

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday July 19, 2018

**Dave Doeren**  
**Germaine Pratt**  
**Ryan Finley**  
North Carolina State



**Q. You've had some big words to say about your receiving corps, just what you can say about them going into the season and how excited you are for the weapons that you have to go a little bit deeper into those weapons.**

RYAN FINLEY: Yeah, real excited about that group. Obviously led by Steph and Kelvin and Jakobi, in my opinion the best trio wide receiving corps in the country. Just can't speak enough words about how hard they work and just kind of how they approach the game and the level of preparation they put into the game and obviously very talented.

And then behind them with Emeka and CJ and Thayer, just kind of guys chomping at the bit to get in. The depth at that position is really special, and the talent from those guys and the experience and kind of the level of trust we've been able to kind of get with each other, and obviously Coach McDonald has done a great job with that group.

**Q. In your decision to come back and play, obviously made a lot of statements about that, but I just want to know, as far as the University and the football team, what's your number one reason for wanting to come back?**

RYAN FINLEY: I think college football is just such a special opportunity, and I wasn't ready to let it go. So many relationships and friendships I've made in Raleigh and on our team that were just too special to me. I just wanted to enjoy it one last time. I think that's what college football is all about.

I had somebody close to me tell me that they'd give their right arm to play another college football game, so I took that to heart, and that was one of the big things for coming back. Just everything it stands for, just the day-to-day stuff throughout the year as a student-athlete, and just with so many of your different friends, it's just -- there's really nothing else like it in life, and I just wanted one more chance.

**Q. Ryan, what area has Coach Drinkwitz challenged**

**you to sharpen up the most going into this year?**

RYAN FINLEY: Yeah, I like the word you just used, sharp, I like that a lot. Just staying sharp, staying mentally sharp as a quarterback, I think, is important for my performance. As far as on the field, just kind of some pocket toughness stuff, just learning how to keep manipulating the pocket and just moving within the pocket and just making plays when stuff breaks down. Not everything goes as planned. I need to be able to show my athleticism a little bit more, kind of something I've been working on. I don't always show my athleticism in my play. So just kind of when plays break down, making things happen.

**Q. Ryan, I don't have the numbers in front of me, but my strong impression is that you made a lot of improvement as a team in red zone offense last year. What are the keys to scoring in the red zone, and what do you need to do even better this year?**

RYAN FINLEY: Well, red zone is a huge emphasis for us because we're down there a lot. As an offense we tend to have long drives. We're kind of a ball control offense, so we spend a lot of time in the red zone, and if you spend a lot of time in the red zone, you've got to work on red zone. We work on red zone. Obviously we have Coach Drink, we have some stuff that we kind of emphasize in the red zone, like touchdown, check down, no negative plays, no penalties.

But our main philosophy in the red zone is we've got to run, run to win. You get in the red zone you've got to run to Brock. That's the band of brothers and the offensive line, that when we get down there, they know it's on. We're running this thing in. And whether the defense knows it or not, they know we're going to run the ball and we've got to do it successfully. Just a quick shout out to the O-line, Garrett, Big T and Tyler and the new guys that are ready to play.

**Q. NC State has a history of great quarterback play with guys like Philip Rivers, Russell Wilson. What does it mean to you to kind of join that group and be a part of that legacy of NC State quarterbacks?**

RYAN FINLEY: Yeah, it's a pretty impressive lineage of quarterbacks, and I don't take it lightly to be considered among that group at all. I think there's a standard that needs to be upheld when it comes to the quarterback position at North Carolina State. Just in our quarterback room, we've got this table, and all four or

five of them are on that table, just kind of a reminder of who came before you in the history of this position at North Carolina State. That's something you shouldn't forget.

**Q. Last year you had one game in which you scored into the 50s, and that was your last game. That's pretty enthusiastic getting ready for the off-season and for 2018. There's going to be a lot of good momentum there.**

RYAN FINLEY: Yeah, you know, in a bowl game -- I think bowl games are important because you just build momentum going into spring ball. You just get all those extra practices. But to win a bowl game is a huge step for your next season. I think the performance that we put on in that bowl game was exciting, to see all that we had coming back and kind of just the future was bright, and another reason for me coming back, just to be a part of that group and the talent and kind of the camaraderie that we built as an offensive unit.

**Q. You've gotten to spend more time than most being able to come back and play this college game. What have you seen develop in your game from where you started to where you are right now? What are some of those key pieces? And who would you give some appreciation to for helping to get you along the way to get you where you are today?**

RYAN FINLEY: Well, I think I'm a product of a lot of different people. I have a lot of different people to thank. I think what's unique about my story is just how many coaches that have been able to touch my life just through being at Boise State and transferring to NC State, and I've kind of been really blessed. I've really had two opportunities to do college football, which a lot of people don't get. So I wasn't going to take my second chance for granted, and when I was blessed enough to have the opportunity to come to NC State because of Coach Doeren and Coach Drinkwitz, I wasn't going to take that opportunity lightly at all. And I was excited for the opportunity to play, excited for the opportunity to just meet new teammates and win an ACC Championship, and that's what our goal is.

**Q. You're a counselor at the Manning passing camp this summer. You're obviously instructing people. But what did you learn out of it?**

RYAN FINLEY: Yeah, so that was the second year I was able to go to the Manning passing academy, which is a pretty awesome event. I think the Mannings are really, really great people. I think just being around Peyton, Eli, and Archie and just -- Cooper -- and kind of how they interact and what type of people they are was the most special thing for me. And obviously the quarterbacks there, there's about 40 of us, we get a chance to sit down with Peyton and Eli and just kind of

pick their brains, and they tell stories. It's a really good time, but it's just kind of -- from those two -- obviously the Manning name, from those two guys sharing their experiences and their advice, we soak that all in.

**Q. Germaine, tell me a little bit about your teammate there.**

GERMAINE PRATT: Ryan Finley, he's a true competitive leader. He's pushing guys, making sure the offense is great basically. When he's on the sideline he tells them let's go get seven. He just stays focused and pushes the guys around him because they've got so much talent in that room. You've got to have somebody that's a leader to hold them accountable, and I think he does a great job.

**Q. Germaine, obviously one of your teammates, Darian Roseboro, has got a lot on his shoulders filling in for all the guys you lost up front. Talk about how he's doing and the talent he brings to the program.**

GERMAINE PRATT: He's doing great. He pushes the young guys around him, pushes them around because we lost four of the huge starters, so I think he's leading them in the right direction. He's working hard, and he's staying focused, and he's not getting distracted from his mission.

**Q. Germaine, what you can say about the Dave Doeren factor, what he's done for NC State and what the environment has been like as you've grown through your time there.**

GERMAINE PRATT: He makes people want to come to Raleigh, I think. It was a ghost town. When I first got there, it was a ghost town. People didn't want to come back and work. But now people come back and ask to work. People wanted to even commit and come here to play with us because they seen what we had last year, seven people get drafted and go to the NFL. So I think everybody wants to come to Raleigh.

**Q. You had a chance to show what you were capable of a little bit in a reserve role last year, but now Airius Moore, Jerod Fernandez, they're gone. How much does it feel like an opportunity to be a leader on this defense?**

GERMAINE PRATT: I mean, I take advantage of my opportunity. I don't see it as different because they left. I'm just going to be the same me and don't change and just trust in God, trust his plan that he has for me and stay focused and help the younger guys around me. Like Louis A., Brock and helping that linebacking corps be stronger than it ever was.

**Q. You've not been a starter; has that been okay for you? You've made a great impact, but emotionally is it okay that you know you're not starting?**

GERMAINE PRATT: I mean, it's a little bit up and down, but that's part of life. You have adversity, and I think adversity creates you or it breaks you, but I think it has created me to be more stronger as a man because without football, who knows where I'd be. I'm going to be a great man, a great father for my children. That's what I'm going to be. So I can tell them what I went through in life to push them and make them be the best they can be in life.

**Q. I've seen some of your teammates and former teammates, Bradley Chubb being one, calling you Big Play Pratt on social media. You have been able to kind of earn that nickname in a non-starter role. How will that grow this coming season?**

GERMAINE PRATT: Just trusting my coaching and stuff. Just seizing the moments, just taking advantage of the opportunity that I have. Whatever play, just doing my job, doing my job well, and if a big play happens, I just take advantage of that opportunity.

**Q. Do you like that nickname?**

GERMAINE PRATT: I mean, yeah, of course. You've got Bradley Chubb calling me Big Play, so yeah, of course I'm going to like it.

**Q. You have quite a few players starting on defense who did not start last year. Talk about the challenges of that in the Atlantic Division where there are so many great offenses. What are the challenges that defenses face in this division?**

GERMAINE PRATT: I mean, I don't think it's a challenge, I don't think they would find it as a challenge. I think it's an opportunity for them to showcase their talent since they've not been on the radar. They're ready for their opportunity and showcase what they've got. We've got guys with experience, Darian Roseboro, Big E, Shug, James Smith-Williams, and then you've got guys coming from JuCo, Larrell, and you've got -- dang, I can't get his name out right now, but yeah, he's ready to play.

And then you've got guys around that's ready to play like Steven Griff, a transfer at nickel, he'll be ready to play, and then a lot of guys that's ready to take on a bigger role. And my role has only increased, as well, by pushing others and taking care of my job and ready to seize the moment.

**Q. Last day and a half we've heard a lot about CTE, concussions and football. What do you guys do to educate and protect your players?**

DAVE DOEREN: Player safety is a big deal, and I think in the last -- I've only been a head coach seven years, but in the last seven years through the NCAA and NFL, you've seen a ton of research being done, Brian Hainline heads that up for the NCAA. And we're just

trying to learn about it, to be honest. I can't give you the facts. We know that it's there. Don't know exactly what all the exact information is. But we care a lot about these guys. We care a lot about this game.

From the changes in practice where we can't have two-a-days on back-to-back days, we don't ever wear full pads on back-to-back days, wear half pads, full pads, pro pads, so we're changing that rigor of contact from back in the day when -- I'm not that old, but when I played we had 14 straight days of two-a-days and they were all full padded. That just doesn't happen anymore.

So the ability to develop players, which is what we take incredible pride in at NC State, starts with being healthy. You have to be at practice. You have to be in the weight room. You have to be in the meeting room. You have to be your best you can be, and I have to set a schedule that allows these guys to stay that way.

The advances in technology are incredible. Like our ability to track the volume they run, how fast they run, how many times they change direction, the contact that takes place, it all adds up, along with the information that's coming in on a yearly basis from the NCAA. Just trying to take it all in and doing the best that we can with that info to help the game of football.

And really it's not just football, it's athletics. There's so many contact sports, including soccer. You see kids that aren't allowed to head a soccer ball anymore at certain ages. I think we're all learning as we go, and at the end of the day, I have three sons, we treat our players as sons, we want them to compete hard in a very physical sport but compete as safely as they can.

**Q. This is kind of a two-part question. First I want to get a status update on Peyton Wilson, and how does that commitment and some others show the really improved recruiting in state for the Wolfpack?**

DAVE DOEREN: As you guys know, Peyton suffered an injury probably midway through his senior year and re-injured that knee a couple months back and has had it repaired. He's doing great. Saw him in the training room the other day, and don't know is he out for the season. I don't know. He is a phenomenal athlete. His recovery time will be faster than most people's. So we'll see. But great prognosis. He's feeling really good and was the top player in the state last year.

As you guys have followed, I can't give specifics, but those kind of things have helped, and going back to what Germaine said, it started five years ago. We were talking about why he should stay home, and some guys like Germaine have done that, and you're seeing those guys, B.J. Hill, Kentavious Street, Nyheim

Hines, Will Richardson, these were these in-state guys that had out-of-state opportunities that stayed home that are now reaping the benefit of the blueprint.

The thing that we have that other people don't, Raleigh, North Carolina, is the fifth fastest growing city in the United States. We've got apple moving, we've got Amazon possibly moving in. You couldn't live in a better city than we live in right now. Our University has 23 sports, 21 of them went to postseason play.

This is a great place to be, not just because our staff and our players have built a great football program. The entire thing, the big picture of it, it's just the timing is right, and it's hot. If you were buying stock, you might want to buy a bunch of it and get ready to sell it, know what I mean, because it's going up. But we're excited about what's happening in the state, and you can see that.

**Q. There's a new redshirt rule allowing you to use a freshman up to four games and not burn the season. Could Payton Wilson be a candidate later in the season --**

DAVE DOEREN: Well, medically --

**Q. How will you use him?**

DAVE DOEREN: If he's cleared by then, yeah, but I'm not going to put him at risk, either. We'll see where he ends up. But the redshirt rule in general I think is a great rule for many reasons. Back when that rule was created, what the current -- the old redshirt rule was, there was 120 players on scholarship at that time, and since then it's been reduced to 85, and so our usable number of players has gone down, and over the course of the year when you have attrition and players get injured, it affects your roster, and the number of players taking reps adds up, then their higher percentage for injuries takes place.

So now to be able to take those guys maybe in fall camp -- let's say we've got 20 signees, maybe five of them are ready for the first four games, so you play them, and then maybe they prove they're ready for the rest of the season, and you keep playing them. Maybe at some point they get injured, or you know what, we shouldn't have played him this early, thought he was ready, he's not, we're going to redshirt him.

And then there's guys in fall camp that maybe sprained and ankle or they're immature and they're not ready, flat out. And maybe you have depth at a position group, so they don't even get a chance to be ready. Or you have attrition and they recover from an injury and they've been on the scout team and now they look really good in practice, like the defense or the offense is struggling to go against this player, and now you have an opportunity to play him and you can.

I think it's awesome for these kids, and it's going to help our roster, our depth when we have attrition. I know Germaine has dealt with it for two years. Our linebacking corps has been decimated two years in a row with injury. They've had two guys playing two spots for two seasons. So to be able to plug some guys in and fill it out and help on special teams, and for those kids that are in the developmental program, there's kind of now a carrot hanging out there like, hey, I could get in a game here and help the football team even if it's not right away, I think that'll keep them motivated throughout the season.

**Q. What would you say is Darian Roseboro's best quality, and how important will he be to your defense this fall?**

DAVE DOEREN: Darian is extremely strong. He's tough. Those two things, when I think about how he plays on the edge, he's going to knock people back. There's going to be -- we call it a dent, but there's going to be a dent on that side of the ball which disrupts play and helps guys behind him. I think that's the biggest thing. He has experience, which you can't coach. He's played for three years. He's made a lot of plays in big games. It's important to him. I think he's a lot like Ryan and Germaine; they're in their last year of football. This means a lot to them. They want to leave a legacy. We finished in the top 25, and I know these guys want to go out leaving our program in a better place than they found it.

I think we all believe that way as then that that's our job to leave something better than when you picked it up. So he's going to be highly motivated to play well. And I think the fact that you guys are all asking that question, I guarantee you motivates you, because those guys are hearing that they can't be as good as last year's D-line, which will be hard to do.

I don't know how many years the NFL Draft has been happening, but only three times in the history of the draft have all four D-linemen been drafted ever, so this was a unique thing to have happen, so for him I know it's a motivating factor.

**Q. The team has had some issues in the past in the secondary, and I just want you to speak a little bit about what do you project for the secondary this year on defense?**

DAVE DOEREN: You know, I'm excited for those guys. I think every year there's -- in this conference there's a huge challenge. I think you've just got to pick your poison on defense in college football. I think you can say that you want to be great in pass defense and then you're giving up a bunch of run plays. That's just not how I'm wired.

I think our defensive football team and our offensive football team both believe in winning the line of scrimmage, and it starts from a mentality standpoint our identity is play hard, play tough, play together. You don't do that if you don't stop the run, if you can't run the football. Our coverage, they're going to have one-on-one out there a lot, and we ask a lot of them. Now, we do some things to help them with middle field players and some cover-two, but if you're going to stop the run, your corners are going to have to cover, and in our league, your safety to the field or your nickel to the field is going to have to cover.

And we play against some of the best receivers in college football week in and week out. West Virginia is going to have some of the best receivers in college football, and we play them. Marshall has one of the top receivers in college football, and we play him.

So that's a challenge. It's a lot easier than just, yeah, we'll get that fixed. But our DBs are very athletic. They take it personal. They've got good coaches, and we run a very good scheme, but we're going to stop the run first. I promise you that, and that's just a mentality that we have.

**Q. Thoughts on Ryan Finley's performance up to this point and what the ceiling is in your opinion for him?**

DAVE DOEREN: You know, I think for Ryan, he's as hard on himself as we could be on him. I think it's just daily improvement. I think he believes in the process, I believe in the process, our coaching staff, our strength staff. It's a daily grind to get better at what you do, and where does that get him in the end, we'll see. But I know he has goals for our team. He has goals for himself, and the only way that he can reach those things, these watch lists, all that's great, but I know if you talk to him, he's not going to win a single award if he doesn't handle the day-to-day work he needs to do. He knows that. And I appreciate that because he believes in that.

I think that's what's fun about coaching guys like Ryan and Germaine. I mean, they truly love the day-to-day work that goes into getting to the end of where you want to be.

He's going to have a great season as long as he just continues to trust his process and his routine.

**Q. You're coming off an excellent season, and actually I noticed four seasons in a row, winning record. You've got a returning quarterback with excellent stats. He's a veteran. What are your expectations that you're expressing to the**

**Wolfpack alumni?**

DAVE DOEREN: You know, I think it's just continuing to build things the right way, play hard, compete, recruit local guys, and help them reach their goals and dreams, be physical, win as many games as we can and do it the right way. I want to win a championship. Everyone knows that. Every coach in the world will tell you that. But I'm going to do it the right way, and we're going to do it with class. We're going to help these guys become better men and reach their academic goals. There's just a lot more to it to me than just winning.

I mean, and I want to win, don't get me wrong. I came to NC State to win a championship. And I want to do that. But I'm going to do it where these guys are getting that total experience they can get, and our staff and all of us, the biggest challenge is getting everyone to work together towards a common goal and being the guy that gets to lead that charge, it's a blessing. It's the hardest thing and the funnest thing that you get to do.

So I'm excited. I tell the alumni the same thing. Like just look at the progress. Five years ago we had zero wins in the ACC, this year we tied the school record. Five years ago we had no draft picks, this year we broke the school record. So the progress is there. Everyone sees it. Now it's just continuing to get better and just raising the standard for this program again, and that's what this year is about.

**Q. You guys are in a similar position to what you were going into last year's camp at the running back position, replacing a guy coming off a great year. Are you looking for someone to kind of step in and seize the reins the way Nyheim did or maybe more of a committee approach with Gallaspy and Person?**

DAVE DOEREN: Well, we'll see how it plays out. I'm excited for Reggie being a senior, and he's dealt with a lot of knickknack injuries, and he's healthy and he feels great right now. So for him to be going into his senior year feeling good is a positive thing for these guys. But we have three young backs that we don't know enough about yet. We've got to get them out there and battle test them and get them hit and get them into a bunch of drills, see if they can hang on to the football, how are they going to protect.

You take Nakia Robinson, who had a good spring game, Ricky Person, highly touted young man, has a lot of tools, and Trent Pennix, who just got here at the end of June, those three guys are going to get soaked. They are. How it ends up, I can't give you the answer. Would we love for one guy to take over, sure, that's great, but I have no problem with the rotation, too,

because they all have good skill sets.

**Q. You're always applauding the home field advantage, the fans, obviously five of your first six games at home. The top of the season has got to be important, has got to be everything that Wolfpack Nation wants, right?**

DAVE DOEREN: Well, we have the best fans in the state of North Carolina. Our football fan base is incredible, and if you're in Carter-Finley Stadium and that place is rocking, I don't care where else you play. It's intimidating, it's loud. They can't hear. Our players feed on it, our recruits feed on it. Everyone knows how I feel about people leaving the stadium. I want them to stay, okay. But it's an awesome place. We sold out every game last year and expect to do the same. Our season tickets were higher last year going into where we were compared to last year. I expect that trend to continue and look forward to being out there and hearing our fans cheer for our players and get after the opponents.