

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Tuesday, October 8, 2024  
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Duke Blue Devils

## Coach Kara Lawson

## Ashlon Jackson

## Reigan Richardson

### Women's Press Conference



**KARA LAWSON:** I mean, they know me really well at this point, and I know them really well at this point. Sometimes I don't have to say anything. I can just look at them and they know what I'm wanting or that I'm excited. It's not always that I'm mad at them. I'm excited about something that they've done.

We're just solid. Like, Ash, Reigan, and I are solid. We have a great relationship on and off the court and a great trust and belief in one another. So that allows us to get to extra places maybe that maybe earlier in their careers we couldn't get to because we were just building that, and now we have that.

I'm just excited every day I get with them. It's great.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll get back to the hard-hitting questions in a moment. Both of you had a look on your face when she said her look. What does that look appear -- how does it appear and what does it look like?

**REIGAN RICHARDSON:** For me, if I'm in practice or if I'm in a game, I know I do something good, I always look at coach to make sure I get her approval. She gives me the head nod, I know I did something good.

**ASHLON JACKSON:** Same for me. Especially in practice. If I do something good or bad, who knows, I will just look at her, like Reigan said.

**KARA LAWSON:** I can say their name in a different way, and they know what I mean by it. You know? So, like, could be something I was excited about that they did or it could be something I was frustrated about that they did too. That happens, both sides. I don't even have to say anything but their name and they know what I'm feeling.

**THE MODERATOR:** Kara, an exciting summer for you. Gold medal with the USA Women's Basketball Team. Obviously to be the best you want to play against the best, you want to be around the best. Is there anything you took from that experience this summer that you have brought back to this team?

**KARA LAWSON:** I think for me every summer I want to

**THE MODERATOR:** I'm happy to introduce Duke, lady Blue Devils Here, head coach Kara Lawson. We have Ashlon Jackson as well as Reigan Richardson here with us. Welcome, ladies.

Kara, coming off a great season. Made a great run at the end. Can you talk to us about this team coming up, maybe some similarities and also some differences that you foresee?

**KARA LAWSON:** I think some of the similarities is we have a lot of returners. Certainly in this environment in college basketball it's rare. I think it speaks more to our players and their commitment to each other and their excitement to have an opportunity to compete again in this league and hopefully in the postseason as well.

We're still learning each other right now. I can't say how similar or different the teams will ultimately be, but I know we're working hard. These two have had really good off-seasons and practicing well.

You know, with us you know we're going to be aggressive on the defensive end, and you know we're going to compete at a high level.

That's kind of been our program standard. So that would probably be where the similarities are is we're going to do that this year. Hopefully we can continue to grow throughout the season.

**THE MODERATOR:** As a coach to have two veteran guards, because the guards are going to be that heartbeat of your team, how does it help you in terms of what you're trying to implement to have these two young ladies back on your team?



come back better. As a coach, you challenge your players every year, you know, come back better, and here are the ways that I want you to improve.

That's kind of hypocritical if you say that to them and you don't do the same thing. This summer I feel like I grew as a coach. I feel like I came back better just in scheming, strategy, obviously reps in high-pressure situations, which we certainly had a lot of those at the Olympics.

You know, relationships with players. I have great relationships with the national team players and our players aspire to play at that next level too.

So I'm just working with them hands-on in different drills or different tips that I can bring to them. It's all-encompassing, I think, the growth. I never want to be a coach that doesn't come back better in the offseason.

I feel like I did that, and that experience was a big part of it.

**Q. In the four years that you've been here at Duke, what was the culture that you wanted to establish coming in as a head coach, and do you feel like you succeeded in doing that so far?**

KARA LAWSON: I wanted to establish a culture -- well, I mean, I think culture is every phase of your program. It can't just be the basketball, right? It has to be how you conduct yourselves on and off the floor, what your relationships are like. Not just mine with them, but them with each other. What your standards and expectations are.

I wanted to have a sincere, authentic culture, but I also want to have one where we tell each other the truth and we tell each other about ourselves. I think that's important in any relationship that you do that.

I think we have succeeded in that. I walk in every day to practice so happy, so inspired to coach them. I love them. I love what they're about, and there's an urgency to try and help them fulfill their potential.

I think we talked about this last week as a group. Like, we succeeded in building it, but you have to protect it, you have to continue to fight for it, and you have to continue to make it what you want it.

Just because you succeed at it is not an end point. It's incumbent upon us to continue it because if we stop, it will go in the other direction, and that's important.

We try to actively talk about that. Not talk about it when it starts to turn the wrong way. We want to have those

conversations before they do.

But they're so special. They're amazing young people. Yeah, it is everything that I hoped for when I took the job.

**Q. Ms. Reigan, this is for you. Twin number one. Reigan, Coach Lawson spoke on your maturity, settling yourself down, being more vocal in your work ethic in the breakout room. What does that mean to you coming from your head coach who is a Hall of Famer in my opinion and just one of the greatest to coach the game of basketball?**

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Yeah, that means a lot. Everybody has their GOATs, but to me Coach Kara is my GOAT. Hearing that from her, I definitely have struggled over the course of the three years just in how much I've grown from my first year here to this year really does make me proud to see how much that I have grown and just to continue to grow in those aspects.

I know going into the season I do want to keep developing my vocal leadership when it comes to my younger teammates. If they ever need anything, I can be that person that they can lean on.

**Q. Obviously one of the conversations last year was around how quickly will the freshmen integrate into the system, especially with all the new faces and smaller roster. This year has it been any easier to introduce Riley and the freshmen into the system knowing that you have a little bit more of that older leadership and more returners?**

REIGAN RICHARDSON: Sorry. Can you repeat the question one more time?

**Q. Last year you guys talked a lot about -- it was a big part of the season was going to hinge on integrating the freshmen into the system and getting them comfortable. This year has been easier to bring your newcomers in with more experience and more experience on the team overall?**

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I feel like with the freshmen here we have developed so much great chemistry with them. It's really easy for them to just -- if they have any questions, to just ask. When it comes to them and integrating into our, like, system, they're really eager to learn and they pick up things really quickly. So it's been fairly good.

THE MODERATOR: Kara, what do you feel like right now? I know it's October, but what are the strengths of this team, and what are those areas that right now you know to make a run in March your team needs to get better at?

KARA LAWSON: Right now the strength of our team is our togetherness and our chemistry. We have a really tight-knit group. How that shows itself on the court, I think we're very connected on both ends. I think we have an unselfish team. I think we have an understanding of each other's strengths and really work throughout the course of possessions to try and allow someone's strengths to show themselves.

I also think we have an understanding of each other's weaknesses. Instead of waiting for them to show themselves, they try to hide them for each other. If someone doesn't know something, they're going to try to say it to them so they can get it. That part about this group has been fun.

It's too early to say. Our standard, especially on the defensive end, has been really high the last couple of years. It's too early to say whether we will reach that, but I think we have the makings of a really good defensive team again. It will look a little bit different than it has the last couple of years, though.

THE MODERATOR: Reigan, going into your senior year now, what is that one aspect or maybe multiple aspects that you've have added to your game for this last year?

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I feel like speaking again going off of my ability to just be able to be that leader for my team. I've always had that aspect going from last year, but just being able to develop that a little bit more as well as I'm just continuing to grow each aspect of my game, whether it's figuring out how to finish off two feet, continuing to build my midrange game, continuing to -- getting beyond the arc, ball handling. I'm continuing to grow each aspect of my game.

**Q. This question is for Ashlon. I asked Coach Lawson in the breakout room, what does the sisterhood mean to you? What does the sisterhood mean to you?**

ASHLON JACKSON: Can't break it down into one word, but it means everything to me. Just coming in, like Coach said, she's super excited to just coach us. I think I answered this before, but I get goosebumps just competing with them, let alone competing against them in practice.

So just being able to go into the season and expecting that same competition with them. I'm so excited for it. As far as off the court, they're everything to me. We're very tight-knitted. Like I said, there's nothing that I can't go to them for.

But, yeah, just can't wait. Like, they're everything to me.

**Q. Coach, not having Kennedy Brown this year is a big loss for the team. How are you kind of looking to fill that hole on the roster?**

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I mean, Kennedy, we just talked about Kennedy this morning. She's the best defensive player I've coached. She was the anchor for us for two elite defenses the last two years. Just did so many of the little things that go into winning.

So for our group it's going to be collective in the front court. It's a young group. They're all freshmen and sophomores, but they're eager in their own way. They're going to do it differently than Kennedy did it.

They're excited I think to step into bigger roles, and our freshmen are excited to step into college basketball. It's going to take time for them to develop. I certainly don't anticipate them to have the wisdom of a fifth-year senior like Kennedy was last year from the beginning, but there is an expectation for them to grow and to compete and to ultimately produce at those positions for us to be able to win games.

It's incumbent upon myself as a coach to make sure that they're equipped, and it's incumbent upon our back court players and our experienced players to help them grow. So that's the challenge. That's our job. I'm looking forward to it.

They're a lot of fun to coach, and we're excited for everyone to see them play.

**Q. Coach Lawson, or for the ladies, is there one individual on the team that has stood out that we may not know much of that by the end of the season we'll look back and say, hey, they're showing out right here?**

KARA LAWSON: A player?

**Q. Yes.**

KARA LAWSON: I don't know. I looked pretty good on Saturday, didn't I?

THE MODERATOR: The fact that you prefaced it with a player (laughing)...

KARA LAWSON: It's always hard to pick one because I think we've had a lot of players. I thought Delaney had a really good summer for us. She was a freshman for us last year and just came up big in a lot of games for us.

She's just more comfortable, understanding of our schemes, using her voice a little bit more. So I think she's going to have a good year for us. I'm excited about it. I would say that about all of our sophomores. They played such critical roles for us as freshmen, and now they have the benefit of a year under their belt and the confidence of kind of that success.

So I put Oluchi and Jadyn in there as well. I think they've all grown a lot. We're going to need them to play like veterans, not sophomores this year. I think all three of them are in a good space mentally and physically and ready to take their games to the next level.

THE MODERATOR: This is for all three of you to wrap up. Give me one word that you hope just encompasses what this season is going to be for Duke.

ASHLON JACKSON: Competitive.

REIGAN RICHARDSON: For me I think it would be memorable.

KARA LAWSON: I would probably say emotional. Like, it's emotional to be with a group that you really enjoy and to witness their growth emotionally when you win, emotionally when you lose. It's just a part of it.

I think it's why can I love being in it. So that was a lot of words, but my one word was emotional.

THE MODERATOR: Duke Blue Devils, preseason number 11 right now in the way too early poll. Good luck, ladies.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports