

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Wednesday July 17, 2019

Dave Doeren Justin Witt James Smith- Williams

North Carolina State

THE MODERATOR: NC State has now joined us.

We'll spend a few minutes with Justin Witt, questions, please.

Q. What can you say about John Garrison as the O-line coach for you, what you take from him?

JUSTIN WITT: John Garrison has been a great coach for us so far. Him coming in after Coach Ledford left us was kind of hard. Getting to know Coach Garrison's system has definitely been huge for us. He brings different things that we didn't learn from our past coaches, but we know now.

He's definitely going to be a great coach for us.

Q. Officially your offense is called the pro-tempo offense. How it looked this season, some different personnel, what will determine whether it's as effective as it was last year?

JUSTIN WITT: Comes down to us as players. We control the tempo. Our coaches try to stress to us how to keep a good tempo throughout the game. It all depends on how fast we get up to the line, how fast can we get the ball snapped before the defense is ready.

Q. With you guys losing three starters on the offensive line, replacing your coach, how important do you feel like your role as a leader is to help that offensive line gel is one of the guys who is back from last year?

JUSTIN WITT: It's a huge role. We got a lot of young guys coming in. We had guys in the past who taught me how to be a great leader, like Garrett Bradbury, Terrone Prescod, Tyler Jones, Tony Adams who all taught me to be a great leader. I feel like I can pass that knowledge down to younger guys, who are going to have to step up one day and be another leader for us.



Q. How would you describe your leadership style? What characteristics lend to what it is you are as a leader?

JUSTIN WITT: I like to be a vocal leader. I like to lead by example. I feel like if I'm doing the right things, younger guys can look at that, All right, I want to model my game after that, I want to act like that outside of the field.

I feel like I can just lead younger guys by example.

Q. You were a little pass heavy last year. Worked out. With the change in personnel to where you're younger at those positions, would you expect to be more run-oriented this year?

JUSTIN WITT: I feel like we're going to run the same offense. We got great quarterbacks that can come in and step up after Ryan Finley left. We've got great running backs who can step up after Reggie Gallaspy left. I feel like we're going to run the same style of offense and with some of the guys coming in now.

Q. (No microphone.)

JUSTIN WITT: No, I feel it's going to be pretty much the same as it has been.

Q. As you think about the number of snaps you've taken, as you think about being a junior this year, you're halfway through your career, what are your goals moving forward?

JUSTIN WITT: I got higher goals for myself. I feel like if you set the bar too low, you won't meet your goals where you want to meet 'em. I feel like I have a great chance to make it in the NFL. It all starts with what I did today.

I feel like I'm in a role where I can go out there and compete with anyone right now. It all depends on, like, if I get the work in in the off-season.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

We'll welcome James Smith-Williams. Questions, please.

Q. You were thinner in high school. What have you done to fill out so well?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: He's talking about maybe

60, 70 pounds ago. I was a 195-pound kid. I think buying into what the program is teaching us, the weight room and the nutrition plan with our staff, it's helped me grow a lot.

Q. Can you describe the competition, the push to get better, that goes on between you and Larrell Murchison.

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: I love him. He's a great football player. He's a great guy. We've grown very close. I would say that every day he does something new, I'll do something new. We're trying to copy each other or teach something that we learned. It's helped us both grow.

Q. With so much experience and depth on the defensive line, how much confidence do you have coming into this season?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: We have a lot of confidence. I think that comes from experience, but also comes from knowing the system, knowing who is around me, playing beside Larrell Murchison gives me a sense of confidence. We're excited to play and we're excited to get going.

Q. How would you describe, in your opinion, from your viewpoint, the Wolfpack, what Coach Doeren has done with this team, elevated this team and this program not just in the ACC?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: Right. I think Coach Doeren has a standard, and that standard is raised every day. He set the bar high. He's shown us also what it's like to be a man, handle your business. I think that's reflected on the field, as well.

Q. We had the commissioner in here earlier. A lot of talk about the ACC Network, ESPN, all that. Do the players talk about that? Is that on your radar in any way back in your apartment or anything?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: We're definitely intrigued by it. It's cool to get more coverage, especially for the other sports that are outside of football, that they're all getting covered, being played on TV as well. We're definitely aware of it.

At the end of the day we're here to win games, you know.

Q. For several years now you have been really good at stopping the run. Less good at stopping the pass. I believe last year was a little better than previous years. You would agree 11th is maybe a little higher in the league than you'd like to be. You returned three of your four top players from the secondary. Is this the year State gets better in the secondary?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: I think those guys have the

experience and knowledge that we need to be the best possible defense on the field. I'm excited to play with them. I know they're excited, too.

Q. What is it like to wear the No. 1?

JAMES SMITH-WILLIAMS: It's a massive honor, if you look at the guys that came before me, Jaylen Samuels, Steph Louis, were all hard-working guys that were well-respected in the program. I think that's reflected in the No. 1. I'm excited to be wearing it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, James.

We will bring Coach Doeren up. Questions, please.

Q. Last year you outscored your opponents by 98 points in the second quarter. In the third quarter the margin was a scant 7. You've expressed concern before about fans leaving the stadium. With NC State now beginning alcohol sales, do you feel that's the beginning of a turnaround of keeping more fans in the stadium? Will that help your third quarter effort?

DAVE DOEREN: Man, you just threw a softball right at me (laughter).

Well, they're two separate issues. First of all, I'm excited for our fans. I think the entertainment is such an important part of game day for them. Obviously the product we put on the field, the type of player we bring in for them to watch, the style of football we play, is a big entertaining value.

But now for them to be able to buy beer, if that's important to them, have the opportunity to do that in the shade under the stands at halftime, I know there's going to be a lot of different spots where they can do that. Then be back in there for us.

The fact is for those of you that have been to Carter-Finley, it's an incredible place to play. It's a huge advantage. Our sidelines to the bench, our parents sit right behind them, our recruits sit behind. Our student section is incredible. It brings energy, creates an advantage for our football team. We want that for four quarters.

Selfishly, absolutely, I would love to see everybody staying in there because it helps us win. At the end of the day I think everybody would agree that's our job here, is to win as many games as we can and do it right the right way, so our fans can enjoy it and in my opinion be a part of it because that's a strength for us.

Q. Could you talk about the development of Devin Leary. Will he be figuring into the quarterback mix this year?

DAVE DOEREN: Really excited about Devin. One of the best young passers, just true arm strength, that I've been around. I think what spring ball is for a guy at his age is his chance to show you where he's at, what he knows. Then how does he take that information from the spring, which ended the first week in April for us, up until August 1st, and grow from that information?

Because I think for all of our players, the less they're thinking about what they have to do, the better they play. It takes reps to get them there. So Devin has now the opportunity to see if learning going from the spring to the fall, allows him to showcase that arm, so he's not thinking about the offensive play, he's thinking more about the defensive coverage or the blitz that's coming at him. That will allow him to play faster.

He's going to be a really good player for us. He's a big part of this competition.

Q. What can you say about George McDonald, wide receiver coach, making him co-offensive coordinator, recruiting coordinator. How has he elevated himself there?

DAVE DOEREN: I'm a huge fan of George's, to be honest. I think the guy is one of the best teachers and motivators in the country at his position. I feel fortunate that I've had him on my staff as long as I have. I'm really proud of him, for his growth. Love his family. His wife Heather, their son Roman. He's a really good role model for these guys.

He is hard on his players, but he loves them. He holds them to a high standard. They hold themselves to it now because they see it works. It was fun seeing Steph Louis teach Kelvin Harmon, and Kelvin Harmon teach Emeka, and now Emeka is trying to teach Devin. They passed the torch to each other through his leadership. So I'm really thankful to him. He's earned the co-offensive coordinator title. He does a really good job with our pass game.

Q. Obviously there's been turnover on the offense. I want to ask you about the defense. Defense seems like it's going to be one of the strong points. What is one area of the defense you think needs to improve?

DAVE DOEREN: Well, I think statistically we were really good, top three in rushing defense, top three in third-down defense, top three in red-zone defense. We need to create more takeaways on defense, in my opinion.

Offenses are going to get yards. You guys all know the RPO world that allows offenses to do things that really aren't fair in football, to have linemen downfield and throw forward passes is really hard on a defense. The

stress gets put on the secondary, if you're a team that wants to stop the run. That's something I believe in.

Our DBs obviously get a lot of the blame. I don't think that's always their fault. A lot of times they're playing one-on-one, everyone else is trying to defend the run game. That's just college football.

But if we can get more takeaways and do what we did last year on third downs in the red zone, stopping the run, create shorter fields for our offense, I think that would be outstanding for our football team.

Q. Certainly we're here in Charlotte. You want to be back here at the end of the year. You and your staff are here a lot because of recruiting. Talk about how important Charlotte recruiting is for you guys.

DAVE DOEREN: Charlotte has been great to our program. High school coaches here, we've built great relationships with. Obviously this year's draft, last year's draft, you can see that when you see what happened with Garrett Bradbury, national award winner, the career that Jaylen Samuels, and BJ Hill are having from this area. We've got a lot of good players from Charlotte. We'll continue to battle to do that.

I think it's an important city for all the schools in this state. It's been one that's helped us quite a bit. It's been fun over the last six years to see this area grow. There's so many people moving into our state, not just Raleigh, but Charlotte. There's a good population of talent here to recruit from.

Q. With Larrell Murchison, his agility, strength, he's great on the defensive line, but are there other positions maybe he could play for you, but also in the NFL?

DAVE DOEREN: Yeah, I think Larrell is a name, if he stays healthy, knock on wood, that's what we need him to do, should be one of the better defensive linemen, interior guys in the conference. He's very disruptive. He plays hard. He's got a great motor, big heart. The game is slow to him right now. He's not thinking at all. In the weight room, there isn't anything he can't do in there with Coach Thunder.

The biggest thing for him is going to be staying healthy. He would be a disruptive force in the interior of our front.

Q. Coach, last year you were very pass heavy. Worked out great. Talented quarterback, receivers. You have some talented young running backs.

DAVE DOEREN: We do.

Q. As the new players involved in the pass game

**mature, if you may become a little more run heavy?
If the run-pass balance will change?**

DAVE DOEREN: Our offense is built to be balanced, first of all. But at the same time I'm not going to just beat my head against the wall. We had three outstanding wide receivers last year. Ryan was one of the best throwers in the country. We took advantage of that.

We'll see what we end up with this year. I'm excited about Ricky Person. I'm really excited about our young backs, Zonovan Wright, Jordan Houston, Delbert Mimms, we've got four talented running backs. They need to get into camp and show they can hang onto the football, protect our quarterback, do all the things that Coach Kitchings demands from them.

Our offense is trying, constantly evolving. One thing that does remain constant is I want to be a balanced football team. I want to run it when I want to run it, I want to throw it when I want to throw it, and be able to have the confidence with our offensive line that they can do both. I think if you get too one-sided to that, it gets really hard now to shift to the other when you need it in a football game.

Q. With Payton Wilson coming off the issues with his knee, what can you say about what you've seen from him this spring?

DAVE DOEREN: Well, he's chomping at the bit. I'm going to tell you, Payton is an incredible competitor. He was a great wrestler, incredible player in high school. Hasn't been able to play in a long time.

He's healthy. He's fully cleared. Probably more excited to play in training camp than anybody on our football team. He's in the office all the time watching tape on his own. I see him every day. He's really, really looking forward to this fall.

I'm excited to see him. The kid loves his game. He hasn't had it in his life. It's something he's missed. I'm excited to see him out there doing it.

Q. Do you have a timeframe you'd like to establish a starting quarterback? What impressed you with Matt McKay last season?

DAVE DOEREN: It would be great to be able to give you a timeline. I think when it shows itself to us, we'll know. There's a lot of data that we accumulate on a day-to-day basis when we start practice from completion rate to touchdown interceptions to who can stay on the field, create the most first downs, to our red zone opportunities, what happens down there, do they score, kick a field goal, turn it over, two-minute drills.

You accumulate data over time, see who has the lead.

Sometimes it's really telling. Sometimes it isn't. So I wish I could give you a deadline. I don't know it. It's on the players to show me who it is, to be honest.

I want to see who is the leader of that group, how do these guys play for them, and who can inspire the guys around him. I know as a guy that played offense in college, we had a quarterback we would have done anything for that guy. He got hurt in the game, I remember it. The next guy came in. You could just feel the emotion of the huddle leave. You want that guy to be an inspirational part of your offense where they trust and fight for him. He takes time to find that.

The good thing is, we've got options. We have some good players there.

Q. I imagine being in North Carolina you've had contact with Coach Satterfield. What have been your impressions of him, how do you think he'll do at Louisville?

DAVE DOEREN: When Coach Satt was at App, they used to visit us every spring. Got to know him. Think a lot of him. Good coach, good man. He did a tremendous job at App State. I'm not sure what the workload looks like for him at Louisville. I know he's a guy that will do it the right way and work hard at it.

Q. North Carolina is a growing state, talent growing with it. You've had a lot of recent success with Raleigh area recruits. How have you tried to tap into that?

DAVE DOEREN: I think 45 players on our team were from North Carolina when I was hired six years ago. Now it's upward of 70. So we always try to start in the state. It's nice for those young men to have their families close. I think the transition for a lot of people is hard from high school to college. Sometimes having that family nearby helps them through those struggles.

Then being able to have them come to the games easily, less expensive, all those things. But it starts with having the talent to do that. I've coached at places where you didn't have that, didn't have that many good players in your state. I think that's the one thing people don't realize. If you look at the current NFL active rosters, the state of North Carolina is represented very well. It's in the top 10 for active players in the NFL.

There's a lot of good players in this state. So we're fortunate to have that. Then surrounding the state, the states that touch our state, we're in those states heavily, as well.

Q. You touched on the quarterback situation. Right now, can you give us an idea, does anybody have an upper hand?

DAVE DOEREN: I'm not going to give you the answer to that because I don't want to do that. I want to see who improves over the summer. I'm not trying to hide anything. I mean, I just think you're talking about a transfer that came in in January, a kid that redshirted last year, a kid that's in his third year. There's a lot of growth that's going to happen from the end of the spring to the beginning of this fall.

I'd be selling them short not to give them that opportunity, you know? Once we see where it's at, obviously Matt has been here the longest, has taken the most reps. So he has that value for him. But I'm really excited to see these guys compete. I think that's what they signed up to do when they came here. We need to give them that opportunity.

Q. Special teams never get a whole lot of love during these press conferences. Talk about Mackenzie Morgan.

DAVE DOEREN: We're fortunate, with Mackenzie coming in, to bring him in a year earlier than he would be the starter to follow. AJ Cole, who in my opinion was a really good punter for us, he's one of the greatest human beings I've been around. For Mackenzie to get to see him, shadow him for a year, I'm excited for him.

He's got a lot of ability. He can punt on the move, being a guy that was an Australian Rules player. But he can also sit in the pocket, directional punt. He's got a great personality. He's an older guy that has a lot of experience behind him.

He's in a room with a guy that had great success last year in Chris Dunn. Chris was a weapon for us as a field-goal kicker a year ago. Kicked a 50-plus, I think it was a 54-yard field goal in our spring game, might have been longer, and drilled it. It would have been good from 60. He's getting better, coming off of a year where he was a freshman All-American.

I feel great about that area of our football team. The return game is an area we can get better. I'm excited to add Tabari Hines, and some of these young freshmen to our football team to help us in the return mode, as well.

Q. To speak on recruiting, what you see from these guys going through their high schools, whatnot. Not only are they rising up at NC State, but they're going to the NFL. What are you seeing in them? What can you say about your staff doing their homework to find good guys collegiately and on the professional level?

DAVE DOEREN: I was really fortunate when I was at the University of Wisconsin to work for Bret Bielema,

Barry Alvarez. I think that program did a phenomenal job at developing players. There were three-sport athletes, tough guys. I got to watch that, be a part of that for five years. It's come with me here.

I think our staff understands, we just don't look for good football players. We look for guys that love to train and love to play, that are good human beings. I think James is a great example of that. Here is a guy that was 185-pound linebacker, that's a 270-pound defensive end. That doesn't happen if he doesn't love the process of working hard.

We have to find that in our process of evaluation of recruiting and go to the weight room and watch them lift, go to their track meet, go to their wrestling meet, their basketball practice, see them do the dirty stuff behind the scenes, not the stuff on game day that everybody does.

We put a lot of time and effort into that. I think our staff has done well following that formula. Then it comes down to how we coach 'em, how Coach Thunder and his staff develop them, Justin Smith, our trainer. We have a good group of people around these players to help them a lot. I think they understand the value of those people in their lives. They take advantage of the opportunity they have to work with them.

THE MODERATOR: NC State, thank you. Good luck this year.

DAVE DOEREN: Thank you.