

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 25, 2024
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Clemson Tigers Coach Dabo Swinney

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Swinney.

Q. Looking at this conference and SMU, Cal, Stanford, you've seen over the years the evolution of the conference, how would you describe it now? We look at accomplish greatness as the moniker for it. What can you say about ACC football, how it looks now?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, it's exciting times. I mean, obviously footprint has changed. Super excited about the three new teams coming in. Creates a lot of new story lines, new opportunity.

Obviously getting a chance to go to the West Coast, out to Texas as well, I think that's great for the league. Should be a lot of fun.

The days of divisions and all that stuff are gone. It's always been about winning this league. I think that's the main thing. Now not only if you win the league, you have an opportunity to be in the Playoff, but you got a great chance to get the bye. I think that just makes it more exciting. More teams, more competition. It's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. One of the things that's been apparent this week is the amount of transfer quarterbacks in this conference. Does it feel like a luxury to have Cade back and have that familiarity?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I mean, it's a blessing certainly when you have your starting quarterback back, for sure. I mean, we've had great ones that have come in, it was their first year in our system, and have done well.

It's always great when you're not starting over, and you've got a guy that's grown, had some experience under his belt. I mean, Cade is a great young man, a great talent. He's just blossoming right before our eyes physically and mentally, also as a leader.

We're excited about year two with him as our starter. Also with Garrett. It will be Cade's first time to have the same coach, same system. I think we all expect to see some great growth from that.

Q. An incredible performance by your freshman class this past season. This one, what makes this one so special?

DABO SWINNEY: Freshman class?

Q. Yes, sir.

DABO SWINNEY: We're going to find out. We think we signed another great group coming in here for sure. I think we've had 14 top-15 recruiting classes in a row. We're very consistent with evaluating and recruiting our top prospects year in, year out. We think we've signed another excellent class.

We'll hold judgment on that till they go out there and go do it. Certainly on paper we have some talented young men.

The one part I can speak to is most of these guys came in January. I think we had 15 or 16 of 'em came in January. That gives you a little bit more insight into where they are. It gives you a chance to accelerate their learning curve. I think we only had two guys come in June. We had three come in May. The rest of those guys came in January.

For them to be able to go through the off-season, go through spring practice, all the installation, then a chance to get it again in the summer, now again in fall camp, you expect several of those guys to be able to help us.

We've signed some really good players in all areas: offensive line, really good guys there. Tight end. Signed another great running back. A couple wideouts that we're excited about. Some great young talent in the secondary. Linebacker. D-line. Really every position. Kicker. We signed a really good group that hopefully will help us put it all together as a team.

Q. You put a lot of emphasis on recruiting out of high school. What does it mean to you when you recruit a



guy like Gideon Davidson, and you make their dreams come true?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I can't speak on a prospect who is not at Clemson. But in generic terms, I mean, I think any time we can get a young man to come to Clemson, it's awesome. They choose. That's the thing. Guys have to choose. The type of kids we recruit, they have lots of options.

It never gets old when a young man chooses to come to Clemson, especially how we recruit. We're very transparent. When a kid signs up says, Hey, I want to be a part of that, that's awesome. That's why I get excited.

You're always going to not get more guys than you get. That's just the nature of recruiting. I get excited about who we do get.

Then for the opportunity for them to change their life through access to education, it's special. I mean, ultimately that's what it's all about. I mean, for these guys to continue to chase their dream, to play at a place like Clemson, at this level of football, to continue to be developed as a player, but also to be equipped as a man through the education process. It's awesome to see that transformation in a young man's life, have a front-row seat of that to watch them go from 17, 18, to 22, 23 years of age.

Q. There's a proposal out there to up the scholarship limit to over a hundred. Are you for that? How will that change or will it change how you handle high school recruiting/transfer portal, being able to hand out scholarships to walk-ons?

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, I mean, all of that is TBD, if you will. The crazy thing is, there's not many coaches that want 105 scholarships. We want to keep our walk-ons. It's hard to manage that many guys. When you have that many guys on scholarship, you think you got transfers now, wait till that number gets there. It's going to be a lot.

It's going to change a lot of things. But I think it's a product of the lawsuit that was settled. I don't think there was an intention to say, Okay, you can have no more walk-ons. I think the way it was settled is whatever your roster size is, that's your scholarship limit. So you couldn't limit scholarships.

That's where administrators get together and say, We can't have 130 guys on scholarship, so we're going to have to reduce the roster. Whatever they reduce it to, everybody has to be on scholarship. That's how we've gotten to the situation.

That's great for baseball, soccer, some of the sports that you take 11 scholarships and spread it out amongst 30-some guys. But for football, the unintended consequence is it basically eliminates your walk-ons. There's no coach that wants that.

It's a really sad thing to me. Yeah, great, we get more scholarships, that's awesome. But our game is just different. If you look and think 105 guys, you have to dive a little deeper into that. If you look at the NFL, I mean, they'll have 53, 16 or 18 on the practice squad. Whatever their roster is, it never changes.

For example, if they have eight active linemen, they never have less than that. They can go to any practice squad on 32 teams and take a guy on Monday and activate him to play. Every Tuesday, they can bring free agents through.

In college you can't grab the guy out of the algebra class in the middle of the season and bring him over here and plug him in. Whatever you start with, it dwindles. This is a game played by big people. You don't put the corner at nose guard for the week for the scout team. It's a complicated game.

You may have maybe that corner physically could go play running back, but he doesn't know what to do. It's not like they all sit in the same meetings, learn the same terminology. It's not that simple.

It's frustrating. You need to not be able to have the walk-ons. Then in our world, we don't get them at 7 and they leave at 4. We have a very small window to practice. We have 17 hours to meet, to work out, to practice to get a team ready to play Monday through Friday. When you go on the practice field, you have to be incredibly efficient with your time. If you don't have scout teams, to be able to present the looks, it's really difficult.

So I think it's going to really challenge. It's a challenge, for sure. We'll figure it out. How you have to practice to develop these kids at this level, 'cause when they come to college, the guys that we recruit, it's the first time they've had peers in their life. When you go to the NFL, these guys, they're the best of the best, they've been playing football forever. If you can't win on a slant route versus inside technique, they just bring somebody in there who can because it's different in how they practice.

We have to develop guys. Yeah, you might be strong, but it's the first time you have been matched up. We have to teach a guy how to pull properly. It's a different type of preparation in college.

When you do away with the walk-ons, guys that are just wanting to be a part of it, they want to serve, that 105 is going to dwindle. We have no way to practice.

There were teams last year that played bowl games, if this rule is in effect last year, they would have had to forfeit the bowl game because they wouldn't have had enough players.

Again, you don't just take a guy and go play left guard. It's frustrating. We're going to play more games than we've ever played, practice more than we ever played, finish longer than we ever played, and have the smallest roster we've ever had.

Again, it's not like they said, Hey, no walk-ons. That's just what happened when it was settled, that you can't limit scholarships anymore.

Again, we could keep our 120, which all coaches want, but everybody would have to be on scholarship. Obviously that's a problem. Everybody's been trying to figure out how can we best make it work.

I think it sounds like - I don't know this - but it sounds like it's heading to 105. That means you have more scholarships. I think everybody will handle it different. There are some walk-ons that you got to keep, now you got more scholarships, so... There will be some guys that might take a few more developmental guys. You might take maybe a transfer or two from different levels. I think it will just be a 'to be determined' on how it's handled.

I do think you'll see that transfer number go way up because you only travel about 80. That will be a lot of football players not getting to play.

Again, the walk-on program is what disappoints me the most. Kids that just want to be a part of it, that want to come help you practice in practice. It saddens me that that is probably going to go away.

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