

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Stanford Cardinal

Coach Kyle Smith

Maxime Raynaud

Jaylen Thompson

Men's Press Conference



country, period. Especially for me.

But I always thought the best, and that's going back to I'm old enough to remember when they were No. 1 in the country, and I always thought just being able to get the true student-athlete and compete at the highest level is kind of the dream.

I grew up kind of following Duke and kind of thought of Coach K's early teams with Amaker and Dawkins and those guys. Therefore, kind of always thought that. To have that opportunity I was just kind of tickled. There was no negotiation. They kind of offered it to me and I said yes.

Hey, there's not much thinking to it for me. If you have a chance to go to Stanford, you do Stanford.

Q. A unique position that you're in coming to Stanford in your first year with the school and first year of the school inside of the ACC. Just what that looks like for you and the parallel of that as something that's a new challenge for you personally? It's also a new challenge for the school.

KYLE SMITH: Obviously my career, I'm not afraid of challenges. Going to Columbia, going to Washington State were really challenging. Like I said, it's the best conference for basketball in my opinion. I mean, Tobacco Road, Duke, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia Tech, all those schools that I grew up following.

To be able to be associated with that and kind of measure ourselves against those teams, I think it will help.

Like I said, we're a national brand, a global school. If we can get some success, I think we'll attract really good talent.

Q. One of the faults for this team was the struggles on defense. What's the plan to address that defense?

KYLE SMITH: We address it honestly by these two guys that are up here. Jaylen Blakes, I think he is really at the point of attack, and it's hard to be good defensively if you can't stop the ball in transition or at least put some heat.

Q. My first question is, with the change in conference, how does a team plan to make a statement in the ACC with so many powerhouse programs?

KYLE SMITH: You know, I think the ACC matches up with what Stanford stands for: Excellence in athletics. I think it gives us a chance. We're a global institution, and I think being able to play in the best basketball conference and compete against the best, you get to measure yourself, and I think it will help bring awareness of what Stanford basketball means.

We'll cover a lot more time zones as we compete and hopefully do well. It will build our brand.

Q. How was the recruiting process for Jaylen, getting him from Duke University over to Stanford? How was the whole recruiting process and transition for you?

KYLE SMITH: Truthfully it was random. Our athletic director's wife, their daughter plays volleyball at Duke. She said Jaylen was a really good guy and he was available. I said, my staff hasn't put me on it, so I took it from there.

I have to give full credit to Liz Muir, Bernard Muir's -- I surely did. I took it from there, and he made a lot of sense being a Duke guy, Blair Academy, my kind of guy.

When we did our Zoom, just giving our pitch, I could tell I think he kind of would be invested in the way we do things. It's been a great match thus far.

Q. After a successful five-year stint at Washington State, what brought you over to Stanford?

KYLE SMITH: Well, Stanford -- it sounds crazy, but it's always -- I've always thought of it as the best job in the



Thus far he has been tremendous in that area, so I'm excited to see what that looks like. I think that will help.

So recruiting is usually a big part of it. Then Maxime has really grown in that area. We've made an emphasis since we got there. Everyone knows he can score, and he is a good defensive rebounder. Being able to get him more of a rim protector and plug things up, that will be good.

It's been our strength. I got pretty much the same staff from Washington State, and that was our strength up there. When you take over a program, that's usually the first thing we address is defending.

You have to be able to defend every night to give yourself a chance, and we're kind of going through the same steps. I expect us to make improvements there.

THE MODERATOR: You are known for nerd ball because of the focus on analytics. Could you describe nerd ball and what it means in your life.

KYLE SMITH: You know, nerd ball, we just do -- we give our guys a lot of feedback, a lot of number crunching. The best way I can say is we quantify all the plays in basketball and kind of give these guys information.

So, again, I think I'm at the right place. Stanford, they already identified themselves as nerds before I got there, so I think it's a good marriage. That's the best way to say it.

Almost everything we do, we give them a lot of feedback.

Q. My question to you is with the change in staff, you guys added Jaylen to your team, what is Stanford's impact and plan for success in this upcoming season?

KYLE SMITH: Like I said previously, we're going to have to defend better, rebound better, and take care of the ball. That's been the steady -- this is my fourth program that I've taken over, and that's kind of always been the mantra.

I feel like I've got a good blueprint in how to do this thing.

We don't really set hard goals. It's daily improvement. I know that sounds -- might sound silly to some, but that's what we did at Washington State too, and we were able to get better and better to a point where we were a second round and won a game in the NCAA Tournament. I feel like Stanford is going to attract even better talent and really smart guys.

I think that we're just going to build this thing into something by doing those things to where we can be really

competitive in this league.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch places with Maxime.

Questions for Maxime, please.

Q. Maxime, being part of this program for a while and under a new head coach now, can you tell us what the vibes were this offseason and how you and Coach have connected since he's come to Stanford?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: Well, the very first thing was trying to connect on a human level. I think Coach took the time to call us individually and took the time to maybe get food outside of campus, just have a normal conversation with someone that's more than a student-athlete.

Then on the court, as you mentioned earlier, there's been a big emphasis on the defensive end. We had six returners over the spring that we kind of call the hexonal, where he set the tone with, and we kind of try to carry that over this summer with all the new guys coming in. That's how the transition was made.

Q. You just mentioned the new faces. Just what can you say about the newcomers into this program for the Stanford Cardinals and how you would maybe define the talent and what you have brought in?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: Well, I think a lot of talent was brought in from all around the country, with Jaylen from the ACC, with Chisom Okpara from Harvard, maybe Oziyah Sellers from USC. I think all these guys are good for us.

We also got a couple of freshmen. Also, by the way, Derin Saran from UC Irvine. I think all are really good workers. Most of them have really specific abilities whether it's to shoot, to defend, big bodies to drive down the lane.

All of them add something very unique to our team, which I think add a lot of diversity, which is what we need. All our freshmen have been so committed to the process of getting better. Coming in early, getting their work in, embracing the physicality of college, which I think is a big deal for freshmen.

Yeah, I'm really happy to have all these guys with us now. I'm also really happy that we form a team as a whole. I really feel like we don't have anything cliquey going on. It's really 15 guys just hanging out together, working towards the same objective.

I think that's the main thing, especially for me as a senior and potential leader of this team. Seeing the guys working

for each other is what makes me the happiest, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Last year in the conference you were the most improved player in the entire league. What was it about your game that led to that accolade?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: I think it started off the court. I think it started with David Berkun. Before practice every day an hour before just working out. Doesn't matter the time, doesn't matter the day. Being consistent with that kind of workout.

After three years of working with Mike Chatman in the weight room, being able to get bigger, get physical. Obviously that helped me with, like, everything that comes with it. So rebounding, scoring, and all this.

I think after three years you also get the confidence from your peers and from yourself. Whether it's my teammate that trusts me with the ball a little bit more, my coaches. Obviously putting myself in situations where I could perform a little bit better and hopefully I will be able to take it to the next level this year and help this team as much as possible.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. If you want to switch spots with Jaylen. Questions for Jaylen, please.

Q. My question is, with you coming into Stanford, coming from Duke, how has the relationship been with building the guys and the team morale?

JAYLEN THOMPSON: Yeah, obviously good question. It's been great. When we first got here, Coach kind of highlighted our first goal was becoming a team and becoming a culture. The hexanol, they did a great job. They were obviously the ones that had to set the tone, and they carried that tone over.

But I think that everyone that entered that was new, a transfer or a freshman, came in with the mindset of being all in. I think all of us were all in on committed to what Coach Smith has for us and as well as what we want for ourselves.

I think we've done a great job of building team chemistry. Even some things we did off the court. Coach Smith might not have been too happy about. We might have went skydiving. He didn't know about that. My bad.

We definitely created a bond where everybody is just together, and we click with.

Q. Jaylen, how was the conversation with Coach Scheyer for you to transfer from Duke ultimately, and

what kind of factors played into that decision for you to leave? Was it incoming freshmen, minutes allocation, how you are progressing within the program? What kind of factors played into you leaving Duke University?

JAYLEN THOMPSON: I'm grateful for my experience at Duke. Coach K brining me in, Coach Scheyer for what he has taught me. Graduating in three years, I was truly grateful for that experience.

For me in my last year it was new opportunity. There's nothing about it. I was just looking for a new opportunity, and I was just extremely grateful for those three years.

It's going to be weird playing against them, but those people, you know, the brotherhood is truly real. I saw Tyrese and Caleb, Coach Scheyer, all the Duke people, and it was still all love, and that's truly great.

Q. We have that student before athlete, but we don't talk about it as much. Nationally you don't hear the student side of it. The Dr. Darrell Hart Award Team's Top Scholar athlete at Duke, you got it not once but twice. Can you go into that? Now you're at a school where obviously education is a huge part of this.

JAYLEN THOMPSON: Yeah, it was a great award. I know growing up in my family, education was very important. If I didn't have good grades, I wouldn't be able to play basketball, I wouldn't be able to play my video games. It was always about, you know -- first my mom always taught me was first being a great person, second being a great student, and third being a great athlete.

Those are things that I prioritize in my life. Obviously the ball is going to eventually stop, but knowledge is something that no one can take away from you, and that was something that was very important for me as an athlete but also as an African-American athlete that I showed that I was more than just an athlete. That's a phrase that I try to carry throughout.

Obviously Duke is surrounded by great students, student-athletes, and students in general, and Stanford is surrounded by great students, and that was something that was important to me.

Q. We know you're an animal on defense, and we've seen short stints on offense as well. What offensively have you been working on over the offseason?

JAYLEN THOMPSON: Yeah, I think just being more consistent. You know, obviously you talk about the stints, but just not making sure they're just stints, but constant,

you know -- just constant improvement and growth. I've been obviously working on my jump shot. The coaching staff at Stanford has taken a lot of time and personal development watching film and improving and making better decisions with the ball, without the ball, and just overall just improving my confidence offensively.

It's something that's very important to me, and that's something that I hope to show this year for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Stanford, we thank your head coach and the basketball players and the thrill seekers and skydivers. Welcome to the ACC.

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