

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Wednesday, July 23, 2025  
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Syracuse Orange**  
**Coach Fran Brown**  
**Berry Buxton III**  
**Jack Stonehouse**  
**Dan Villari**

Press Conference



each other?

FRAN BROWN: I thought he has been a leader since he was in high school. He's done a good job, getting a chance to follow him a little bit there. Let's be realistic, I think when he got a chance to play in that bowl game last year, he did a good job and led them to a victory.

For me, what stood out the most was Notre Dame last year, making that run and playing against Penn State when their quarterback was out and he went in. To have a guy just be able to come in with so much poise, so much leadership, seeing the team be behind him, him being able to take them down the field and score, I felt like that led to that spark that they needed for them to be able to go along and win that game and being able to go and compete in a National Championship.

I want champions on our football team. For us, it's competitive all over, though, right? No one's safe for us. Everybody's competing to play at every single position. We have guys that can compete to play, so if you decide not to compete that day, you might not be in the position you're in that day or the next day.

**Q. I'm just wondering, last year's passing success with the quarterback Kyle McCord, some believe that it was a product of him as a quarterback. I'm asking, is that the system that you planned to run moving forward, or was that just a product of who we had at quarterback?**

FRAN BROWN: I think it is the system, but I can't take away from how good he is. The decisions he made, the leadership he's shown day in and day out in the program. Kyle McCord came and set records for the ACC that have never been done. He's done that. He set records at the school at Syracuse, which have Hall of Famers that came there and played quarterback.

To say it wasn't Kyle would be weird to not say that, so definitely it was Kyle. But if you go back and check who Jeff Nixon is and what he's been doing for a long time. When he was at Baylor, he did the same thing. When he had the opportunity of taking over as offensive coordinator

FRAN BROWN: Good afternoon. Appreciate the opportunity to be here. For me, I'm just extremely thankful and blessed to have the opportunity of leading our program this year. Excited about the new leaders we have on our football team, the chance they get to show their leadership, to build our team, just to be able to build trust, to build the culture of DART, and just shows that we're truly committed to it, that we care, and that we trust each other.

It's going to be big for us this year. Very thankful to just be in this conference. For me, it's a conference of quarterbacks. For us, having the opportunity right now of having two really good quarterbacks, having the chance to compete, that means a lot to us. A bunch of preeminent players throughout this conference that are truly good and that can play on our football team and amongst the other teams.

I think that we probably have the strongest nonconference schedule in the country, and being able to have that, being able to compete, week in and week out, you'll just see a conference full of competitive guys, competitive coaches. I think we have some of the better coaches in the conference that we get the opportunity to compete against.

I'm happy to just be the man that has the chance to lead this program out this season to see what we can do, to show guys that we'll be here to compete and play some physical, tough football.

**Q. You mentioned in the open there that you have two quarterbacks willing to compete here in the fall. Just what you saw with Steve Angeli and why you wanted to bring him in, and then Rickie Collins Jr., what it can be like for the fall as they push this team and push**



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for the Carolina Panthers, the same thing happened, and they did a good job during his time.

Jeff was a well sought out guy this off-season. A lot of people wanted him to come in their program, and being able to do it, I think we kind of out-recruited those guys a little bit, and he's been able to stay with us. We think we have a really good offensive coordinator, and we have a really good offensive staff. Then we added some other pieces to come in to be able to help us add on to that with Josh Gattis being able to be on our staff now. We still have Mike Johnson, who's been a coordinator in the NFL. You've got Nunzio Campanile, who's been a coordinator.

We have Jeff Nixon, who I think is the brains of the operation, but there's a lot of guys around him that help, that push, all the way down to a QC that can help these young guys. It's just what we do as a whole. It goes back to the beginning. I think that we're all committed, we care, and we trust each other. When you got a group of men playing like that, you just see family, right?

**Q. Speaking of multiple players at the Senior Bowl and Shrine Bowl last year, your message of DART, detailed, accountable, relentless, tough, is consistently echoed by them just after one year. How is it to have a message that continues to impact players after their collegiate career, and how has that helped you on the recruiting trail?**

FRAN BROWN: I think it's just consistency. When you see people that are successful, when you follow all the great coaches that coach this game of football, I think they've all been consistent, just being consistent. When things go bad, they're able to stick to those same core values, and we were able to do that through ups and through downs, and just always being able to stick to our core values.

Core values mean everything to us. DART is how we want to live throughout our life. This isn't just what we say so everyone can like it and do it. It's how you want to live. If you're detailed, if you're accountable, relentless and tough as a father, I think your wife would be pretty happy, right? I think your children will follow you.

So you want to take these core values and be able to use them in life. You can also use them in faith. If you're detailed, accountable, relentless, and tough in your faith and you focus on that, when there's tough times in life, you can kind of fall back on the faith. We take that and live that way. It's not just a saying, it's a way of life.

**Q. You won the Steve Spurrier First-Year Coach of the Year award and led Syracuse to ten wins for the first**

**time in six years. What is the key to continuing the positive momentum that's developed amongst this program?**

FRAN BROWN: I think just the mental toughness. The award was presented to me. I think our team won that award, the coaching staff won that award, and the fan base. I just was the guy that got a chance to go on the stage and receive it for all of us.

For us, it's a day-to-day grind. Mental toughness is to be where your feet are. So I feel like, if daily, I just focus on the mission at task, right? And that will eventually get us to what our ending goal is, which we want to be able to compete and play for a National Championship. Just daily, I'm focused on being where my feet are. I'm locked in.

**Q. First things first, how has Jamie Tremble's progression in development been, as he is expected to replace a definite dynamic playmaker in Oronde Gadsden? You talked about keeping your wife and kids happy. Is the winners get washed thing still a thing with you as well, or is that going by the wayside?**

FRAN BROWN: That's just something I said. It just depends on how you feel when you lose. For me, when you practice all week, you practice all week to win, you don't practice to lose. When you lose, you know how they'll be like, as long as you did everything you could, you shouldn't worry about it. That's BS. I don't live by that. If you lose, you took a piece of what I was working on. That means a lot.

Jamie's doing a really good job. Oronde will be replaced by Dan Villari and then a bunch of other guys. Dan's the guy that's going to step up into that role and be able to play that role. He's working -- Oronde is the guy. Oronde will never be replaced by one person, but we feel, when it comes to the work ethic, the mindset, the ability to make guys miss, to run after the catch, we think Dan Villari is the guy to step into that role and be able to do that. He'll just also be assist.

We think Jamie is doing a helluva job. He's working his butt off. Any time you see guys working at practice, you'll catch Dan and him together. They're doing a really good job together to go on and replace him. Oronde will probably start in the NFL this year, so you just don't replace that guy with one person.

We've got to go off of who leads that room now, who's the leader on the offense. It's Dan Villari who's doing that, but Jamie's doing an outstanding job. I think you guys will like the roles that you see him in this year when you watch him play a little bit of football. He'll be moving all over the field.



**Q. You speak on DART, detailed, accountable, relentless, and tough, and then your faith, as well. Just the importance of not just saying these things, but living them every single day in the building of the foundational pillars of what the culture is at Syracuse football today, tomorrow, and the next day?**

FRAN BROWN: Faith is everything, that's why I'm standing here. Because of my -- for me, it's my religion first, it's the Man above that I push. I think, when you're trying to do that and you're trying to teach men that and teach young men that, they've got to have a foundation because, at some point, all of us in here are career women and men and we're working extremely hard, but at some point it was extremely hard for you guys, right?

You may have made a couple phone calls and some people gave you the motivation that, yeah, I keep going and I can do it, but for me it's nothing like that Word, nothing like being able to trust in something that you can't see. Right? That's the faith. That's the trust, the belief.

They see that I live that, right? If you ask them, that's every day. It's not a recruiting pitch or it's not just different things. It's, like, that's who I am because, when I went through my trials and tribulations, it wasn't someone else that got me out of it, it was the Word, right? It was just seeing those stories and seeing things in the Bible that happened hundreds of years ago that was going on now and in my own life. I'm like, well, if they went through it and maybe if I focus and I lock in and I read these stories, I don't got to make the same mistakes.

It's just trying to be able to help them be the best fathers, the best husbands, the best community men that they can be, and the best example I can show it is by walking it daily.

**Q. How excited is the team with playing a big game against Tennessee in the opener in Atlanta?**

FRAN BROWN: We're blessed to be able to play in such a prestigious venue against the Blue Blood of college football. They've been doing well for years. I've got a cousin that played there, all the way back to Reggie White. So we get a chance to go and play against Tennessee.

We're just thankful to be able to play in that venue. We're extremely happy to get a chance to go and play against Tennessee. They do a real good job. Our team is excited and thankful, but the main thing is the main thing. We're trying to focus on, like, today. They're back there, they want to focus on the skull session, right? And then they want to focus on the workout they'll have today. So that

way we can be ready for that big stage.

I mentioned something to a coach when he was leaving to go to another program. He felt like that was a big stage, a big program. I told him, stages are created by the people on them. Like, you put the work in, and it will come to you. Don't ever run somewhere thinking I'm going to run to this stage now, this is where I belong at. I'm like, no, they're created by the daily grind, the daily work. If it's meant for you to go get what you're supposed to get when you hit that spot, then just be ready for it.

Mental toughness; these dudes are trying to be who they are, and we're just working. We're just working daily. Tennessee is a good program, they have a good team, they play in the playoffs. We get a chance to go out and compete against them, we want to make sure how we're supposed to look when you play against a team of that caliber because they usually blow everybody out in the beginning of the year and do those things. We're just blessed to have an opportunity to play against them.

**Q. Talking more about that game against Tennessee, you played Tennessee several times as a Georgia defensive back coach. How is it playing against Tennessee yet again in Atlanta, a place you played multiple times?**

FRAN BROWN: It's an honor. I'm thankful. I think Coach Heupel is one of the best coaches in college football. His offense does an amazing job. His defense is rolling. What happened at Georgia don't have anything to do with Syracuse.

I'm just focused on my mental toughness. I'm going to be where my feet are. We're locked on the day so we can be ready for that big stage. It's a big venue, so we've got to make sure we're ready when the time comes.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. We'll spend time with Berry Buxton.

**Q. Berry, for you, we have a mixture of returnees as well as transfers that are coming in on the defensive side of the ball. What can you say to what that mix has been like and how you've all kind of taken from each other to work in what this new team is going to be in 2025?**

BERRY BUXTON III: I think, as a defense for us, it's been about solidifying our identity and what we want to do. Last year we didn't perform to our standard. With new guys coming in and older guys that stayed, it's just been about knowing who we want to be and putting in the work to do that.



**Q. What part of your development this off-season have you been working on that you are most excited to see how it plays out onto the field?**

BERRY BUXTON III: For me, this off-season I didn't get to practice during the spring, so it's been extremely mental. A lot of film, a lot of studying the playbook, studying the defense, just mentally preparing and being a smarter player than I was last year, being more aware, knowing the whole defense and being able to teach it.

**Q. This defense was 133rd in the nation in terms of completion percentage against, and this is a defense that's been proud, had the mantra of the mob and all those things. How do you return to kind of that standard? Or is this something completely new all together and it's like, hey, we're not that group anymore. We're resetting something different, and going forward, that kind of mob moniker is gone, but we're still holding our own here?**

BERRY BUXTON III: No. I would say we're still the mob. We still want to be a tenacious defense. Last year we didn't perform to our standard. I think this year is about upping the standard and holding ourselves accountable.

I think last year the coaches did a lot of it, they told us what to do. This year it's been the players leading themselves and telling each other what's wrong and holding each other accountable.

**Q. Look at the leadership from defensive coordinator Elijah Robinson, just what he has done for you personally and what you think he's done for this defense to create that mob mentality and to instill in you that fight in every single game to elevate this year?**

BERRY BUXTON III: For me, the greatest thing he gave me is opportunity. I think he does that for a lot of players on the defense. During practice all the way down to the 4s, 5s getting reps. So I think that opportunity makes everybody hungry so you know you've got to compete, like, running with the 3s right now, you could be a 1. I started with the 3s in spring of 2024, so you could end up starting at any point. It just keeps everybody hungry, so you've got to be tenacious and keep going.

**Q. Kind of building off on that, you started your career in the FCS, and then you kind of grinded your way up to where you are now to becoming a starter with Syracuse. Can you kind of talk about your journey and what's your mentality going into this season?**

BERRY BUXTON III: I think my path here, going to junior college first and going to Syracuse, I think it put a level of humility into me where in high school I thought I was the best player, I thought I could get whatever I wanted, but at the end of the day, it just made me more humble and made me more hungry and made me more confident that, if I put in the work, eventually it will pay off.

I think this season, I put in a lot of work leading up to this season, being my senior year, and I think all the work I put in will prepare me for any opportunities that are presented to me.

**Q. Was there a moment in which that humility washed across you?**

BERRY BUXTON III: I think there's been a lot of moments in my career, out of high school not getting recruited, not being able to play my second year at Juco, not playing my second year at Syracuse. I think through all those moments, there's always been other people I could tell weren't as fortunate.

Even though I wasn't able to play, I was still at Syracuse. I was still there and still had the opportunity and couldn't make the most of it. When Coach Fran came, I could have said, I'm just going to give up and transfer, he's not going to give me the opportunity. At any point, the work can pay off for you, and it should if you're dedicated to it consistently.

THE MODERATOR: You and Jack can switch spots. We'll bring Mr. Stonehouse to the podium.

**Q. I believe you have the single season record at Syracuse with 44.7 yards average on your punt. Just what you can say to elevating yourself to that place at Syracuse, knowing there's a lot of good punters that have gone to the NFL from the orange.**

JACK STONEHOUSE: Yeah, I'm very blessed to obviously set that record. We're looking to do more this year, obviously. I've talked to Riley Dixon, I've gone out punting with him a couple of times. He's teaching me how to be more consistent in different ways, different punts. So it's just being the most prepared for next season as possible.

**Q. Not only are you one of the only specialists here, but you're rightfully so because you were one of the nation's leaders in terms of punts inside the 20, punts down inside the 20. How have you found a way to carve a niche as a weapon in a position that's not traditionally thought of that way?**



JACK STONEHOUSE: Just like everyone else's position, it's important when you have to do it under the lights. When you're out there, it's muscle memory. The hard work pays off, just like everyone else says. Special teams is still a third of the game, so if you have a chance to change the way of the game or change the outcome of the game, you've just got to do it to the best of your ability.

**Q. You made a decision like the other guys that are here at the ACC Kickoff and in general to play for Fran Brown and be a part of this. It's been known that he is who he says he is. What can you say to that effect that you have a leader who's not just going to talk about it, but he's going to live it every single day?**

JACK STONEHOUSE: I think that's why everyone stays and everyone comes to play for him. I started in college as a walk-on. I liked his gritty mindset, blue collar, hard work every day because, when you come from that position, then you know, like, you have to earn it, you have to go out, you have to work.

Just being able to go out now and lead a special teams meeting, or guys can come up to you and ask you, hey, what do I do on this? Just knowing that you can say, oh, you have this, and they can come talk to you. Being in that position is really cool for me.

Yeah, back to Fran, he's literally the exact same person on and off the field. You can talk to him football, or you can talk to him personal, and you're going to get the same person.

**Q. You just said a moment ago that I've gone out punting with him before. I did not think I would hear something expressed that way. When you go out punting with someone, what does that look like?**

JACK STONEHOUSE: I guess it's the same thing if quarterbacks were to go out and throw. Riley Dixon and I, I don't know how else to say it, we just go out there and punt balls, yeah.

**Q. Obviously you play under a dome in Syracuse, but how do you prepare and what kind of challenges does inclement weather give you as a punter?**

JACK STONEHOUSE: Same as everyone else. Yes, we do have a roof for six games, which is awesome. Still play outside. I played outside my entire life. My high school didn't have a roof. But when it comes to weather, that's just what practice is. I'm outside when it's snowing, we go outside. That's really all you can do, prepare for the worst, hope for the best, and when you get in that situation, it's all muscle memory. You've been there before, and you don't

really think about it.

**Q. You and I have talked about this road from Michigan to Syracuse, quarterback to tight end to quarterback to tight end, just going through this entire journey for you and your faith. God's guiding through this journey is something that you've really leaned on.**

DAN VILLARI: Yeah, my faith has been everything. Everything I've been through, it's a chip added to my armor, and it just kept stacking and stacking and stacking. Everything came together this year nicely, and I think I'm fully equipped this year, and I'm ready for whatever, whatever comes at me.

**Q. You're one of the few players in America that has tallied a receiving touchdown, a rushing touchdown, a passing touchdown, and a tackle in your career. What do you credit that versatility to, and in what type of ways are you expecting to be used going forward with all of the wide myriad of things you can do on the football field?**

DAN VILLARI: I feel like I'm just a football player. Like, wherever you put me, I'm just going to go 150 percent. I don't know, I guess you can credit to just playing in the park growing up, just running around, and just playing running back, quarterback, receiver, tight end, just playing a few different positions growing up. I think I'm just a versatile athlete, so wherever Coach needs me, wherever he thinks I'm going to help us win, that's what I'm going to do.

**Q. You heard words today from Fran Brown that when Oronde moves on to the NFL, you are the leader in that tight end room. You have worked so hard for this moment. To hear from your head coach this is your room to lead, just what that means to you at this point?**

DAN VILLARI: It means the world to me. He constantly is in my ear telling me this is my room and this is my team, this is our team. That's all you really need is the confidence from the head man to just go a hundred percent and just be where your feet are every single day.

Extremely blessed and grateful for Coach Fran.

**Q. You spoke of your passion. We understand what fuels that. Where does the work ethic come from? Where in your past did you develop that?**

DAN VILLARI: I think it's genetically. I think my dad and uncles are all blue collar construction workers, absolute dogs getting up at 5:00 in the morning, working till 3:00 p.m. every single day, and I never heard my dad complain



once. I think just growing up and seeing that just instilled that work ethic in me. It's just something that's in me and then something that will never leave no matter what I'm doing.

**Q. Dan, the definition of Syracuse football to you right now, when you look at this chapter of what's about to happen for the orange, how would you define it? What are some words that would make sense, beyond DART, to speak on what this season is going to be?**

DAN VILLARI: I think we're just the hardest working team in the country, and we're a bunch of really tough dudes. We're going to go out there every Saturday and give it everything we've got. We've got a lot of underdogs mixed with a lot of talented guys and a head coach that's an absolute dog.

Yeah, I would just say relentless, like a bunch of relentless guys.

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