

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Q. Coach, will the offense -- what will be the differences of post Aaron Grant era offenses at Notre Dame?

COACH BREY: Yeah, I still think we can pass that ball. We've almost established a culture of that in our program, replacing a Grant and a Connaughton is going to be tricky more so from the leadership side than anything. But we still have a pretty good nucleus back of guys that were part of that championship.

I think when you play Colson and Auguste together, your spacing is a little different than Auguste and Connaughton together, and I still think we have to work to figure that out because when we spread the floor we're really at our best. But there really is that culture of moving the ball and making the extra pass.

We're a little bit bigger. When you have a Beachem and a Colson on the floor, those are two seven-foot wing spans that are on the floor together, so defensively we end up getting our hands on a few more things. And I think Jackson and Vasturia are two of the better defensive guards in the country.

But it's a group that tasted it. It's Jackson's team, and he's kind of been the guy setting the tone for us. I've been really pleased with his leadership.

Q. I wanted to follow up on Connaughton specifically because he was a unique player, enabled you to spread the floor offensively because he could shoot the three, and yet defensively he could guard power forwards and box out. Does that maybe change the offense even more? Is there another player like him, or are you going to be more bunched up in the middle offensively?

COACH BREY: You know, there is, and I think we always have the ability to substitute a perimeter guy for a Colson or an Auguste and downshift. We've done it a bunch throughout my -- just downshifted. So does that mean Beachem plays a little bit more like Pat did? Beachem is 6'8", he's got a 7'2" wingspan. He can stand behind some big guys and play post defense. Matt Ryan is a freshman for us who really shoots it and can spread the floor.

So you know, I don't ever lose sight of playing a little bit

smaller and really opening up the floor. The floor being open like that was so great for Jackson and Grant, and so it helps Grant -- this year it helps Jackson and Vasturia kind of get in there and be able to make plays.

Q. 775 three-point attempts last year. Is your roster set up for that type of output this year, or is it just really based on team by team?

COACH BREY: No, I think we've really utilized that shot. We've recruited guys that can put it in the hole. What did Morgan used to say, Dave and Bobby, good shooting covers a multitude of sins? We've certainly lived by that more than died by it. But we still have the arsenal of guys that can make shots, and that is always then led to great spacing because you have to come out and guard us. And I think that's why Zach Auguste shot 62 percent last year, because when he was balling screening, rolling, he was rolling down the middle of the lane and no one knows who to help off of.

Q. Vasturia has seemed to make a really big leap, probably one of the biggest in recent history of your program. Do you see somebody ready for a breakout this year?

COACH BREY: I think a Beachem and a Colson, the two guys right now that would go into the starting lineup for the two guys we lost. I think both of them. Colson was amazing for us the second half of the season, and he's amazingly efficient playing 20 minutes a game off the bench. I wonder what he does when he plays 30 minutes as far as his rebounding and his shooting percentage. I'm excited about having him on the floor more.

V.J. Beachem wasn't very good for us in March, but man, he helped us get there. He really was good in the regular season, shoots it, can get to the basket, long, even blocked some shots, and we've had in the history of our program another hallmark of it has been junior has taken a big step when we need him.

Guys paid their dues for two years. Doesn't happen much in college basketball anymore, but it does at our place. Then as juniors, when we ask them to do more and start, we've had many of them that have been able to deliver in that role. So those two guys I think will really jump out.

Q. Can you take us back to March when the final

buzzer went off in the Elite 8? What did you think? What was your reaction and how much of that have you taken with you into the late spring and summer?

COACH BREY: Well, I think exhaustion. Our run in March really starting at Louisville when we won on the road in early March and to finish the regular season through Greensboro and on, it was a little bit of a blur.

And I think all of us -- it was interesting in that locker room, there was really nobody crying because I think everybody gave so much emotionally, physically, that there really wasn't anything left. And they were kind of almost satisfied, which they should have been, that we gave it everything we had. It was a heck of a run. All I had really left to say to them was it was an honor to coach you.

The depressing thing was we couldn't practice the next day. Because it was an unbelievable group to be around. You just didn't want it to end.

Q. The commissioner today described the ACC as brutally competitive. This is your second go-around. Do you agree with that assessment? And then secondly, how do you react to the trial balloon that he's floating that the league play more conference games?

COACH BREY: First thing, I really believe this is the year we get to eight bids and maybe more. I really feel this is the year. My first two years I didn't have that feeling. I do feel with the teams and knowing what's coming back and how teams have recruited, I think this is the year it has the look of that Big East that I left those last couple years when we were getting eight, nine, and that one year we got 11 bids. And everybody in the ACC was thoroughly pissed off that year because I think you guys got four and the Big East got 11. But I think that we'll look at it.

You're talking about the 20-game league schedule. We're 18 now. I was actually the one that brought that up two years ago. Some of the veteran coaches in the league almost ran me out of Jacksonville, but I brought it up because of this reason: The whole thinking was to get more teams in the NCAA Tournament because we had a little bit of a trial balloon with the Big East. We were the first league in the Big East to go from 16 to 18 league games.

I'll never forget the Big East meetings going into that season. The Georgetown athletic director said, we can't do that because in those 32 games, if they're non-league games, our league will be 28-4, but it's going to be 16-16 if it's league games. So what it does was just the opposite. It mixed the RPIs again and again. For example, it gave bubble teams more shots at locks in

February to play their way in, and that year we got 11 bids. You could almost say conspiracy theory, because any time a bubble needed to beat a lock the last three weeks of the season in the Big East, it happened. So I really think it's something we should explore.

Also, we have such good inventory. We're the best league. We have the best depth. We should mix our inventory. I don't know if we should give other leagues a shot at us all the time. Just mix our stuff. If that means we have to start playing our league games in December, let's start playing our league games in December.

I think it softened a little bit after they gave me the big unanimous thumbs down, but league format, how you play your league format, whether it's 18 games, 20 games, or how you mix your repeat opponents, do we blow up the permanent repeat thing and change that. I think that all has to be looked at because that's strategically -- Mike Tranchese was unbelievable with that in the Big East. And you can almost kind of strategize to mix it up the right way to ensure more bids.

When you get to half your league in consistently and then maybe nine sometimes, then you can say you're the best league. That's when you can proudly say it.

Q. Two years ago 15 and 17, last year 32 and 6. I'm just stirring the pot here. Is it a failure season if you don't match 32 and 6 again?

COACH BREY: I don't know if I'd put 32 wins on it. You know, the current group is highly motivated and has tasted a lot of good stuff, so they'd like to play further, and that's nothing that I laid out for them, which is great. Jackson set that tone. Auguste has set that tone.

I think when I look at it, and this is how we had to start out in the Big East, when you can get in that tournament annually, or four out of five years, now you've got a real presence in your league.

Well, we got in one in a row, I look at it now. As good as last year was, that's one in a row. I'd like to go back and get in again because then you really start to gain momentum and a presence in the league.