

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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

## Wake Forest Demon Deacons Coach Dave Clawson

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Clawson.

**Q. You've been at Wake Forest since 2013. 11 years later, I wanted to ask you, how has college football changed from your perspective, especially with the NIL, expansion of the transfer portal, pre and post COVID?**

DAVE CLAWSON: It's become a completely different sport in terms of the off-the-field. This will be my 25th year as a head coach at different levels, FCS non-scholarship, FCS scholarship, Group of 5, and now Power Four.

I can remember 10, 11 years ago when you were allowed to put out bagels and not put out cream cheese. Now we're paying players 10s, hundreds, and millions of dollars a year with unlimited free agency.

I think the product on the field is as good as it's ever been. I think there's a lot of good with this, that more and more players are pushing off the NFL, and so many good players are coming back. I think the product on the field is as good as it's ever been.

Certainly the job of being a head football coach at this level of football has changed drastically in the last two to three years. In some ways for me it's been a fun challenge, that you learn a new skill set, new ways of doing things, managing your football team.

It's the evolution of our sport. You have to embrace it.

**Q. Today being reported that roster sizes are on pace to increase to 105. Just as you figure out how to allocate resources, what do you see as the biggest challenges there?**

DAVE CLAWSON: Well, I think part of it is the smartest way to get to 105. I can't imagine suddenly everyone is going to take 20 more high school players. I think it's trying to predict now what is roster turnover going to look like

every year.

With everything that's done, there's going to be unfortunate consequences. The days of the walk-on in college football are probably leaving us. We've had some incredible walk-on success stories at Wake Forest. Grant Dawson was a walk-on that became a captain. Jack Freudenthal was a walk-on that became a captain for us. Nick Andersen was a walk-on that had three interceptions against Virginia Tech, was on NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt. That was one of our best players, a scholarship player.

Unfortunately those success stories are going to be fewer and far between. But that is what the courts are telling us that we have to do. I don't think there's any college football coach that likes eliminating walk-ons. What's basically been told to us by the courts is the way that we've been operating is illegal, so this is going to be the next evolution of college football rosters.

I don't think anybody knows exactly how it's going to play out 'cause we're all doing this for the first time.

I try to focus on Wake Forest in the best way to build a competitive and championship program at Wake Forest. I still think for us, it's going to be recruiting players that love the game of football, that their academics and the quality of our degree matters to them, that are high character, and we have to have enough collective or revenue-sharing resources to keep our best players.

I think even from a year ago to now, we've done that. These three guys are in their fifth and sixth years, and all three of them could be in the NFL if they wanted. A year ago, we didn't have this. I think the fact that we have players the caliber of Jasheen Davis, DeVonte Gordon and Taylor Morin coming back to play their last year at Wake Forest shows we've made progress in the last year.

**Q. At this time last year we had a different scheduling model for the ACC. With expansion, we have a new scheduling model. How excited are you to play Duke and NC State more regularly, and to a lesser extent North Carolina?**



DAVE CLAWSON: We're very excited. With the old scheduling model, the oldest/newest model, one of the really negatives of it is right now our rivalry with NC State is the second longest continuous rivalry in the country, I believe behind Wisconsin and Minnesota. We were going to lose that. If it took bringing in two West Coast teams and a team from Texas to allow us to play NC State every year, then it's all been worth it.

We love our rivalry with them. We love our in-state rivalries. The history of Wake Forest in the ACC is Tobacco Road in our in-state games. Our players like those games, our fans like those games.

For a team on the East Coast, we're going to have to travel to California probably once every other year. When we played in the Military Bowl, half our team had never been to D.C. When we played in the Pinstripe Bowl, three quarters of our team had never been to New York City. I imagine 80% of our team has never been to California.

It's a great life experience for our players. We'll go out there a day early. We'll do something with them, adjust to the time change. I think it's all a healthy, positive experience for our student-athletes.

**Q. When you were at Richmond, you competed in a league that was accustomed to multiple Playoff bids every season, including your team. Did that become part of your recruiting sales pitch? How essential will it be for the ACC to be a multiple bid Playoff league?**

DAVE CLAWSON: You're dating me now. I was in that league when it went from the Yankee conference to the A10 to the CAA. That was certainly a sell in that league, that we were one of the stronger back then IAA, now FCS conferences, that we consistently got multiple bids.

I think that's our challenge now in this conference, is to establish a level of play and to have enough teams that we become a multiple-bid conference.

The positive for us is being in the same division as Florida State and Clemson for so many years, right? The second that you don't win that game, your post-season hopes were dashed. I think the good thing now is that you can maybe have a hiccup early, and it doesn't eliminate your goal of making the Playoffs.

I think it's a selling point. I think our challenge in the ACC, and as ACC coaches, is let's put a product on the field that warrants getting a second, third bid. Then once we get in there, we've got to make noise.

I don't think we have a football problem in our league. I think we have a perception problem. The only way to change that perception is to put teams in. Once we get in there, win those games against those other two conferences.

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