

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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ACC Commissioner

Commissioner Press Conference



JIM PHILLIPS: Good afternoon. Welcome to Charlotte for the 2024 ACC Basketball Tipoff. To begin, I would like to thank each of you for your continuing coverage of the ACC. The promotion and exposure you provide our conference is deeply appreciated.

Let me also take a moment to acknowledge the devastation that occurred from Hurricane Helene and what has been forecast as a historical storm in Hurricane Milton. Our hearts and prayers are with everyone who has been or could be directly affected, as well as those with family and friends of loved ones being impacted by these terrible tragedies.

Consistent with this time of year there's always an extra layer of energy and excitement. We are midway through our highly successful fall sports seasons with No. 1 ranked teams in field hockey, women's soccer, men's soccer, and volleyball, as well as two football teams in the top 10, and less than a month away from the start of ACC women's and men's basketball.

Since my forum remarks in July, the ongoing evolution within college athletics continues. What has not changed is the ACC's position as a healthy and vibrant conference that competes at the highest level athletically and one where our institutions provide every student-athlete with a world-class academic experience.

During my remarks in the summer, I spoke about the ongoing emphasis surrounding revenue generation. We remain aggressively evaluating financial opportunities, including any area that potentially enhances our conference revenues both in the immediate and long-term future of the ACC.

One area of focus that many of you have reported on is the league's success initiatives that began this fall. This innovative and progressive new revenue distribution model provides schools with the ability to earn additional revenues through football and men's basketball based on success. These dollars are in addition to the annual per

school distribution.

In August, the NCAA Division 1 board of directors voted unanimously to introduce a proposal that would financially reward participating women's basketball programs beginning with the 2025 NCAA Tournament.

Units for women's basketball is just one example of the elevation and appropriate recognition of women's sports in an area I've been very vocal and supportive of. Similar to the process for the additional revenues the conference receives in football and men's basketball, and assuming that the vote during the NCAA convention in January approves the additional revenues, we are prepared to include women's basketball as part of our ACC success initiatives.

There's certainly great anticipation for the upcoming seasons of ACC basketball, but before addressing our league and teams, let me take a moment to speak about a few areas you might be interested in beyond basketball.

The ACC continues to be central in national discussions around identifying solutions to the countless challenges facing college athletics, and among the most pressing is the proposed House settlement. We are pleased that earlier this week Judge Wilken took the first major step towards approving the settlement.

The agreement will provide unparalleled opportunities for student-athletes and offer much-needed transparency and structure on campus, with the end goal being a sustainable model for the long-term future of college athletics.

To be certain, we are laser-focused on the proposed new model. We remain connected with our membership in providing clarity to our schools and our student-athletes. Creativity and innovation remain vital to ensuring our schools compete and thrive at the highest level.

Because the House settlement cannot alone provide the full resolution that is desperately needed, our federal legislative efforts remain front and center, including congressional help.



As I stated in July and it's still consistent today with multiple ongoing legal cases involving the ACC and two member schools, there remain limits to what I can share on the topic.

However, I will restate, we remain confident in our legal position and are prepared for long-term litigation. What we will not do is let the ongoing legal processes distract us from providing outstanding experiences for our student-athletes, teams, and coaches at our 18-member institutions.

Now let's talk about ACC basketball. But I do want to start by asking everyone in joining me in remembering Raymie Styons. We lost Raymie in August. He was taken far too soon.

He was a highly-respected and dedicated official who served the ACC for 35 years, including officiating in 20 ACC and 17 NCAA men's basketball tournaments. A truly remarkable person. Let's take a moment to remember Raymie and his family.

Thank you. ACC basketball, the premier conference in all of men's and women's college hoops is now just 26 days away and our 36 basketball programs will strive to accomplish greatness.

We welcome the Cal, SMU, and Stanford basketball programs, as well as the seven first-year head coaches, four women's and three men's, who start their respective tenures this year.

ACC women's basketball enters the 2024-25 season with six ranked teams in ESPN's way-too-early women's basketball top 25. We welcome back 14 of last season's 20 All-ACC honorees. This includes five first-team members and the ACC Rookie and Defensive Player of the Year.

This year's competition will be as fierce as ever, and ACC women's basketball continues to be the national standard. Since 2014, the ACC leads all conferences in Final Four, Elite Eight, and Sweet 16 appearances, as well as NCAA Tournament wins.

In addition, over the last six seasons the ACC leads all leagues with 48 teams participating in the NCAA Tournament. The ACC's 60 victories since 2019 also leads all conferences.

At least one ACC team has advanced to the Elite Eight in each of the past 22 NCAA tournaments, which is the longest streak of any conference, with the next closest being at 14.

Overall, ten of our current member institutions have played in at least one Final Four.

ACC men's basketball continues to prove itself as the nation's top basketball conference with another dynamic postseason performance to close out last year. As we enter the season, two of last year's five first-team All-ACC players return.

Overall, the league welcomes back its ACC Player of the Year, Rookie, Sixth Man, and Most Improved Players of the Year, as well as the nation's lone returning first-team consensus All-American.

The postseason success for ACC men's basketball is well-documented. Last season, four teams advanced to the Sweet 16 and three to the Elite Eight, with NC State moving on to the Final Four. The ACC had the most teams of any conference in both the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight last season.

In the last three years, four different teams have advanced to the Final Four, and the ACC is 33-15 in the NCAA Tournament, both the very best of any conference.

Since 2015, the ACC leads all conferences in Final Four appearances with nine and NCAA Tournament wins with 111, which is 28 more wins than any other conference. Six different ACC programs, the most of any league, have reached the Final Four since 2015, and the ACC has won three NCAA titles from three different teams.

If you want to talk about sustained excellence and depth in each of the last five decades, the ACC has led the nation in either NCAA Tournament victories and/or tournament winning percentage. Before taking some questions, I do want to share some specifics related to our league's vocal concerns with the lack of recent NCAA men's basketball bids despite undeniable success of our teams.

Last spring, we initiated an extensive statistical analysis with multiple experts regarding our scheduling. This was inclusive of both conference and non-conference games and how that impacts the NCAA net rankings and selection process.

Our league formed working groups and engaged in countless discussions with our head coaches and athletic directors. Scheduling remains an important piece and collectively our teams have been aggressive.

As you look at November and December matchups, you immediately note our teams playing in the most prestigious early season tournaments as well as meaningful events and marquee games throughout says non-conference play.

Beyond scheduling, we have focused on a number of other areas. As I have said before, being one of only three conferences with a dedicated fully distributed national network is significant. ACC Network is a differentiator and having it showcase our basketball teams, coaches, and players into its daily programming is critical.

We will continue to be aggressive with our television partners in ensuring our ACC and talent, coaches, and players are integrated across all of the ESPN platforms.

Internally we've been working with multiple consultants as well as bolstering our external efforts to make certain our coverage is appropriately reflecting the talent and the teams we have in this outstanding league. We've connected with current and former members of the NCAA committee and NCAA staff to best ensure the conference and our membership understands the metrics and system by which programs will be evaluated. As a former member of both the men's and women's NCAA basketball committee, I understand this is extremely important.

Consistent with previous years and as part of the NCAA basketball committee's process, throughout the year we will have regular communication and connection with NCAA committee members. From top to bottom, this league has been undervalued, but it remains clear that the competition within the ACC prepares our teams for postseason play.

As I said when I started to talk about ACC basketball, both men's and women's, we have been and continue to be the premier conference. I'm hopeful I was able to address your areas of interest, and now I'm happy to take any questions from the floor.

Q. Women's basketball is continuing to grow exponentially. My question is, are we going to see even more surfaces valued towards showcasing women's basketball?

JIM PHILLIPS: Thank you. Thank you for being here. I will go back to maybe what I just stated relative to women's basketball and the success that we've had, but we have been aggressive with our TV partners. Not only our ACC Network and what we're doing with women's basketball, but with ESPN and the platforms they have.

I think we have 27 games or so of women's basketball, which was the most we've ever had on several different platforms. The game has never been better and more exciting. I think last year's NCAA Tournament attendance and NCAA Tournament viewership said a lot where women's basketball has gone.

Certainly, our conference to me is the premier women's basketball conference, but we want to hold up that trophy at the end of the year. I am really proud of how we built that. It really isn't a time to back off on what we're doing and the support we're providing for women's basketball. It's really a chance for us to double down, and that's what we've tried to do in the offseason working with our partners.

Q. My question to you, Commissioner, were there any concerns adding the new teams to the conference?

JIM PHILLIPS: There really weren't. I go back to expansion. We looked at a lot of different options, but I will say this: We really explored and investigated at a high level what it would mean to bring in the three new schools.

Getting into the Dallas-Fort Worth area and obviously having to travel for teams both ways in the Bay area. In the end, I really feel we've scheduled well. We've come up with travel partners for the first time, so when you go out to California, the teams that are on the East Coast, they'll play two games. When Cal, Stanford come in this direction, they'll play two games.

I think it makes a lot of sense to do that. We've gotten an early kind of snippet view with our Olympic sports. I think it's worked out pretty well, but I'm sure it won't be perfect. I just know that because we've gone now outside of our footprint that we had for 71 years.

So we'll adjust and make some changes as we go into the future, but so far so good. I feel really solid about what we've been able to do. In the end, we'll talk to the student-athletes and get some feedback, but excited about those three schools, what they bring on the women's basketball side and what they bring on the men's basketball side.

Q. Just wanted to ask, you talked about the lack of men's basketball teams getting into the NCAA Tournament. That really hasn't been a problem on the women's side. You know, eight last year. Could have been nine. Maybe ten this year with the addition of Stanford. Is there anything that the men can learn from the women in terms of marketing themselves and putting that résumé up and scheduling to get more teams into the tournament?

JIM PHILLIPS: Thanks for the question. I would say a few things that we've learned by looking at the women's scheduling, but then also doing that really deep dive on the men's side. You have to schedule well. It's really important to play good teams.

And I understand and we understand the NET better, the point differential, and some of that. I think you're going to see some of that tweaked by the committee, et cetera. You have to play a good schedule.

Then whether we like it or not, the narrative starts to get set in November and in December in the nonconference games. You have to perform at a greater level.

But I would say one of the things that has occurred for us the last several years is we've had a drag at the bottom of the conference very directly where the bottom portion of the conference, and because of rebuilds or new coaching situations or the transfer portal, we've had some teams that have had really difficult seasons that has really influenced and has helped influence some of those rankings, some of the metrics overall that they're looking at.

When I was looking on the women's side, there hadn't -- didn't seem to be nearly as much over the course of the last several years, but in the end it's about winning games. It's about what we're going to continue to do with scheduling, and I really believe the bottom of our league won't be maybe as bad and in as difficult of a spot they've been the last several years, and then we're going to be promoting in a heavy way.

We have to. We have to tell our story better. That's on me. We just have to do that relative to the outlets that we have. We have one of only three networks, collegiate networks, but then we have this great partner in ESPN. I think you're going to see really that ratcheted up both on the men's side and on the women's side this year.

Q. I'm curious, so the 2027 NCAA men's first round is coming to Charlotte. You were a co-bidder with UNC Charlotte because obviously you're now based here. I'm wondering what you think about going after women's Final Four or women's regionals? Charlotte had one Final Four in 1996 and has not had any women's basketball tournament games since. What is your interest in that area?

JIM PHILLIPS: It's high. It's high now that we're settled. Very candidly, while we were in transition about where we were going to move and where our permanent kind of offices were, I think we were a little hesitant to reach too far beyond not knowing what the future is.

But certainly now that we're located here in Charlotte, we've been here now for 13 months, we have been more aggressive.

I think you're going to see that. I'm not privy to give you all

of what's happening, but it only makes sense. I think in order to get and chase championships, you have to do some things in the first and second round or maybe in the Sweet 16, Elite Eight rounds, regional finals, et cetera. We want to do that.

To that point, I think a good barometer for us this year is having the men's basketball tournament in Charlotte for the first time since 2019. We'll have a chance to kind of get our feet wet back into this community, see what works, see what doesn't. A great partner with the Spectrum Center in the City of Charlotte.

I think you'll see that evolving specifically to what you said on the women's basketball question.

Q. You mentioned ACC basketball being quote, undervalued. Can you expand on that a little bit and kind of what you mean by that? Then, also, as you look at obviously the outsized impact of football on college sports and leagues in general, how do you kind of balance that with also trying to grow the basketball product as a whole as well?

JIM PHILLIPS: That's, by the way, Ben, my travel buddy this past weekend. We pulled an all-nighter. At least I did. I think he went to bed. We were out at Cal and Stanford and College Game Day and all the rest of it. There's a picture. I wish I had my phone with me because I would have Amy put it up on the screen, but we were traveling.

We had gotten up for College Game Day. Was there 4:00 -- about 5:00 in the morning Pacific Time. Stayed and then we went over to Stanford for their game against Virginia Tech in football and crossed the bridge again.

There was only one person in the car of six people that had kind of gone throughout the whole day that was asleep, and that was Ben Portnoy. So I just want to go on record with that.

The first part of your question, Ben -- and you know I'm only teasing you. Don't write anything negative about what I just said. I just think we've been undervalued. I stated the statistics. This is a premier basketball conference.

I know you don't get credit for past successes. I get it. I totally get it. But we just feel like the last three years with five invitations, each of those five years, is not reflective of the basketball that's being played in this league, the coaches that are in this league, the student-athletes and players that are in this league that are matriculating into the NBA and all the rest of it from a players' standpoint.

We have to fix it. That's not the committee's fault. I've sat



on the women's basketball committee and the men's basketball committee. That's not it. We have to be more intriguing and deserve to be selected than maybe what we've done. That's why we did a complete, complete kind of rebuild and look at this thing objectively. Don't be sensitive about it. Coaches, don't be sensitive if we call you out on schedule and some of those things.

I feel very good about it. Now we have to go play. Now we have to go win games. I think we have the structure in place. We'll promote the heck out of our programs on the men and women's sides. We'll have great platforms for them to play on. We have to win. We have to win.

The second piece of that, if you would repeat that maybe, about football.

Q. (Off microphone).

JIM PHILLIPS: Yeah, that's always the goal is you don't want to grow one at the expense of the other, and we've tried to do that simultaneously. I feel very good about where we're at in football. I really do. We're one of three conferences that has two teams in the top 10. There's a 12-team playoff this year. There's still a lot of season left. I like the way we've gotten off, especially several of our teams.

You have to market and promote, and you have to absolutely address and support both of those programs, or all three really: Football and men's and women's basketball. I give our schools an awful lot of credit because as I travel around during the football season and we have regular communication with our ADs and regular board meetings, I'm hearing of the investments.

The most recent one, as it relates to maybe football, is Georgia Tech. \$500 million stadium and practice area. I think it's got a basketball practice center attached to it and some of those things.

Campuses, local decisions influence it a lot, but from a Commissioner level and from a conference level, we try to continue to keep everybody educated about what's happening not only in our conference, but in the industry. It's kind of a motivator for us.

Q. Related to the NET, coaches have expressed concern with the 20-game conference schedule, talking about lack of flexibility with non-conference scheduling. How open are you to potentially scaling back to 18? How open is your television partner to that?

JIM PHILLIPS: Yeah, good question. Good to see you. I

don't think you can be too rigid right now, especially for a league that's had 15 invitations in the last three years.

We like to stay at 20. It makes a lot of sense because we're playing -- we know the matchups are going to be good. Two ACC opponents against each other. I think you take it a year at a time and look at it. You try not to overreact with maybe a small sample size, but I guess what I would just, again, say, I think you have to be flexible. You have to be open-minded to it. We'll watch it this year.

I know our TV partners like 20 conference games, but I also think you could make some kind of structure in those two games. If you went back to 18, could you mandate that they would have to be against one of the three or four or five best basketball conferences. It would have to have a certain maybe NET ranking the year before.

I think you could structure it in a way where it wouldn't go the opposite direction where coaches would take maybe the bottom quartile of rankings in the NET and allow us still to maintain that commitment to really trying to schedule in a strong way.

We'll watch it.

Q. Commissioner, you mentioned briefly on speaking with experts on evaluating teams from top to bottom in the ACC. How confident are you that they will actually make the right decision with adding more teams into the NCAA Tournament after going through all the metrics, the NET rankings? We've had coaches previously give a lot of frustration on teams not being selected in the tournament.

JIM PHILLIPS: Well, I trust the committee. I do, having sat on men's and women's committees before. We have to do our part. We are going to overcommunicate with them. We are going to make sure that throughout the year that we're telling our story about how well our teams are doing.

I also think it leads into maybe what you are alluding to. Maybe it's time for moderate, slight expansion to the tournament because I feel like we've been one of those conferences that's had one or two teams every year that were on the bubble that fell on the wrong side of the bubble.

I do want us to continue to look at that. I don't want to disrupt kind of the gem of championships. It's hard to be at the NCAA Tournament both on the men's and women's side, but I am open to maybe expanding it just a tad. That creates just a few more opportunities.

Q. To follow up on what you were saying about



promoting the men's basketball product better, I guess, it kind of makes it seem like you think the NCAA committee is susceptible to a spin and a PR campaign as opposed to just how you do in November or December. Can you kind of explain what you think of promotions, how you think that might actually sway an NCAA committee?

JIM PHILLIPS: I think we have a lot of smart people in college basketball, and I think the committee is a smart group of individuals. They expanded the committee I think from 10 to 12. People are -- I don't know. You have to decide whether people are swayed with what you write or not and what you state, but I think it's a forum for us to utilize in order to tell our story.

Maybe they believe it; maybe they don't. Maybe they listen to it; maybe they don't. It will come down to facts, but I think you have to make sure that you're telling your story in a position of strength, and that's what I want us to do.

Maybe you will feel individually that maybe we only deserve whatever number that is when we feel like we deserve one or two more than that. So, what I would say to you is it will always come down to the facts. It will always come down to the metrics that are used to evaluate your overall résumé, but it doesn't hurt when national people and local people are talking about your particular programs. So, I want us to be able to do that this year at a higher level than we've done in the past.

Q. Jim, you talked a little bit about the depth of the conferences as well. What does it say about a team like NC State that finished -- started eighth, ninth in the conference last year in the rankings, to be able to make it to the Final Four and be able to make it at that point to get to the NCAA Tournament even.

JIM PHILLIPS: Thanks. Glad you're here. I think it tells you about the league. I guess that's what I'm trying to state here today. The league is really good.

I think we have been undervalued. If it wasn't for a bank shot from McConnell, right, McConnell, NC State is not in the Final Four. That was a miracle shot, but certainly they strung together nine in a row at that particular time.

We've had four different Final Four teams in the last three years. That tells you a lot about the league. Sometimes I would also say we haven't been the beneficiary because I think sometimes when people believe your brand schools, your brand basketball programs aren't as good as they've maybe been in the past, there's this kind of thought process, well, maybe the rest of the league isn't as good. I don't think that that's necessarily a fair way to evaluate it,

but tells you if you play in this league, you have a chance. Even as most recently as you just described, NC State, who nobody gave any opportunity to get even out of maybe the first day or two of the ACC tournament, let alone playing on the last weekend of the NCAA Tournament.

Q. What role do you envision for the ACC in shaping the future of college athletics, especially with debates about student-athlete compensation, the governance, and the overall structure of college sports?

JIM PHILLIPS: The ACC will and continue to be a leader in working together collaboratively on the future of college sports, and it's a really good time to be a student-athlete. It just is. I think a lot of you know I've had two in my family. One currently still is a student-athlete. The other is graduated.

The benefits, the support, the opportunity to monetize their name, image, and likeness, the freedom of movement they have. We want to continue to allow that to happen, but we have to be -- it has to be done in a structured way in several different areas.

We're reworking the governance structure. We have to look at a new way to handle infractions. What are we doing with our championships? So there's work to be done, and this earlier ruling from Judge Wilken as it relates to the House case starts us on that path.

I would just say we have more questions than we have answers right now on the House case and others, so it's time to roll up our sleeves and push forward. But at the heartbeat of all of this -- and you have heard me say this before -- if you peel away all of it, it's about supporting young people at a really important time in their life, 18 to 22 or 23, and knowing that a very small percentage of them are going to go play professional sports.

So, whatever we can do for all of them, that large majority that doesn't and those that want to play professional sports and are good enough to play professional sports and have a great experience at each of their institutions.