

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Pitt Panthers

Coach Tory Verdi

Brooklynn Miles

Khadija Faye

Women's Press Conference



you to be a part of it. I took it and ran with it, and that's what we're doing. We're going to do something special.

THE MODERATOR: Khadija, this is now you're a veteran. You've put the time in and everything else. What is the expectation now for you to make this jump to come into the ACC, new coach, new program, new league, to where you know right now that you're prepared to have the best year yet of your career.

KHADIJA FAYE: I'm sorry. Can you repeat the question?

THE MODERATOR: What is it now that makes you think you're ready to have the best year of your career?

KHADIJA FAYE: I just know that, like, I've been working real hard like this summer with the staff, especially Coach Verdi and the rest of them. They have been putting a lot of work in stuff that I needed on the court.

Then I feel like I'm there. I'm there. Then I feel like come this season, I will be able to perform like the way I really want every day.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Verdi, you talk about some of the makeup in terms of classes and transfers and what not. What about style this year? Now year two for you, what should we expect?

TORY VERDI: Yeah, we want to continue to be different. Schematically we want to do different things. The last thing I want to do is have our opponent come in and be really comfortable and execute offensively. So defensively we want to continue to change up what we do and keep them guessing.

We're starting to get there. I like what I'm seeing in practice. I think both these guys do a great job. I do think that Khadija is ready to have an unbelievable year. I think that mentally, she's in a great place to perform at the highest level. I know for a fact that she's going to anchor our front court.

When I look to my left, I have a little point guard here who is our catalyst to our team. She makes us go.

THE MODERATOR: I'm happy to introduce the Pitt Panthers here on stage with me. Head coach Tonie Verdi going into his second season, Brooklynn Miles as well Khadija Faye. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being with us.

Tory, you've had great success in your previous two stops. Now you're going into year two. Do you feel like this team, how it's come together, is following along in a similar trajectory?

TORY VERDI: I think we're headed that way. We obviously still have a lot of work to do. I'm very fortunate that I have these two with me each and every single day, but I do think that we're inching towards that success.

Everyone asks me, like, what's the special ingredients, like a have a special sauce. It's extremely hard. Sometimes I shake my head and I think, Why did I do this for the third time? It starts with culture.

You have to have great culture. If you don't have great culture, it doesn't matter how talented your roster is, you are not going to win. We've gone out, and we have seven newcomers and five transfers, two freshmen, one in which is unable to perform this year due to an injury.

But I'm really happy with the players that we brought in this year.

THE MODERATOR: Brooklynn, your head coach just mentioned the culture. As you were looking around, what was it about what Tory said and what he envisioned that you were like, hey, I want to be a part of this?

BROOKLYNN MILES: Everything really. As soon as I met him, he is, like, hey, I got something special going. I want



I'm looking for Brooklyn to really go end line to end line and attack defenses and then on the defensive side of the ball look to get up and pressure and turn over our opponent.

We want to be super aggressive defensively. We want to get deflections and steals and turn those into points on the offensive end.

Q. Liatu King had nothing but wonderful things to say about you. Can you talk about what that means to you when players who, even when they depart, speak well on your program and what that means to you?

TORY VERDI: You said Liatu King?

Q. Yes.

TORY VERDI: Look, I mean, she should. Whenever you're the most improved player in the ACC, that means that people took the time out to really invest in you, and we did do that.

If you looked at prior to myself, my staff coming in, she averaged seven points a game. At one point she was scoring 22 and having ten and having a double-double every single night. So a lot of people invested in her.

But to hear it from her, you know, publicly, it just tells you that you're doing the right things. My goal in all this is just continue to help grow our players, both obviously on the court and in the classroom as well and in society. I want them to leave the University of Pittsburgh feeling good that they can go out into society and be successful.

Q. The program itself when you came in, a bunch of players had transferred out. You were looking for new transfers in and recruiting freshmen, but you've built a solid program at Pitt. There's a lot of improvement. Can you go into that process as a head coach, the stress of it, the positives of it, especially when you pick up two players like these two stars up here?

TORY VERDI: Well, it's kind of like PTSD right now. Everything that you just said, to be honest with you. When I first took over -- my wife says it to me all the time, Why are you doing this again, it's so hard. It is hard, and it's stressful.

Because as a coach, when you go into a program, you have to change everything, and you have to start at the bottom, and you have to pour the foundation. But most importantly, you've got to give your expectations for the program. Then you have to get players to believe in what

you are trying to do.

It's really hard, especially in today's day and age. It's easy to recruit freshmen because they haven't played at this level, all right, but when you recruit transfers, in which we need to -- in order to compete in the best conference in the country, we had to go and recruit five power four institution players. That's what we did.

But these guys have played a lot of basketball. So it's like now they come into my program, and you got to kind of reprogram them a little bit. I'm very fortunate enough that they all have one ingredient. Their competitive spirit is unbelievable, but they're winners.

So they know what it's like to win. For me it's easier, but at the same point in time when you have five transfers from other institutions who have had all these different experiences and then you have two freshmen and then you try to put it all together, it's not easy.

What I can tell you is what I try to do is everything is built on love and respect for one another. Now, they may not feel that in practice, right, and understandably so, but my goal is to develop a rapport and relationship with my players to get them to understand who Coach Verdi is off the court.

I love these guys, and I appreciate them, and I appreciate everything that they go through, but we have to have that connectivity off the court so that way when they step on the court and I'm giving them constructive criticism and I'm going to do that because I want them to be great, but if I don't tell them the truth, then I'm failing them. I'm not going to fail them. I'm going to tell them exactly what they need in order to be successful.

At that point in time it may be really hard, yes. It is hard, but guess what, winning in the ACC is really, really hard as well. Every day we've got to show up, and we've got to differentiate what we do from the rest -- from everybody else in the country. It's every possession, and every possession matters.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Verdi, you have two newcomers that you have anointed as captains of your team. What is it about these two young ladies that you know you're ready to turn this team over to?

TORY VERDI: Yeah. From day one they were leaders. They're different, which is great, but they work so well together. Khadija leads by example. She's in there. She's the first one in the gym, last one to leave. During the summer, I think she slept in the gym, but she did it because she loved the game of basketball, and she wants

to have an unbelievable year for us.

But just alone that dedication is what I want here. I want players who are invested. I don't want a player who has one foot in the door and one foot out the door. I want both feet in. There's no question in my mind that she has both feet in.

Then you got Brooklynn, somebody who leads and provides that constructive criticism, holds her teammates accountable. She has a sharp tongue, there's no question about it, but she's a winner, and she's competitive. That's what we need, and she needs to really hold her teammates accountable and get them to play at a different level.

I know that the two of these guys are capable of doing that.

THE MODERATOR: Brooklynn, for so long in your career you've been known as that get in someone's shorts, defend her, lock down. Right now, what have you added to your game?

BROOKLYNN MILES: Getting downhill for sure. I'm going to get downhill and finish buckets. Now I have somebody to dish it to every time I drive downhill. So yeah, definitely that.

THE MODERATOR: So, if I could ask you, who is the one player on your team that maybe people don't know about that you think is going to make a big impact on your program this year?

KHADIJA FAYE: I believe MiMi. MiMi will definitely make an impact this year.

THE MODERATOR: Why is that?

KHADIJA FAYE: She competes every practice. We will, like, practice for like hours, and then she will have the same energy. She will go hard. She will drive to the basket, run the floor. So, yeah, definitely.

TORY VERDI: That's Amiya Jenkins, aka MiMi.

I'll just piggyback on what Khadija said. She's been fantastic at practice every single day. Just her motor, it's endless. Her mentality, she has a scorer's mentality.

I think that the culmination of what we put together this year, I think we're going to have the opportunity to surprise a lot of teams.

THE MODERATOR: Brooklynn, who do you have?

BROOKLYNN MILES: Amiya Jenkins too. I've played with

her my whole entire life, so we got this connection. It's just like that, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Tory, obviously it's October, but what are the strengths of this team right now? Then what are those couple of areas that, hey, if we're going to make a run, we need to get better at?

TORY VERDI: I think they're resilient, and they have short-term memory. I think that is good because everything that we go through, I think that you learn from your failures, and that's okay. We make mistakes, but we can't dwell on them. You have to have a what's next mentality. I think this team is learning to do that.

If you are still thinking about that mistake that you just made, it's obviously going to affect you down the next couple of possessions, and I think that we're learning, all right, what's next? Switch that gear. We turn the ball over. Now let's go get it back.

These guys are relentless. So I'm excited about the product that we're going to put out there on the floor because I think that we're bigger, we're quicker, we're more athletic than we were a year ago. So we're going to have the opportunities to pressure more, create some tempo, and make it exciting.

THE MODERATOR: Brooklynn, can you give me a scouting report on Khadija?

BROOKLYNN MILES: Let's see. She likes to go over her right or left shoulder. It doesn't matter. Either one. Watch the elbows too, by the way.

TORY VERDI: When you are little, you have to watch the elbows.

BROOKLYNN MILES: She got a pull-up jumper too now. She's starting to do the turn-around and fade shoot it. We've seen that too. That's been great to see her progress and get better as the time goes on.

THE MODERATOR: Khadija, what about Brooklynn?

KHADIJA FAYE: You got to get low when you dribble because she's coming for that ball. She will get the steal. She's just -- her motor, she will run up and down the floor. You know, her passes. Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Tory, what many say is already the best conference in the country added three teams, really good teams. Talk about maybe, if your staff did any, preparation in the offseason to get ready for what's becoming an even longer gauntlet now.

TORY VERDI: We went through every single game we played last year, including three new schools, and we wanted to look at the different things that they did.

As we prepare our practices, we're mindful of those things, and we're adding things on both sides of the ball. We know that there are no nights off. Every single game is just going to be a bear, but that's what's exciting. That's why these guys came here, and that's what we sell.

We're talking to recruits. You know, come to the best conference in the country and have the opportunity to play against the best teams in the country. They're listening.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, obviously the ACC talks about accomplish greatness. What does that mean to each of you?

BROOKLYNN MILES: Well, for me that's just always what I've stood for. I always to be great. That's something I want to do. That's who I am. That's how I want to be. Being around all these girls and all these good teams has just set me up for greatness.

KHADIJA FAYE: I would say same for me. Just compete every single day. You know, be great, work hard, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: To wrap up, one word that you hope encompasses this young coming season.

BROOKLYNN MILES: Winners. Winners. That's what I want it to be. Winners. That's what I want.

KHADIJA FAYE: I was going to kind of go with the same because all this hard work we're doing, win at the end.

BROOKLYNN MILES: I want it to pay off. It's going to pay off.

THE MODERATOR: Coach?

TORY VERDI: I'm going to say fun, but it's the hard work that makes it fun. That's where we to get to. We have to understand that what we do on a daily basis, it is hard, but when you win, it's the byproduct, and that's where you get that enjoyment, and that's where we'll have that fun.

Then we'll be, like, okay, all right, we can do this again. Let's do this again, and let's remember how we became successful and what we did each and every single day.

I think that if we're mindful of that, you know, we're going to be able to do something that we haven't done in a long time.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Verdi, ladies, thank you so much. Pitt Panthers, good luck this season.

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