

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Mack Brown

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Coach Brown will make an opening statement, then we'll take questions.

MACK BROWN: -- they're using it to reach out and help their brand, they're using it to get to meet new boosters.

One of our guys was talking about the storm damaged the roof on the house. Mom was able to fix the roof because of NIL money.

We've got a young guy with Stage 4 cancer that he's been able to help some of those costs. His mother is a police officer, help her. It's really helped him.

Tez Walker, when he was dealing with his NCAA stuff, was able to get an attorney. We couldn't have done that three years ago.

There's so many things that our guys are doing. They're helping with Table to feed kids that are poor and can't eat. I can't imagine a child not eating. We're all so blessed, get to eat what we want when we want to.

35 of them were at Habitat for Humanity when it was 97 degrees. Conner and a bunch of guys the other night were raising money to fight an awful disease.

NIL for us has been good. It's a great learning experience. The guys have handled it really, really well. And I'm really proud of them.

Quickly to reflect on our last five years, really proud of the things that have been accomplished. We are the best in academics with the APR in the ACC this year. We've had the best four years in North Carolina history. I'm proud of that.

These guys are tied with Northwestern for the third best APR in the country. They come to school to get a degree. That's going to help them even more than the NIL money that they're going to get when they get out.



I'm really, really proud that these guys with the best academic situation right now in the history of North Carolina football. The best in the ACC. The third best nationally.

We are also second in the ACC with number of draft choices over the last five years. That means our coaches have done a good job of recruiting. It means we're developing young people. A lot of those guys are getting opportunities at the second level. I'm really proud of that.

Third, we're tied with NC State for the second most wins in the ACC, in ACC games, over the last five years. I'm proud of that.

We've been to an Orange Bowl, which North Carolina has never done. We won a Coastal championship, which North Carolina has only done once in our history.

A lot of wonderful things that these guys have done. We won some games that really we shouldn't have won, surprised people. We've had national rankings that are really high.

What we haven't done, though, is we've lost some games that we shouldn't have lost. That's really hurt us. That's on coaching, that's on us, because we've had good enough players.

We also finished the seasons like we should. The old adage of media and fans: remember November. That's why we don't have the respect nationally that we should have over the first three comments that I made simply because we haven't finished right.

We've played some really good teams at the end, but we've lost to our rival three years in a row, one of our rivals. You can't do that. At the end of the year, we've lost to Clemson in a title game. We lost to Oregon. These are all good teams, but to be where we want to go, we have to win those games.

Our whole focus since the end of last season is why are we not finishing right. Coach Bowden had a quote that kind of said, If you keep making the same mistakes, you're going



to have the same results. That's true. Why not change?

We're going to play more people. We have to play more people and create more depth. We've said it for five years, haven't done it. Geoff Collins is committed to doing that, and we'll do it on offense as well.

When you have starters that are not as tired at the end of the year, you can have them more involved with special teams. We got to get better on special teams, on defense. We've had some injuries, guys get tired at the end. Those are all things that we can do better. They're simple answers for a very difficult problem, but they're things that we can do.

Questions that I can answer for you?

**Q. You look at this conference as a whole, how it's evolved over time, SMU in Dallas, Texas, two on the West Coast with Cal and Stanford, how would you define what the ACC is becoming in collegiate football?**

MACK BROWN: I was here when Florida State came in. I remember Florida State was so good. John Swofford came to me, and we weren't good. He said, Do you mind in Florida State comes in the league?

I said, Yes. I said, My Lord, why would I want them in the league? And I said, Wait five years and we'll do it, and we put them in the next year.

Then I saw the changes with Syracuse and Boston College, all of those, Virginia Tech, those teams coming in. Then I was at Texas when we were down to hours that I thought Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas and Texas Tech were going to the Pac-12. All of that was going to change 'cause it changed your recruiting areas. It changed the travel for your teams. It changed the travel for the parents. It changed the expense for the parents.

When you start looking at what's happened to this league really in a third change. We had the change with a lot of different dynamics with teams coming in. Then we had Notre Dame's addition. Now three new teams.

It makes it exciting for our players to go a Cal, Stanford or Dallas that maybe they haven't been to before. It makes it fun for fans.

At the same time you have to think about what does it change in recruiting, for your academic schedule, and how much more difficult is it for the parents to get to see their sons play.

**Q. When we think of your national championship, we sometimes think first of Vince Young, your great quarterback. When we think of your recent Carolina teams, they think of Sam Howell or Drake Maye. Your '96 and '97 teams were built differently, without the dominant quarterback. Can you do that in 2024, given your three-headed quarterback and the rest of your personnel?**

MACK BROWN: I think first, you're going to hear from Max and Conner. I think they're both really good. Then we have Jacolby Criswell coming back. He competed with Drake Maye down to the last week.

I remember the year that Drake started. Andrew told me the other day, There's not much buzz about your team right now. I think that's what was said when Drake and Jacolby were competing for the quarterback spot. We started 9-1.

Conner has played enough now that he gets it. He's got to chance to be really good. Max has thrown 900 balls in the SEC.

I do think what will happen is our defense is going to be better. Last year we ran the ball more like we did when Michael Carter and Javonte Williams were here. We're going to help the defense more with our offense. These guys have to step up and they can't be Drake, they can't be Sam, but we can be a better team.

That's what we're working towards. You kind of said that. We were never great in the offensive line even with those two teams that we had in '97 and '98. That was where we didn't get to where we could block a Florida State. Today they beat us when they were No. 1, we were No. 4, they beat us 20-3. Quarterback got hit nine times because we couldn't block 'em.

I do think we will be better in the offensive line next year. That's a compliment to our coaches, the recruits that they're bringing in, and Randy Clements being back for a second year. Randy and Chip are really on the same page. Our coaches are all on the same page.

I expect us to play better complementary football. That's what I'm excited about. I think we can have a good team. I don't want to talk about it. Everybody said, You're not talking about your team. If you talk about them, they're not any good, then you're stupid. There's not a coach up here that knows how good his team is going to be.

None of us. Who gets hurt. You have to be in a tight game, usually on the road to see if you win. If you do, then you pull together. If you get beat early then some teams fall apart. After 36 years of this stuff, you can ask me. I

have no clue.

When I was in your seat and ESPN would say pick the four finalists for next year's team, right before the national championship game. Are you kidding me? I don't have a clue. They said, It doesn't matter, just pick 'em.

That's what some of you have done the last few weeks (smiling). That was humor, that was humor.

**Q. Since you decided to return to coaching five years ago, how are you feeling going into your fifth year? You talk about coaching and player relationships. What does it mean to you to keep that bond going once they leave school?**

MACK BROWN: I'll answer the second one first.

We have a sign on our building, it's not a four-year decision, it's a 40.

I'm old enough now, some of these guys it's a 50. I'm still with them. I get calls every day, Can I get a job, Coach? I love Father's Day. I love Christmas when I can see pictures of their families.

People ask now, Why are you doing this?

I was meeting with Coach Bowden and Coach Paterno on a trip, Coach Bowden was 84, Coach Paterno was 86. I said, What are you all doing? Why don't you go play something? Coach Paterno said, I got no hobbies. I got 17 grandkids. Sally actually said, Do you know all their names?

He said, Sure I do.

His wife, Sue, said, He knows Joe, but he may not the rest of them.

I asked Coach Bowden, Why are you doing this at 84?

He said, I have a purpose. The purpose is to help these young people with their lives. He said, When I quit coaching, the next significant thing that will happen in my life will be my death.

I thought that's pretty strong. The way I feel is I love these guys. I don't like these guys, I love these guys. They're so nice and they're such good people, they work so hard, they're so mature that my life right now has a purpose that I get to see 'em every day and I get to talk to 'em, I help them grow. If they do something that I messed up, it's worse now because of social media. We messed up, nobody knew. They mess up, it's out there, public.

I feel such a purpose, more than any time in my life that I can help with their lives. That's pretty powerful as you start looking at it. That's why I got back into coaching. I feel even more strongly about that.

Now, like I said in the opening part, I'm more excited about them next week. A lot of people are questioning us, what we're doing. We've done more good things than we get credit for. I get that. That's okay. But I want them to win all the games. I want nice young people that have the best academic record in our league, one of the best in the country, that are doing everything right with NIL, to win all the games.

That's my purpose.

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