

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Wednesday, July 24, 2024
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Duke Blue Devils Coach Manny Diaz

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Diaz.

Q. (No microphone.)

MANNY DIAZ: I remember David calling me to ask me if I would be interested in the job when it opened. I said, That depends. He said, Depends on what? I said, Would you stay?

The fact that he chose to stay, he did not stay because of Manny Diaz. He stayed because of our locker room, our players. What could entice me to want to be the head football coach at Duke more than that endorsement over the type of guys we get to coach every day.

Q. Your last stop was with Penn State, defensive coordinator. Talk about your current defensive unit, what you want their identity to be.

MANNY DIAZ: Well, the identity of this defense has traveled from Penn State through Miami, Mississippi State, throughout my entire career.

We want to create a high volume of negative plays. It's important to us to lead the nation in tackle-for-losses. Those are drive killers. There's a reason behind that. That puts people in third down and long. No one turns the ball over more than they do on third down and long. Everybody knows that turnovers win. How do you create turnovers?

I think we led the nation in sacks last year. It's a scheme that the players love to play in because who doesn't love sacks, tackles-for-losses, interceptions for a defensive back. It's a play-making defense. It's predicated on attacking front play, playing some man coverage on the back end. More than anything, it's 11 guys trusting each other to do their job, playing with great effort, great toughness and great fundamentals.

Q. How important was it for you to shed the sour test after Mike Elko left the program and to pretty much

establish your pedigree with the players that stuck through the grind to be underneath you?

MANNY DIAZ: Look, it's always difficult when there's uncertainty, right? I think it was maybe a 13-day window where there was not a head coach at Duke. That's a lifetime especially in the current cycle of college football. I give a lot of credit to the players for hanging tough. I give a lot of credit to the staff that was at Duke at the time, still preparing the team for the bowl game.

I think it's that ideal of what Duke is in general. Our guys want to be at Duke. They love being at Duke. They love the student-athlete experience at Duke. They love what it means to be a student at Duke, what it will mean to graduate from Duke. I think the power of the place helped in that transitional time.

Q. We know your familiar face here in the conference, your time that you spent at Miami. For Duke, for you, what was it that spoke to you more than anything about this program? We've seen it have success, stints of success. What made you believe this was the right fit for you and there can be sustained success at Duke?

MANNY DIAZ: I think everything starts with alignment. I mentioned knowing Feeley was here, hearing commentary on the staff that I worked with previously. I had some inside baseball on what was going on and contributing to their success the last couple years.

But that wouldn't be enough without the dedicated support starting from the president, Vincent Price, through our AD, Nina King. Duke wants to be excellent at football, sustain excellence in football.

Everybody is aware of the turbulence in college football right now. I do believe Duke is uniquely poised in a way other schools aren't.

As I mentioned before, generally speaking, the parents that drop their young men off on our doorstep as freshman, it's very important to families that those men graduate from Duke University. We still have a chance to develop a



roster. We have to take care of our guys, make the student-athlete experience worthwhile to stay. But if we do our end of the bargain, our players want to be at Duke. What that allows us to do is it allows us to build a roster the way it's been done for a long time. Right now the forces of college football are trying to tear that apart.

Q. What does 'accomplish greatness' mean to you?

MANNY DIAZ: What we talk about at Duke is, it's about mastery, it's about a pathway to mastery. We talk about trying to not confuse success with excellence. I feel like greatness comes in the same way. Not confuse success with greatness.

Success can be determined in the short-term. We're a small sample size sport. In the ACC, one thing I can promise you is we're going to play a lot of fourth quarter close games. Sometimes the success in the short-term can mask what is excellence in the long-term.

Whatever term, definition you want to use, greatness, excellence, that's what we're dedicated to do at Duke.

Q. Obviously with this being your first off-season as the head coach of Duke, I want to ask, what are the most important things you learned about your team this off-season?

MANNY DIAZ: What I learned, you would imagine to be true, but until you're on the inside of Duke as a coach, you're always trying to impress upon your team the virtues of hard work, of sacrifice, of discipline. Can't have a great team without that. Every coach on this podium will say we got to do all three of those things. That's obviously true at Duke.

What you realize at Duke is you can't even get into Duke unless you were raised that way. There have been times in my career, and I take great pride in this as a coach, where I have been the first person in a young man's life to try to teach them discipline. They were never raised with discipline. That's a big thing we take very personally as a coach that we get to instill these values that they were not raised that certain way.

You can't get into Duke if you don't understand the value of hard work, if at some point had you to sacrifice something as a young man, when your friends were doing this, you had to study. You can't just luck into the grades. You can't talent your way to get into Duke.

As a coach, how great is it to be able to inherit a team that has those things? How now you can spend your time coaching football. You don't have to say, If you really work

hard, it will pay off. They know it's true.

Q. Tell us a little bit about the locker room upgrade you just had and what that means to the team.

MANNY DIAZ: Well, what it means, I mentioned that phrase 'student-athlete experience'. If you want to be first class, if you want to say you're going to have a big-time program, you have to be big-time in all things you do. There's nothing more important than the players' home in our building, which is the locker room.

As I mentioned to the players, they get to be the beneficiaries of a lot of teams that come through Duke that have not had that. The support we had from our donors, the previous football staff that helped push getting it through, it's really important.

Now we get to recruit to that, to be in there every day. It's a great blessing for our guys. But we should be a little bit humbled at all the players that did not have that before and take care of it with a reverence of how lucky we feel to have something as special as that.

Q. Your defenses have been a force behind the line of scrimmage. Is the TFL the unsung hero of defensive stats?

MANNY DIAZ: It is in our building. Again, we don't just do it for vanity. There's a lot of analytics, if you couldn't create a negative play on a drive, the points per drive goes way down. It's hard to overcome.

By common sense, a negative play creates a long yardage situation. If you can create negative play on first down, you're behind the chains on second down. The game is about avoiding third downs, or the down and distance on third down.

It's not complicated. The more we can leverage people into third down and long situations, the more the arrow turns. It's like blackjack, you're trying to turn the odds more into your favor when you're sitting at the table. That's why I think the TFL is something that enables us to do that.

Q. When you look back at mentorship for you, discipline, a lot of cases being the first guy to do that, who taught you that responsibility, some of those mentors?

MANNY DIAZ: Well, I think first you're taught how you're raised. My parents are... the first lesson you're going to receive is from them. The first credit goes to them.

In this profession in particular, I'm so fortunate to break in

at Florida State in the late '90s. To sit there when football staffs were so small back then, I was one of 15 in the staff room. Bobby Bowden at the end of the table. You've got Mickey Andrews and Chuck Amato to your right. You have Mark Richt as the offensive coordinator to your left. Holy cow, what a room of people to learn from.

To be with Coach Bowden for three years, to go to NC State with Coach Amato for six years. Really the first nine years of my career, I was raised in the Florida State way.

Then to go to middle Tennessee with Rick Stockstill, who really, again, is a Coach Bowden disciple. Over the first decade of my career, three jobs, really taught from the Bobby Bowden way. I think the guy won more games than anyone ever. It was like getting a Ph.D. in what it takes to be great at football.

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