

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets Coach Damon Stoudamire Kowacie Reeves, Jr.

Naithan George

Men's Press Conference



and naive isn't the word, but you are just trying to learn the league.

So when I say learn the league, I'm learning each individual coach. I'm trying to learn their style of play, what they hang their hat on, what going to be the concepts that they love from a basketball standpoint.

What that does for me now is it helps shape your recruiting and how I move forward with my team. So that was really big for me.

I'm excited about coming into year two because I think the biggest thing, as I've been telling these guys from day one, I don't think -- and this is just me personally. See, I don't believe sports are played from the neck down. I think it's played from the neck up, and I think that the smartest teams are the best teams.

I think college has proven that historically throughout the years because the best team doesn't always win in college. The best teams win in the pros because it's the best of seven, so eventually, you know, somebody is going to have a little more talent than the other team and along with the smarts.

For me mentally we have to be better. We have to be more consistent. We showed all last season that we can win big games, but we also showed our immaturity by losing some games that we felt we should have won. If we can make the growth in that area and be more consistent, I think that will lead to a lot of victories.

You know, it's on all of us and I'm holding them accountable, and we're not going to skip no steps. That attention to detail has to be on point this year. I'm not going to settle for less.

Q. Name, image, and likeness, the transfer portal, realignment affecting this conference with Stanford, SMU and Cal coming in. How do you address all of these things that coaches didn't have to address when you were playing?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: At times it gets on your nerves,

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Stoudamire, please.

Q. Bonzi Wells, obviously had time in the NBA with him with the Portland Trail Blazers. What's it been like to work with him with this team and build these young men after being a young man with him in the NBA?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: It's been good. I think most people maybe don't realize Bonzi was the coach at LeMoyné-Owen for two years, head coach. To have him on staff I think is great for these young guys.

I don't even think -- I think that he's going to assume so much more of a role with us. I don't even think he's put his stamp on the team yet in terms of who he was as a player because I always tell him all the time, let them know who you are.

And it's not about being an NBA player, but most of the guys on our team don't understand he came from Muncie, Indiana. He went to a mid-major school, Ball State, and he was the 11th pick in the draft. That means something, you know what I mean?

He's been an underdog his whole life. For me to see him in this light has been great. I look at him as a brother. I'm excited for him as he moves forward as a coach.

Q. Damon, this is your second go-around. Everything was new a year ago. What have you kind of learned about the league in the year you've been in it and making the adjustments to coach in the ACC?

DAMON STOUDAMIRE: Well, the league is a really good league, number one. I think that I learned a lot last season. You know, for me I was coming into the league,



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but I actually love it. It's probably my background, though, I would say.

It's like coaching, right? When I became head coach, and I reinforce this to myself all the time, I try not to get mad or take it personal when my players don't know something that I know because I've been somewhere where they haven't.

It's the same thing in talking to agents, parents, and recruits about NIL and all the different things because the reality of it is, all I hear people talk about is money.

Obviously it's about money, but most people talking about money right now are talking about money because they don't have money. I have money, so I have a perspective on what money looks like.

Now when you are dealing with people, now you are trying to get them to understand and see a bigger picture. Because speaking for Damon Stoudamire, if I was in a situation where I didn't have a great relationship or didn't feel like I had a relationship with maybe the head coach, I'm not going to that school. I don't care how much money they give me.

But it's because I thought I was going to be a pro. I knew I was going to be a good college player, so I left a little on the table.

Mentalities are totally different, so I get it, because some guys aren't necessarily pros, you know, because we take that word for granted. We always put people and say people are pros, but what does that really mean?

When I played to be a pro, first of all, nobody left school early. You had numbers. You had a body of work. You can start from a guy who was a freshman -- my freshman year to my sophomore year I averaged 7 points, 11 points, 18 points, and 22 points, and I was No. 7 in the draft. They knew I could play, and now you're guessing.

Trying to get parents, trying to get even agents talking for kids, you can't talk about potential of a kid. We get fired for our potential. NBA, right? Coaches get fired for guys with potential, teams with potential. You get fired, right?

So you have to create some type of system to help you out in that NIL space. If somebody is realistic or they don't align with what you are talking about, it's fine. There's a lot of players.

What you have to do is you have to go and evaluate. See what has happened with NIL, this is what's happened with NIL, right? That kid over there on the left or to my left, Nait

George, Nait, you had, what, one scholarship offer? If you didn't come to Georgia Tech last year, where were you going to go? Seattle U if I'm not mistaken, right?

Nait George was going to Seattle U had I am not taken him last year. So that's missing the evaluation. So, again, what has happened is that there are people out here that have allowed money to make them lazy. So now you got to do more work.

To your point, leading all the way up to it, so you're the head coach. You're trying to coach a team. My NBA background makes me a GM and a president as well. So if you are going to talk numbers with me, you got to talk real. We're not going to talk fictitious stuff. We're going to talk honesty and we're going to talk real, because at the end of the day if I do decide to give that guy that money, it's because I don't have no illusions about it.

We all got these collectives and all that stuff, but the collective, they only going to give the money if I say give the money. They don't give the money to somebody that you don't say give the money to. So my thing is what comes with that money is an expectation, and that's what we have forgotten because everything -- we have a lot of rules that are in the gray area.

We have to get out that gray area. If we get out that gray area and get black and white, then it will help the whole out.

It's so complex now, and it's turned into a 24-hour job. You cannot do all these and wear these hats by yourself. So what I try to do each and every day is speed my coaches up because what has happened is it's become an uncomfortable conversation in 2024 talking about NIL money because nobody has ever had to talk about money, but in my world you talk about money all the time. You make money; you lose money. It's just kind of part of it.

I like it, but it don't mean I don't dislike it at times. So for me I enjoy the part of it. The crazy thing about it is now I talk to my kids. These guys will tell you -- these guys will tell you I'm on them about academics, but man, ever since I got back to college I haven't had nobody ask me about graduating. That's a fact. We've lost what this is all about.

The only reason I can stand up here and be a head coach is because I went back to Arizona and got my degree. I never hear people talk about a degree anymore.

Now, that does not mean you can't be successful, but if you are going to start this journey, you might as well finish this journey even if you come back, but nobody talks about it. So for me that's the beauty of what I'm doing now, and I

didn't know that when I took this job, but it's the beauty of it.

I had a great conversation with Derrick Favors. Most people in Atlanta know Derrick Favors. These guys in the front row probably know Derrick Favors. He's an east Atlanta guy. He went to the NBA Draft. He was drafted No. 2, okay? He had a long career. He made over \$100 million.

The one thing he said to me is, now I want to come back and get my degree because, see, it means something when you get older. You're trying to make it, but it means something.

Nobody is even talking about degrees anymore. So for me that's what I like. I still like the father part of it, and I'm going to always be on my guys about the father part of it. I don't care what they say, and I don't give a damn, but we just got to keep pushing as coaches. We've got to stand for something as well.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch spots with Kowacie. Questions for Kowacie, please.

Q. Just what have you changed in your game? What is the thing that et cetera going to take you to the next level in your next season at Georgia Tech?

KOWACIE REEVES JR: I will say what I changed in my game really don't have too much to do with basketball. It got everything to do with, you know, my personal journey of self-discovery and humanizing myself because we get lost in that a lot of times in regards of basketball.

That's another reason why I came to Georgia Tech, because they put trust in their man that deals into ethics and morality first before the ball starts bouncing. He has really helped me with that journey.

I would say this summer that's what I have worked on, and that has allowed me to inadvertently be able to serve my teammates better, and that gives me a perspective that is only going to think about what's in the best interest for Georgia Tech as an institution and as a basketball program. So I would say that's what I have worked on the most in my game.

THE MODERATOR: Kowacie, that is one heck of an answer, so thank you very much. You can switch spots with Nait. Questions for Nait, please.

Q. Coach relayed everyone your story and we know that, but how does it feel to be here in your second season representing Georgia Tech on the ACC stage

as one of the top players in the conference?

NAITHAN GEORGE: Being here representing Georgia Tech feels like a surreal experience. Like a blessing just to be here because I never knew I would be here a year ago. If you told me I would, I wouldn't believe you because of where I was.

I'm just really thankful for the opportunity that Georgia Tech gave me, Coach Damon and my teammates for supporting me always. Just having that support from everybody that roles with me and believes, so this is an awesome experience.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time. Georgia Tech, thanks for being with us, and have a great season.

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