

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Coach Jake Dickert

Nick Andersen

Demond Claiborne

Devin Kylany

Press Conference

JAKE DICKERT: Good afternoon. It's great to be here at my first ACC Football Media Days. This means the sights, sounds and pageantry of college football is right around the corner.

We're really excited to get our preseason camp kicked off next week, and really, it's going to set the table for our 2025 season in a really successful way.

I want to start by giving a big thanks to Commissioner Phillips. Since I joined the league in September, he's been a tremendous advocate for the ACC, our 17 member institutions and most importantly all of our student-athletes.

I think we all have a shared responsibility to protect the future of this game, and Jim has obviously got a big part to play in that.

I want to thank the media here today. While a lot of the conversations naturally are about schedule and settlements and NIL, I really appreciate keeping the spotlight and the main focus on the players. These are the guys that have the stories, the growth and the journey that makes college football really special, and I thank you for that. I want to thank our president, Susan Wenthe, and our Director of Athletics, John Currie, for their belief in me and the future of the Demon Deacon football program. I want to publicly congratulate President Wenthe on her appointment to the chair of the ACC Board of Directors, a tremendous honor and testament to her credibility and leadership.

Today I'm honored to stand in front of you to represent Wake Forest University, our world-class student-athletes, our faculty, our staff, our alumni, and everyone that



supports the old gold and black. We are the winningest football program in the state of North Carolina this century. We're the only one in the last 40 years to win an ACC Championship. We have 19 players that are going to start their NFL journey this fall, and just excited to build on the success that's been laid before us.

To me, college football is the greatest sport on the planet. This game has given me so much. 17 years ago I was a Division III graduate assistant. I've had an opportunity to work my way up every level of college football, and my journey has been really special and unique, and for that and this game, I'm very thankful.

Officially, it's been 217 days since I've been hired in late December, and from the very first moment, we hit the ground running. We built a tremendous staff. We brought in 43 new players, eight from the high school ranks and 35 from the transfer portal. Our transfer portal guys bring in 17,000 plus career snaps of experience to our football team.

Quickly, we created a vision. We established a standard, and we laid a foundation for what Wake Forest football is going to be like now and into the future.

Our players have done a tremendous job of buying into that standard and working hand in hand daily to build the culture of this football team.

Since January, we have lived by a process we call built in the dark. Built in the dark is a belief that true greatness is forged in the unseen moments. The dark is a place where no one is watching. There's no crowd, there's no cameras, there's just commitment.

The dark is a scary place for most because it's unfamiliar and it's uncomfortable, but at Wake Forest, we embrace those moments. It doesn't scare us, it strengthens us.

We want players that love doing hard things. Guys that want to embrace the daily grind and the process and love to grow through life's challenges and adversities. Most players get bogged down by the light. The recruiting rankings, the stars, the money. The light is blinding and

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will lead you off the path. These players and this team thrive in the dark because they know the best version of themselves and our team is built there.

These players have embraced the challenge since day one, and I have four of these guys with me today. Demond Claiborne is a senior running back from King William High School in Virginia. He's one of the first players to say I believe in this new era of Wake Forest football. Demond is one of the most explosive players in the country. He's a returning All-American and a Doak Walker Award candidate at running back, and he'll be earning his degree in December in communications.

Nick Andersen is a senior safety from Centreville High School in Virginia. Nick is the great American story. He's a former walk-on. He turned himself into an All-ACC Defensive Back and he's been a team captain last season. Nick has over 250 career tackles and eight interceptions. But what defines Nick is his passion for the details of the game. Since day one, he's been a tremendous leader and change agent for our program.

Next is Devin Kylany. Devin is a senior offensive lineman from Lake Stevens High School in the state of Washington. Devin and I have been on this journey for a long time together. I'm proud of him. He was a starting offensive lineman and a team captain during our time together at Washington State. There's not a greater person that has a better passion for this game than Devin. It's been great to watch him just take hold of the leadership position as we build the new Wake Forest program.

Davaughn Patterson is also with us today. He's a redshirt sophomore defensive back from Edward White High School in Florida. One of the most talented and athletic defensive backs that I've had an opportunity to work with, and he's locked in and ready for a great tremendous football season.

These guys are the four cornerstones of our football team. They have set the standard. They've demanded the best out of themselves and each other. Our team is fueled at competition at every position.

I look forward to seeing that competition come to life this fall. We're excited about having seven home games this season at Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium, and we can't wait to see Deacon Nation out at the August 29th football game. We look forward to building something really special with everybody, because the work you don't see in the dark creates the moments that we all never forget.

That's the staple of this football program, and with that, I'll

open it up to any questions.

Q. How will you bring what you learned from the West Coast and transfer it here to the East Coast?

JAKE DICKERT: I think the biggest thing is if you really study our history at Washington State, we've been through some of the most adversity in the whole country that any football program has probably ever had to deal with. The message is adversity is part of life. We've thrived in it.

To be shaped and molded as a young head football coach in that type of environment and create success, I thought was pretty special, and we developed a plan. Built in the dark is a process. I believe it's a process that can work on the West Coast, East Coast, south, but we're here for a reason. Wake Forest is a special place. A lot of people talk about obstacles and why we can't do things. I think there's a tremendous opportunity right here in North Carolina to do something really, really special, and I think those are the lessons that we're going to bring here.

It's a really fertile recruiting ground. We have one of the best educational institutions in the whole country, and I think it's a great fit for me and our family and we're really excited to be here.

Q. How do you plan to sustain Wake Forest football culture with the constant turnover that the portal provides?

JAKE DICKERT: I think you have to have stability. I think you've got to be willing to change and adapt with the coming landscape and where we're going and what we're doing, and it takes guys just like this, guys like Demond that put a stake in the ground and said, I want to be here at Wake Forest, not just for the football but the value it creates for me and my life and my future. Demond is not just defined by his game and his athleticism. It's the man he is and the man that he wants to be in his future, and I think that's always going to be our edge. We've got to know who we are better than most teams in the country. You're not going to come to Wake Forest for the flash. You're going to come here to do something really special in your education. You're going to come here to be built into a great football player, but most importantly a great man, and I think that's the foundation that we stand on at Wake Forest.

Q. Built in the dark is a powerful statement for the new era. What kind of tangible changes have you already seen in player buy-in and performance as a result?

JAKE DICKERT: It's funny, I take myself back often to the first team meeting. It was a really nervous atmosphere.



Everyone was sitting there not knowing what to expect. The belief is different. You can feel it. You can feel it not just through our coaching staff. You can feel it through the players. You feel the energy of the building the moment you walk in the door.

That's not something that's a poster on the wall. Built in the dark is really about a process. Our purpose has to be greater than your purpose every Saturday. You've got to know why you wake up in today's world, and I think we've got a bunch of guys that are really driven to do something together. A connected team is a dangerous team. So how do you take 43 new players, 50 plus holdovers from the last staff, and build a team that can create success? You've got to connect these guys in unique and different ways, and our guys have really embraced that. I'm proud of them for it, and it will matter.

But the season comes with tremendous highs and unfortunate lows, and you've got to be able to handle that adversity. I think that's what built in the dark really means. You embrace those challenges because you know you're going to be strengthened by it.

Q. Jake, Wake Forest has had a unique offense over the last decade or so. Power spread is going to be new. What does that look like? How does it define, or how would you define it without giving away any state secrets?

JAKE DICKERT: There won't be any state secrets. It starts with power. It's built at the line of scrimmage. I believe physicality travels. We are a national league. You'd better be able to walk into Texas, to the West Coast, anywhere up and down the East Coast and be the tougher football team. It starts with physicality. The best part, we've got a guy like Demond Claiborne, who, if he can handle 40 carries a game, I think I'm up for that. But it's going to be about being more physical than your opponent and being very multiple at the quarterback position.

Wake Forest Demon Deacons haven't had a quarterback that's going to be a runner in quite some time, so we're excited about the multiplicity of that position and how we have to do it as a team and as a unit.

If you can be physical and you can run the ball, and it really opens up a lot of play action passes over the top and creates explosive plays.

Q. With all the changes in college football, roster limits being one of them, there's a lot to be said about walk-ons, and certainly Nick represents that. What can you say about the potential loss of walk-ons on a roster given what someone like Nick has been able to

accomplish in his career?

JAKE DICKERT: I think it's tough. I even go back to my Division III playing experience. I tell these guys all the time, I got to experience something a lot of players don't, and just playing for the love of the game. Nick Andersen bet on himself. He bet on the belief in what he could do and what he could accomplish, and to lose some of those stories I think is one of the tougher parts of our game.

But we all have to navigate with that, and opportunity is everything. I'm standing in front of you today because I've taken advantage of some amazing opportunities in my life. Like I said, I've been in this game for 17 years. I moved 11 different times. I'm blessed to be here at Wake Forest. But opportunity is big, and unfortunately we've lost a lot of those opportunities in college football.

Q. I write a lot about college football integration in the '60s, including a story about Bill Tate passing away last month. The story got about zero attention nationally. I was wondering how much you've learned about how important that was, not only at Wake Forest, but nationally what Bill Tate did with his first Black players, Bob Grant and Butch Henry, if you could comment on that.

JAKE DICKERT: The biggest thing, Wake Forest has always been trailblazers in that area, and I think it's really important to know and to understand the history of the place that you've been.

So to see Wake Forest really be a trailblazer in that area, I think is very special. One of the biggest things that drew me to Wake Forest is the stability of the overall coaches over a long period of time. To say that and to know Wake Forest has been on the cutting edge, I believe we had the first Black assistant coach in the ACC, so we've always been there. We've always been progressive and we've always been able to adapt and change.

Q. Nick, just looking back on your history of being a walk-on and then I believe you led the ACC last year with 122 tackles. From walk-on to scholarship to leading the entire conference, just your story and betting on yourself and your faith in yourself.

NICK ANDERSEN: Yeah, I think it comes down to consistent hard work. That's something that my family instilled in me when I was a young kid, and I'll take that for the rest of my life.

I've been very, very blessed to have so many great coaches. I couldn't be standing here today without all of them, without all the people in my life. So truly grateful for



those that have helped me get to where I am now.

Q. Nick, we know about the 122 tackle season, but also your redshirt freshman year. You had four interceptions in that season, which is not exactly common at Wake Forest, and even beyond that, the stitches in the ear, stitches on the chin and all these budding moments for you and keeping the No. 45. You're a true throwback player. What do you attribute that to, and how have you kind of maintained that, hey, I'm the same guy that's going to go out there, bleed about it, die about it; that's who I am?

NICK ANDERSEN: Yeah, I think going back to my family, just to my roots, I come from a hardworking background. Then having a lot of pride in not only the name on the back of the jersey but especially the name on the front of the jersey.

After my freshman season, Mr. Currie told me don't ever change your number, so that was something I stuck with.

I think just sacrificing your body is something that's infectious. I'm not the biggest guy, I'm not the fastest guy, but putting my body on the line each and every single game and every single day, I think it's a sense of leadership that my teammates appreciate and something that is one of my leadership qualities that I hope others can follow and find inspiration from.

Q. Nick, your defense is projected to have quite a few seniors. Talk about that and that leadership of what you all bring together to this team.

NICK ANDERSEN: Yeah, I think it's something that's really valuable because you can have higher level conversations. I can go to someone like Quincy Bryant or Dylan Hazen in the linebacker corps and I can ask them what happened on that play or what do you think about this, what do you think about that? Those higher level conversations that we can have will help our defense elevate, and it's something that's valuable.

I think the biggest part is when adversity hits. Those guys have been in this situation before. They understand that times are going to be tough and how do you respond and deal with that is what's very important.

That's something that's very valuable and something that helped me as a leader, that I have older guys, as well, that have had that experience and know how to handle adversity.

Q. Nick, you've now gotten a full spring and summer learning underneath Scottie Hazelton and Freddie

Banks. I know that Wake Forest defense has had their moments of both high and low ends over the last couple years. What's different about having these two new voices in the room leading the charge?

NICK ANDERSEN: It's a .300-level education. So much football knowledge. I've been around for a couple years now, and I'd like to think that I've built up a decent bed of knowledge. But these guys have opened my eyes to stuff that I've never even could have imagined. That's only -- I'm very thankful to have them because they're just going to elevate my game, and I know they're going to get our defense to play at a really high level this year.

Q. You are the old man of the team, and they do say it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. How are you adjusting? What is it about your process that allows you to adjust to so much change in a short amount of time?

NICK ANDERSEN: Well, I think it starts with learning from Coach Dickert, the new staff, and also my teammates. My teammates are ones that don't necessarily question when you tell them, hey, I think you should be doing this or doing that. They embrace feedback. They embrace wanting to get better.

To have great teammates that want to get better and don't challenge you when you might be just doing something to give them constructive feedback is something that I'm really, really thankful for.

Q. What is it about your eye, your understanding of football, that allows you to get to that ball so quickly?

NICK ANDERSEN: I think it's preparation, film study throughout the week, constantly trying to get an edge. Like I said, I'm not one that might have the greatest physical traits in the world, so to have a two-step advantage based off film study and then just trusting my instincts is how I can get all the footballs that I want and make as many plays as possible.

Q. Demond, in his introductory press conference, Jake went public -- as a matter of fact, within an hour after the press conference, he said, I'm meeting with Demond. What did it feel like to you to be such a priority to the new coach, and what did he say to you to get you to come back?

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Yeah, absolutely. I think when me and Coach Dickert met, it was solely off of can he help me on the personal aspect of life. A lot of coaches during that time when Coach Clawson stepped down were calling my phone asking if we could give you this amount of



money to come here or if we could do this for you. Coach Dickert came and his message was, how can I help you as a man off the field? So that's something that stuck out to me. When I first met him I hit the ground running. I wanted to make a statement with him, and we made it happen.

Q. Demond, two-part question for you. When Coach Clawson stepped down as head coach, you stayed. What about Coach Dickert compelled you to stay with this program?

Secondly, you have a 96 speed rating. You're tied with Ryan Williams as two of the fastest guys in the game. Is that an accurate representation of your real world skills?

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Yeah, with the speed thing I think I'm a little faster than a 96 overall, but I'll let the ratings be the ratings. When Coach Dickert came in, his energy, that was the big difference I seen. The first team meeting when he came in, everybody is fired up. We've got something called Wake the Deke, so we stand up every morning and we scream to the top of our lungs.

Small changes like that is definitely what this program has been needing for a while. I felt like in the last couple years since I've been here, it kind of got very strict and couldn't really say much in meetings and stuff and speak up, but Coach Dickert gave the team a voice. It gave us a voice to want to be heard. He listened to what where was coming from and what we felt, and it ultimately made my decision easier to stay here.

Q. With the new coaching staff coming in, you've got a new scheme. How do you see your role evolving in this offense, and do you think this new scheme is going to help you maximize your ability as maybe a rusher and receiver?

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Yeah, absolutely. This offense allows me to get out in space more, allows me to have more one-on-one match-ups, allows me to broadcast speed more so the slow meshes out. So coming into this offense with a great mind like Coach Dickert and Coach Rob Ezell has definitely been something I've been looking forward to continuing to grow with and continuing to learn from.

When the season comes around, a lot of people will be surprised about how things look.

Q. You've got a really good quarterback battle going on on your team. What have you seen from Ashford and Purdie that's helped you, and how do you see them working as the season starts?

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Absolutely. I think both of those guys are great attributes to the Demon Deacons. When I step on the field with either one of those guys, I feel safe. I feel at home. They know what they're doing. They're very in tune.

That battle has definitely been something that has been great to watch. It's been cool to be around. Adding either one of those guys would be something that our program is needing and in the long run it'll be beneficial for the Demon Deacons.

Q. Coming off your really strong 2024 season, what has been your focus over these summer months in improving yourself, and what are you looking to accomplish in the 2025 season?

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Yeah, so my biggest goal is to stay consistent, not really trying to step on the field and do too much. I want to play the game how the game is supposed to be played, listening to my coaches, following my coaching tips, techniques, just being in tune to the program, not making it about DC but making it about the Demon Deacons and where we want to go when we get later into the season.

Q. You grew up in a town of only 8,000 people in Aylett, Virginia. Describe what it was like growing up with such a small population.

DEMOND CLAIBORNE: Yeah, country, country, country. Really country. We got cows at my school, chickens at my school, turkeys at my school. Growing up in that environment definitely was cool but those country folks that teach you how to work and go get it, that's definitely something that's embedded in me, and I'm ready to continue to roll with how I was taught coming from the country.

Q. Coming over to Wake Forest, how have you helped the rest of the team adjust to the new offensive scheme, and how have you helped them really get their feet underneath them and start to hit the ground running as you're approaching fall camp and the regular season?

DEVIN KYLANY: It's a good question. The scheme is a little new for me, coming from a little bit different offense. But the first step was getting to know everyone on the team, understanding who everyone is and why they do -- why they play football. After I did that, it was easy for me to just be a good leader and set the standard and let them follow.



Q. With the quarterback battle, how are you growing and how are those two helping you help this new O-line?

DEVIN KYLANY: Yeah, the quarterbacks have done a great job just getting to know me, getting to the O-line and showing us their true colors. I think both of them bring a lot of great things to the table, and whichever one the coach decides to put behind us, I know he's going to do the right thing.

Q. You came all the way from the other side of the country with Coach Dickert. What was it about you all's relationship that made you say, I'm following you wherever you go; if we're staying in Pullman, we're staying there, but if we're going over to North Carolina we're going there?

DEVIN KYLANY: It was definitely a difficult time in my life, but it's not just Coach Dickert that made it so easy for me to come to Wake Forest but the men he surrounded himself with. Coach Jared Kaster, I know he brought Coach Edwards over, Coach Whit, Coach Kaligis is a man that I really trust, and also Coach Ben Iannacchione. Coach Dickert has done a good job surrounding himself with men that I can trust and that I know will help me be my best. It made it really easy for me to come to Wake Forest University.

Q. Devin, during spring and probably during the fall there was some shuffling of the offensive line but you've really been the consistent guy in the middle of it. How hard is it to organize everything when everyone is shifting out to different positions, and also how does that make you better to say I need to be able to relate to different people around me?

DEVIN KYLANY: Yeah, it's a great question. In offensive line it's important to know what everyone is doing. I like to know what the tackle is doing, what the guards are doing. If you can cross play like that and play on both sides of the line of scrimmage, it just makes it easier to help the team.

The most important thing with being able to play with different people is just being able to understand and trust everyone. Makes it way easier to play with different people around me.

Q. You hear what Coach has to say about that statement, built in the dark. What does that mean to you, and how has this team already started to embody what that means?

DEVIN KYLANY: It's more than a statement and it's more than a mantra, it's a way of living. If we want to win on

August 29th and if we want to win on Saturdays, that starts before the kickoff. That starts with the early mornings, the late nights, the film sessions, the going to sleep at the right time, the eating the right foods, all that stuff will help us win on Saturday. So it's all about getting an advantage and making sure we can win.

Q. You wrestled in high school; how have those skills helped you as a center?

DEVIN KYLANY: PSA to any high schooler who wants to play collegiate or wants to play in the trenches: Start wrestling. Wrestling is all about being in a powerful position and hand fighting, and those skills directly translate to offensive line play and defensive line play, and wrestling is some of the toughest training I've ever had to do in my life: Physical, one-on-one combat that you have to win.

When you look at the bigger picture of football, it's a whole bunch of one-on-one match-ups happening at the same time. I thank my wrestling coaches and I thank the wrestling team I was a part of for that.

Q. What weight class did you wrestle?

DEVIN KYLANY: They call it heavyweight, but 285 was the cap.

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