationship between the ACC and your TV partners, and the contracts are in place for quite some time. But there's been a growing trend of what they call cord cutting, I guess, that has led**



**to layoffs at ESPN and other things. Has the league kind of looked at these kind of trends and new technologies and things and kind of started thinking about what might be in the future, and also the fact that there might not be as much revenue available when these contracts do come up as there is now?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, absolutely. I mean, we'd be totally remiss if we weren't doing those things. And the good thing, I think, about our current partner is there's nobody better in the world in terms of sports television at doing what they do, and I suspect that they will find ways to adjust to whatever that world is in a very effective and positive way. And we are having those conversations with our partner with regularity.

You know, I've been hearing forever that rights fees and television dollars are going to level out or go backwards, and I've been doing this for almost 40 years now. It's never happened. It doesn't mean it won't happen, but there's not much history to suggest that it will happen, and we've seen a lot of -- I don't know if it'll -- a lot of it is timing. I mean, the market fluctuates just like anything else. Sometimes you're out for bid at a really good time, and sometimes your contract is up at a time that you wish it wasn't. I mean, that happens to every conference somewhere along the way, and I don't know that the increases will necessarily continue to be what they have been at times in the past, and I'm sure we'll have times where it levels some and times where it jumps considerably.

In today's world, you have to pay attention and learn about the new technology and what it means, and we've got good partners to do that with that know a lot more about it than we do.

**Q. With the tournament going northward for the next three years, what kind of feedback have you gotten from those venues in trying to enhance the fan experience, and how strange will it seem to you to not have the tournament in the state for that long a period of time?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: We've gotten tremendous response and enthusiasm from Washington and Brooklyn, even now, including Brooklyn. I mean, they are way out in front of this. And I think any time you go somewhere new -- we've been to Washington, so it's not like we've never been there. We haven't been there as often, obviously, as we've been in North Carolina. But every experience we've had in Washington has been a positive one, and particularly the last one.

Our schools were very strong in their desire to take the tournament to Washington periodically and very strong

in their desire to take the tournament to the New York area.

We're a different conference than we were when we were eight, and in a lot of ways. The cornerstones and the core values and all that is still there. I think we've maintained the culture within the conference itself and the schools and how we operate and the support of each other and the trust that's there. But our geographic footprint is considerably larger than it's ever been before, which brings us opportunities that we've never had before that we feel like we should take advantage of, and that's certainly part of the reason of going not only to Washington, but now particularly New York.

So there's a lot of enthusiasm for it. Our schools were strongly supportive of that.

Did I miss anything, any part of that question?

**Q. What kind of thing (inaudible)?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Not that they would announce right now, but that's not something you, a month before you go in there that you decide, hey, maybe we should talk about some things we might should do to be more prominent in the marketplace and to communicate with our fans that are going and help them understand a totally new venue and new city. But all of that will be in play, as well as what'll be done there locally, as well. We are having those discussions not only with Washington but with Barclays now, as well.

**Q. With the situation at Louisville and the investigations going on at North Carolina and the appeal with Syracuse, are you concerned about the league's image?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: I'm not concerned about the league's image. I don't like the fact that there are three investigations going on, because that's highly unusual for this conference. But I do have a great deal of confidence in each of those institutions.

Issues are going to happen sometimes. We've got more schools than we've ever had before, so maybe there will be a few more issues. But they aren't issues that you want. They aren't issues that you welcome. But you can't allow that to undermine the cornerstones of what your league is all about, and I think our schools understand that.

What we're trying to do is help those schools get to an end point and then put it behind them, and we get back to, generally speaking, having zero of those on the docket. That's what you want to have, and that's what we expect. At the moment that's not the case, unfortunately.

**Q. You mentioned the new rules. Which of these will deal with stoppages of play and how much are you concerned about the stoppages of play as an issue in college basketball?**

COMMISSIONER SWOFFORD: Well, I think people want to see flow in a basketball game as much as they can. I think with these rule changes, a stoppage of play is -- we've got, what, fewer timeouts and a change in the media time-out situation. I don't have all those in front of me, so you've got those kinds of things.

I think early season, there are probably going to be a lot more fouls called. You might as well expect that. If the rules are called -- if the game is called the way the Rules Committee wants it called in the early going, it's going to require, as I said earlier, some adjustment from players and probably coaches in terms of how they teach the game. There may be -- and it's probably reasonable to expect there to be more fouls called than what you're used to.

Now, hopefully people will adjust as the season goes on, and that will back off and will give more freedom to the offensive players and their movement and, therefore, enhance the game probably offensively to a degree. But I think we'd be naïve if we thought there wasn't going to be an adjustment period to that.

But my point is with all those fouls, if that is true, and there are a lot more fouls, there will be stoppages that you might get a little tired of early on. I hope that won't be the case, and certainly I hope that won't be the case as the season progresses.