

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Miami Hurricanes**

**Coach Mario Cristobal**

**Carson Beck**

**Francis Mauigoa**

**Akheem Mesidor**

Press Conference

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for being here, and thank you for hosting us. I want to first thank, an honor to be here with our players, with Carson, with Akheem, with Sisi, affectionally known as Francis Mauigoa, and Wesley Bissainthe, as well. These guys exemplify what a University of Miami student-athlete and competitor is all about.

We're really excited, and I would say the most exciting part about our team is they have the dominant trait of being a group of guys that love to work, and you can't throw enough at them. They still manage to get all that work done while being great students, achieving the highest GPA they've achieved successively for seven straight semesters, as well as leading the country in community service hours. So we're growing both as people and as players, but we signed and developed an incredible group of players in different forms and fashion, from the high school level to the portal method, and have brought in some really high-level coaches and human beings that we are really excited about that have certainly helped us continue the upward trajectory of our program.

And that being said, there's just a ton of energy and momentum surrounding our program right now, and our excitement is geared towards the fact that we get to start football fall camp, training camp, and get in there and really just be focused on our team to establish our identity, to improve our technique and fundamentals, get in the best shape that we possibly can to master our systems inside and out, name it, to get better at everything we do.

That being said, appreciate being here, and open to questions.



**Q. Canes Connection, the NIL collective, I know you spoke about that pretty openly, the collectives in the beginning of NIL. Just what you can say about where Canes Connection is in the grand scheme of the House settlement and how you work that all together, and Miami's NIL situation moving forward?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, we've always been very well established. We've always been compliant and we've been aggressive in the right kind of way and used it in a form and a fashion that benefits our program and our players.

In terms of where they are and all the details surrounding all of that, that's maybe a question for some other time, but you couldn't find a more professionally run organization than our collective.

**Q. You hired four new defensive assistant coaches in this off-season and you only have one returning. What went into that hiring process, and what are you expecting from them this season?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Sure. Well, into the hiring process, we certainly, after week 4 last year, we took a downturn. We slipped defensively. I don't want to blame anybody. I always look at myself and say, what could I have done better? We had some injuries that led to some schematic changes that weren't the best for our football program, so a change had to be made, and we found a guy in Corey Hetherman. It's not the fact that he was a highly coveted guy, it's the fact that he is an elite teacher and human being and a guy that really does really well what we need our defense to do and to be.

His use of personnel, his ability to adapt, his track record and his productivity, particularly last year at Minnesota, was enough evidence for us to feel comfortable in bringing him in, and he hasn't disappointed.

He brings an elite level of commitment, of work ethic, of teaching capabilities, and he's complemented by a former Cane, Damione Lewis, working with the defensive line, who is aggressive and has a commanding presence, an excellent football coach, as well Zac Etheridge and Will

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Harris on the back end. And I also want to mention Terry Jefferson, who's a local guy who's worked really hard at Jacksonville State and he's also joined the secondary group, also.

All in all, we felt like we needed to make some changes in that department, and we made them, and we feel that not only are they the right coaches, they're the right people, and they're going to grant us better success.

**Q. Did you get your Cuban coffee this morning?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: You know, that's been a battle here. I think it would be good if I could get some help from the locals. Si alguien habla español, por favor ayúdame. It would be greatly appreciated, and I promise to return the favor at a fine dining establishment down in Miami when you guys are down there.

**Q. You've had some teams in Miami over the last couple years that started the season really strong with some signature victories. Towards the end of the season we've seen things start to fizzle out toward the end of the year. Is that something you've focused on and talked about, and what are the keys to starting strong and finishing well, as well?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: No doubt, it's how you finish. We've made a lot of progress over the last three years. Year one, our roster was not really built to take on Power 4 football, and those were some lopsided games and those were tough. Year two, everything was competitive and we won a couple more.

Then last year we had a chance to win every single game, but we didn't. The bottom line is we didn't get it done. And it's more than -- I know we pointed out the defense a little bit earlier, but you know what also what fell apart at the end, ball security. If you turn the ball over, you subject yourself to some not so positive outcomes. Without a doubt, finishing is a mentality. Finishing is a work ethic that comes with the off-season.

We've always invested a ton of effort in those areas, and we've invested even more this off-season, and it will be a big part of training camp, as well.

**Q. You guys have had a good bit of turnover at the skill positions on offense coming into the season, but you have some talent there and you also brought in some guys from the portal. What have you seen from that group coming into this season?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, I've seen a lot of talent and I've seen guys that also have a work ethic that is a little bit

different in a positive way. We've always had hard workers on our football team. These guys seem to take the extra work to a different level. I think Coach Beard has done a very good job, so has Coach Varner, but I think that some of the seniors, some of the older guys like CJ Daniels have taken a leadership role in bringing the guys in before and after the mandatory sessions and getting some extra work in in the form of the film room, in the form of route running and catching the football. And I see a group with a chip on its shoulder and a lot to prove. We see a lot of stuff in practice that you can't really gloat about out here because you haven't seen it, and there's no value in claiming certain things in the off-season.

But we do feel very confident that that group is up to the task, and not only to maintain the standard but to elevate it at some point in time. We're excited about those guys. We push them hard, and we push them to be just as involved in the running game as they are in the passing game.

**Q. You're having to replace Heisman Trophy winner No. 1 overall draft pick Cam Ward. You brought in Carson Beck from University of Georgia. This is a two-parter for you. One, how is the offense going to shift to more accommodate for Carson based on moving from Cam? And then could you give us an update on Carson's injury and how he's progressing and what is his outlook for you guys in the fall?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, we're thrilled to have had Cam and we're thrilled to have Carson here now. We never look for the next -- like, when we had Justin Herbert out west, we didn't look for the next Justin Herbert. We were looking for the first Cam Ward, and now we're looking for the first and best version of Carson Beck. Carson has as good of experience as a quarterback as you can have. He's played in monster games, and he's played at a high level.

He is ultra competitive, and his football IQ is off the charts. It didn't take long to realize that he's a team player, and that his work ethic is also through the roof.

Even though he missed spring practice, his participation was in a limited manner, but soon after he's been cleared and he's been participating and doing everything with our team for several weeks, and that's a lot of opportunities. Nowadays in college football, guys run their own practices and whatnot, and they get almost like an entire spring session on their own off to the side.

But what we see is, like I mentioned, a high-level elite competitor that has played at a high level, and this is what I think is the best part, that is hungry and driven, not just to establish himself as one of the premier players in the



country; he, like Akheem, like Sisi, like Wes, their interest is to make Miami better, to go win.

I think when you combine those things and you combine an offensive line that really prides itself on working hard and protecting and running the ball well and a lot of pieces around it and an improved defense, this is the right place. This is the right time, and these are the right people. I think his relationship with Shannon Dawson and the rest of the offensive staff, particularly the offensive line coach, Coach Mirabal, it's a tremendous partnership. So we're looking forward to getting on the field and making it work.

**Q. In terms of you and your history as a player, you know what it's like to win a championship, multiple championships at Miami, and as a coach it's been a while and it's been something that's kind of been since before your time. Miami has had the talent, it's had the opportunities, but it just seems like a little bit of can't-get-right-itis, or something like that that is preventative. How does this team take that next step to returning to that glory?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: First of all, I'd say I disagree with you. Miami has had the talent. We got here in 2022, and I remember watching film and saying we've got a lot of work to do. And I think this is the best way to put it, to summarize it: We were on a tarmac and we asked the pilot to delay, this is a flight during recruiting and fundraising, where Miami was on the verge of not having a player drafted for the first time in I don't know how many decades, and then finally late in the seventh round, a player was selected. So to that statement, to me, Miami did not have the talent and Miami did not recruit to the level that Miami is supposed to recruit. Now you fast forward three years later, Miami is coming off a 10-win season. Now Miami is sixth in the country in players drafted with double digit combine invites, with double digit wins, and with the No. 1 pick overall.

The steady progress and trajectory is a product of a lot of people, players, coaches, staff members working really hard to get Miami to where it needs to be, and one of the biggest reasons, if not the biggest reason, why I chose to leave my place on the West Coast to come back and do Miami the way Miami should be done. That's what we've been doing.

I think it's evident in the players we have here today. It's evident in the progression of our football team. It's evident in the talent acquisition and the development of those players and the way that things are progressing for our program in general, on and off the field. I hope that makes sense, but I think it's important to paint the picture, because if you want to tell a story, let's make sure we tell

the story from the starting point of what it looked like so we have an accurate depiction for what that story really is.

**Q. Carson, what can you say about why the transfer portal when you had different roads you could have taken and why Miami, ultimately reflecting on that hindsight 20/20?**

CARSON BECK: Yeah, I think the biggest thing for me, obviously, was the offensive fit. As a quarterback, the OC, the scheme, the talent and guys that you're going to have around you is huge to the success and ultimately the future, A, of a quarterback, but of me. This is my future, and I think that this decision is one of the better decisions I've made, and since I've been here in January, developing the relationships and building the chemistry between me, the wide receivers, the running backs, the tight ends, the O-line, and just trying to develop those relationships and that camaraderie, it's just reinforced my decision in a positive way.

I'm really excited to continue to keep working with these guys. Obviously, the spring, it was a little slow for me. I tried to take care of a coaching role, a coaching aspect. Being behind every single play, trying to help the other quarterbacks that were in there getting reps, picking out one singular receiver at practice and watching every single one of his reps and then going in and watching the film with him after and teaching him certain things, certain intricacies and routes and concepts and trying to teach everybody the way I see the game so that we're all on the same page.

Ultimately the decision, I feel like, has really paid off, and this off-season has been really good and full of good work.

**Q. Do you feel any pressure following Cam Ward? Obviously he was the No. 1 pick, broke some program records. Do you feel any pressure following in his footsteps?**

CARSON BECK: No, not really. Obviously his success is undeniable. Obviously I don't really know him very well. I've been able to meet him a couple times, but obviously very -- I don't want to say proud. I don't know the kid. But what he was able to do is undeniable.

The last school I was at I followed up the two-time national champion, so I didn't really feel any pressure there. It's a game; I've played football my whole life. I've played quarterback since I was seven years old, and it's something that I love to do and I've got a lot of good talent around me and really good coaches in position to not only help me not only achieve my goals, but be really successful.

Again, really just looking forward to the opportunity, and again, have the opportunity to go out and play football again. I haven't done it in a while, so looking forward to it.

**Q. You have had some success against ACC defenses in your career, 4-0, 10 touchdowns, one interception. What is it you see is maybe a difference between some of the SEC defenses you've faced and the opportunities you've had to play against ACC defenses?**

CARSON BECK: Yeah, I mean, football is football, at the end of the day. I think from team to team, you're going to get different defensive coordinators with different philosophies.

I don't think it's as much of an ACC versus SEC thing. I think it's just a team to team thing. South Carolina is going to look different than Duke, as Wake Forest is going to look different than Washington State or Oregon. I'm just naming random teams now. But I think it's more of a defensive coordinator thing, and game to game we will watch that film and ultimately put together a good plan that we think will be successful against that and then go out on the film and hopefully execute that.

**Q. Sisi, you have come in from day one and been an absolute stalwart at the right tackle position. Traditionally when we see somebody dominate there, there's normally a move to left tackle. What's going on with your decision to stay at right tackle or is that what the team needs and is best for the team?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Yeah, Coach Mirabal has done a great job with us practicing at all five positions, and I feel like for me it's just whatever you need me to play. I'm more of a team player more than anything. I'll play whatever position you want me to play in just for the team to succeed.

**Q. The O-line has been special throughout the years, but what makes the O-line so special this year?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Like Coach Cristobal touched on, we're a team that likes to hard work, and for the O-line, we like to set the tone for the whole team. We like to set the standard, as Coach Mirabal always pounds on us every day to set the standard for the team, and we're the type of guys that go out there and try to dominate everybody, even on our D-line side. That's how -- iron sharpens iron.

**Q. It's been evident that your family has played a major role in your football career and had a major impact, including your brother transferring to Miami to**

**suit up with you guys. How important has that aspect been to you on and off the field?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: You know, it's very special because me and my brother has been together for the rest of my whole childhood. We've been together since back home, coming from home to my freshman year in high school to San Bernardino, California. We've been together basically my whole career.

To be able to get that time to play again, it's very special because we live together, and having that bond on the field, we push each other to be the best that we can. Him playing on the defensive side, me playing on the offensive side, I see some stuff that he needs to work on, he sees some stuff that I need to work on, and that's what we talk about every day when we get back to the house.

So yeah, it's very special to me.

**Q. Have you had a chance to get Carson kind of up to date with the big-time rivalry between Miami and Florida State?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: I think he already knew. I think he already knew. He comes ready every practice that we have. He's very open minded. He's very out there. He's a very special guy, just like Cam Ward last year. I feel the same energy with Carson Beck.

**Q. With Carson now at the helm, what differences do you expect there to be between him and Cam Ward, and what kind of adjustment to his play style will look like for you, if any?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Shoot, there's no difference to me. I do my job to the best that I can. If I've got to block this guy 10 seconds for him to make a play, I'll do that, just like the same as last year. I'll do whatever it takes for us to succeed. That's the mentality not for me but the whole O-lineman group.

**Q. Total offense last year, top in the country. How does this offense of Miami get even better in your opinion for the season?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: For me, we strive to get better every year. Every season -- every off-season we work to get better at something. We practice hard every time that we get a chance to. We're just trying to be the best that we can be. The stats don't even matter to us. It's being able to be out there and being able to be the best you can be, not only as a player but as a character as well. So yeah.

**Q. Your name doesn't give us the indication that your**

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**nickname would be Sisi, so where does Sisi come from?**

FRANCIS MAUIGOA: Sisi is my Samoan name, so my full Samoan name is Falangisisi, which shortens to Sisi. Most of my family and friends call me Sisi, but at school teachers call me Francis. I feel at home, so I try to make everybody call me Sisi.

**Q. Akheem, you guys struggled defensively down the stretch last year. What do you think you can improve on this year to not have that happen again?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: Well, the biggest thing we've been emphasizing this off-season is communication. If you don't communicate, your defense is going to get just torched, right? Obviously we have a bunch of new additions, but communication is the biggest thing for us.

**Q. You guys have a new defensive coordinator this year. What have you seen from Coach Hetherman so far and how do you like his new defense?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: I love Coach Hetherman. He's a great teacher. He's just an aggressive guy, as you guys can see in his interviews. But he really just gets it down to the point. He's a technician; anything you have, he'll probably answer your question before you ask it. But he's an amazing person, a great coach, and he just lets us play free, play fast, and I can't wait to play football.

**Q. Coach Cristobal, what it is about his leadership, his leadership style that speaks to not only you personally but to the Hurricanes and why it works in Miami?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: Well, Coach Cristobal is a powerful leader and he doesn't stop working. He works day and night. The biggest thing for him that he tells us is elite teams are in elite shape, so what we do this off-season is we run, we run like crazy. We're trying to get in -- just having amazing conditioning. After that, you have to play hard. Play fast, play hard, and just dominate every snap of the game.

Just Coach Cristobal is an amazing coach, best I've been around, and I love being a part of this team.

**Q. You are in a very talented and deep defensive line room, and yet two out of the last three years you've led Miami in sacks. As the elder statesman and as a guy that's been hyper productive from the pass rushing standpoint, how do you set the tone vocally and be a leader in a room where multiple guys are expected to play on Sundays, including yourself, but multiple guys expecting to play on Sundays and maybe even a few**

**going in the first round?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: A big step I've been trying to take this off-season is obviously the leadership role. I think I'm the oldest guy in the room, but just I want to lead by example but also I want to be more vocal. This off-season I've been bringing guys along with extra work. I just want to get to know everybody, and I want everybody else to get to know me, know my story, know my why. We have a deep room, and we have a bunch of guys who can play. We need to work together as we've been. We need to get together and just establish our identity in that room and just dominate.

**Q. You speak about your why, your story. Given your background culturally growing up in Canada, how has that affected how you've matured as an individual and as a football player?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: Growing up in Canada, it's difficult to get recruited out here in the States. Nothing is given to you. You have to go out and grab everybody. I grew up in Ottawa, Ontario, in a five-children household, and then my mom took care of all of us on her own. My dad comes from a Haitian background, so I speak English and French, so I grew up in a diverse community, diverse place.

But football-wise, nothing was given. I had to work for everything. I had to travel back and forth to Ohio, back and forth to Indiana, Michigan, a bunch of different spots in order to gain recognition because just traditionally people looked down against Canadian competition, Canadian talent. I really had to prove myself more than I feel like many or most, and I always carry that mentality even now. Nothing is going to be given to me. I need to go out and take everything. That's why I work as hard as I do, because I really need the game of football to bless me and my family.

**Q. You left the door open. You said you speak French, so please answer this question in French. What's your favorite thing to do in your downtime?**

AKHEEM MESIDOR: I like fishing. I don't know how to say it in French. I forgot. (Speaking French.)

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