

# Atlantic Coast Conference

## Operation Basketball

Wednesday October 24, 2018



# Josh Pastner

# Brandon Alston

# Jose Alvarado

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Georgia Tech.

**Q. Coach, this is your third season. Every coach talks about a building process, where do you think you are in your building process?**

COACH PASTNER: Well, I would like to say, first, that Coach Cremins is here and I want to go on record saying how many times I have asked him to actually coach with me during the game and sit on the bench, and he's such a nice person that he never wants to do that. But I said: Your name is on the court. You can -- I'll move over -- I'll be the associate head coach for that game.

But I want to give a great shoutout to one of the all-time greats ever in Coach Cremins being here.

But we're in year three and I really like our team. Obviously we're still building the right way, and I believe in our vision of how we want to get there and how Georgia Tech wants it to be done and what our -- obviously our goals is to be knocking on the doors to be in that NCAA Tournament and all those good things.

But we still take it one day at a time. I've got the two young men, to my left Brandon Alston and Jose to my right, helping us get to where we need to get to. And we're still in a situation where it's important for our team and our program that when we're on the floor that we make sure that we take care of the basketball, that we don't beat ourselves so we're really good defensively the way we cut, how hard we cut, all those type of things that go with that, that we control -- control the controllables and really do our job in that area.

And if we can do that, we can put ourselves in a chance to have success. So we're looking forward to this year. I like our group. And we're excited to get -- kick it off with games coming up here, first game is November 9th versus Lamar.

**Q. Jose, you were cooking pretty well last year**

**your freshman year until you got hurt. What was your mindset when the injury did happen, again because you had so much great momentum going, and what have you done since to make sure you're ready for this year?**

JOSE ALVARADO: My mindset was the same getting injured. It definitely affected me as a person because I love the game of basketball.

But when I knew I couldn't come back, I knew my role was still the same, getting my teammates involved, getting my teammates knowing that I'm going to support them as much as I can on the bench.

And rehab was very difficult getting back to my motion of it, but I had great people around me, my teammates, the staff, the coaching and my family definitely helped me and it really went well and I'm glad I had those people around me.

**Q. Brandon, you're sort of the old guy in the group here. Graduate student. Got your degree in three years from Lehigh. What is it about your drive, what is it that gets you going to where you are as focused as you are, and what have you learned in this basketball journey of yours?**

BRANDON ALSTON: I think my parents have always instilled in me that if you're going to do something try to be the best you can. Or there's no reason to do it.

So I think just trying to strive to be better every day is just something that's always been a part of me and always looking, being your hardest critic. So when other people critique you it's not that bad because you know there's always more you can give even on good games. So that's always been something that I try to pride myself in.

**Q. Jose, how do you describe your teammate to your left?**

JOSE ALVARADO: Great guy. He wants the best for all of us, not just himself. He cares about the team, and he just wants to motivate all of us to be the best that we can be on and off the court.

**Q. Coach, you talk about being comfortable with the team you have. This time next year when we're having media day, who do you think are going to be the names you'll be talking about having a great**

## '18/'19 season?

COACH PASTNER: I'm hoping these two guys. I also want to give a shoutout to Brandon, he did get his economics degree from Lehigh university in three years, and he's going to get his Master's from Georgia Tech in economics in the spring, which is extremely impressive.

I hope I'm talking about these two guys next season and a few other guys. We'll see how we are. We need to get on the floor and play against another opponent instead of ourselves.

We've worked hard. We've conditioned a lot. We've kept at it. Obviously we lost some seniors and lost Josh Okogie to the NBA draft. Gives other guys like Jose and Brandon, other guys on our team, opportunities to step up to the challenge and really help us move the needle. Also want to give a shoutout to LaPhonso Ellis, even though he's not a Georgia Tech grad, he's a class act and an amazing human being as well. I wish he had some eligibility so we could recruit him to play for us. He still looks like he can play. Though he told me he doesn't play any defense anymore. But we need some help offensively. If he could still shoot it, I would put him on the roster.

**Q. Josh, Ben Lammers has moved on. Obviously a great passer. The guy that seems to be the guy to next step up would be Abdoulaye Gueye. Tell me about where he was this summer, your expectations of him, and what do you expect of him coming in this season?**

COACH PASTNER: As you know, you watched us play. We did a lot through Ben. Literally every time we came down he touched the ball and we played through him and he was a great passer.

So we'll have to be a little bit different on that. Because AD is different than Ben, and Abdoulaye Gueye is different than Ben Lammers in that situation. But the one thing that Abdoulaye Gueye is better than Ben's at -- and he's one of the guys who maybe -- he's probably one of the better in the country personally, I believe -- is being able to score, you could throw it to him and score.

And he's not a guy that can just overpower you. He has enough skill that he can shoot a right-hand and left-hand jump hook and make it. As you know, that's not ordinary in this day and age.

So he can score with his back to the basket. We're able to throw it to him and he's able to put the ball in the basket. We'll have to do more of that, maybe not so much from the high post from him, but from the low back, trying to get him to be able to score the ball from

down there, because he's able to do that.

**Q. Brandon, when you look over your right shoulder you see the floor here of the Spectrum Center where the tournament will be played in March being here today, does that give you a bit of a leg up in understanding what the season is about and where it's all going to conclude, the regular season of the tournament, anyway?**

BRANDON ALSTON: Yes and no. You can see the immensity of the moment. You've got ESPN here. People you see on TV all the time here, the cameras. But playing in the ACC, you kind of know what comes with it every night.

I used to laugh with my brother because when you looked at the schedule, before, when I was at Lehigh, I used to look at the schedule and I'd be like: All right, we've got these three games, got to do my best for these three games.

Now I look at the schedule and it's like every single night -- we play Tennessee the second game of the season. So it's really exciting knowing that you just get to compete at that high level all the time and not just for a few games out of the season.

**Q. Jose, same question.**

JOSE ALVARADO: I mean, this is a great environment. But I wish I played last year in the Barclays Center because that's where I'm from. But down here like Brandon what he was saying is exactly right: We play in the ACC. Every night it's a dogfight as far as you've got to come in with 110 what you got.

You can't just come in thinking one day you can take a day off. No, that can't happen in this league. You've got to give everything you've got every game no matter who is in front of you.

COACH PASTNER: I just want to say with Jose, when we recruited him, we sold -- I mean, hit on hard with Coach Cremins about that, selling about Coach Cremins and his pipeline that he had in New York, when he got it going back in the day.

And so I told Jose he's got a lot of big-time shoes to fill coming from that New York guard and so we hit on that hard.

I told him, though, I said, look, I'm not going to be as good of a coach as Coach Cremins, but you need to be as good as Kenny Anderson and Stephon Marbury. If you can do that, I'll look almost as good as Coach Cremins then.

Him getting injured last year obviously hurt us toward

the end, because he was playing really well and starting to turn the corner.

I can see now in his maturation and Jose's maturity, it's very evident in practice, even on the defensive end, he's taking -- how serious he's taken on the defensive end.

And Brandon has gotten so much better. Like he said, the competition level, I think, that he played against last year has risen his game. It's allowed him to understand what he's got to do in the offseason to work -- usually for graduate transfers, you only get them for one year. We were fortunate with Brandon we get him for two, and he can take from last year's learning opportunity moving into this season.

**Q. You welcome a freshman class that is touted as 46th in the nation. 46 out of 351-some-odd schools. Is the number important to you? Obviously the kids and type of people you're bringing into the program is important, but do you strive to be top 20 with a freshman class? Is that a metric that matters?**

COACH PASTNER: Absolutely not. I think the entire key thing on metric is evaluation. I think everyone talks about recruiting and recruiting, recruiting. It's evaluating.

I'll give an example of Notre Dame. Matt Farrell. Who was it, Notre Dame, and a low Division I, mid-major, he was a two-star guy. The guy was really good.

Josh Okogie wasn't ranked in the top ten players in Georgia, three-star recruit. And the guy is now starting for the Minnesota Timberwolves two years later.

So I think people can get caught up in rankings but it's really the evaluation. It's all about the evaluation in the recruiting aspect of it, of evaluating the right person for your program and then being able to develop them to an ACC level player.

But I think, yes, the ranking stuff, it's all well and good. But in the end it's about production on the floor, and the way you produce is on how you evaluate making sure guys can come in and help you.

So I think there's plenty of two-star players that are ranked two stars that are really, really good. And there's probably a lot of five-star guys out there that are over hyped.

**Q. Brandon, what's your role and responsibility of being a teacher, given all that you have seen?**

BRANDON ALSTON: Trying to bring intensity every game. We had a lot of games last year where Coach

always tells us we've got to win the games, not just against the hardest competition in our schedule, but also the games like first game of the season against Lamar.

So I think it's really important for me to bring that intensity on those type of games also because younger players might not be as hyped up. That's not necessarily why they came to Georgia Tech.

So just little things like that. And then when things go bad is really when -- especially in practice -- when me and Jose have to show leadership qualities. When everybody is good and everybody's making shots, it's okay and nothing needs to be said. But when you go on an 0-8 run or start up a game, when you're running and Coach is having one of those days where he's a little bit more hyped up, you really gotta make sure that things don't get out of hand.

**Q. Coach, what kind of team do you think you'll have when you come back here in March?**

COACH PASTNER: You know, to be determined. I mean, we've got to continue to get better. We're still a work in progress. I like our team a lot. I really, really do. I'm projecting that we're going to be a really good, much better shooting team from 3-point range than we've been in our last two years. We've been dead last in 3-point line in the ACC. So we've got to be better in that area.

I wanted to get back who we were in year one. We were an elite defensive team. Last year we were good defensive. But we've got to get back to elite and a team that takes care of the ball, values the ball.

We're not in a position where we can make silly, careless turnovers and expect to win games. We've got to be so good and so sound. And I use the words -- we've got to really play a clean, mature basketball game. That's how we've got to play every time we step on the floor we've got to be very clean and mature. And that's with everything that we do and the stuff that we can control.

So we'll see how we are, and I'm excited for us and we've got a tough schedule. And I tell our guys all the time: Everybody's good. In this day and age, there are no gimmes, everybody's good and everybody's got talent. Yes, you're playing against in the ACC the best of the best, but even the other games when maybe the names aren't as familiar, all those teams are good. And if you take off one possession, you're going to get beat.

And we always talk about motor. Like your motor has to be on running at such a high octane level every moment, and if you don't, if it's not running like that

you've got a good chance to get beat. And it's just the motor, the motor, the motor.

That engine's gotta go every second and if not then you know you're going to get beat. No matter if it's an ACC play or non-conference games.

**Q. Jose, because you were close to that podium, when I asked that question, I heard and saw you react; what kind of team do you think you'll be back in March?**

JOSE ALVARADO: Me and my teammates, I don't think no one understands how much we matured, even the young guys coming in as freshmen and sophomores. And last year we didn't go -- my freshman year we were like we're going to do this, do this. It didn't go as well as we wanted it to.

I think ever since then we changed our whole mindset. Like I said before, our practice is more intense. And, like, Coach -- he's seen us improve. But I don't think he knows how ready we are. Like in the locker room I'm telling you it's a different vibe. It's like I think all our teammates -- like we're all ready for what we're here to do.

I think we're done losing. I think we're ready to win. Like no one likes losing, and I think everyone knows that. And I think the guys are ready to show that we're not here just to just play basketball. We're here to show to bring Georgia Tech back to where it was.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.