

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 24, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Virginia Tech Hokies**

**Coach Brent Pry**

**Kyron Drones**

**Kelvin Gilliam Jr.**

**Jaden Keller**

Press Conference



BRENT PRY: It's good to be back. Certainly means that the season is right around the corner, which I couldn't be more excited about.

When I come to this event, it reminds me again how fortunate I am to be the head coach at a place like Virginia Tech. A place that I love, I'm very thankful for Whit Babcock, our athletic director, our president, Dr. Tim Sands, our Board of Visitors, for the opportunity to coach these guys and represent Virginia Tech.

I'm also very excited and proud of the guys that we brought today to help represent our team, our players, our organization. Outstanding young men that represent everything that Virginia Tech is about, that I want our program to be about.

I'm excited and encouraged by the leadership from our players, from our new coordinators, our new strength and conditioning coach. We made some upticks in some really important areas in our program. We needed to have the type of off-season that we're having.

Our roster is deeper. We've had an influx of talented transfers, high school signees, and young men that we've developed in the program over the last couple of years, guys that we've recruited and have been in the system for multiple years.

I'm also excited and encouraged by the type of off-season we've had. When we reflected on the 2024 year, it was evident to me that we needed to be a more mentally and physically tough team. That starts with me, and we've addressed it in each phase of our off-season program, the winter, the spring and the summer.

The leadership that Jarrett Ferguson has provided in the strength and conditioning arena has been outstanding. The changes on defense with Sam Siefkes, offense with Phil Montgomery and Matt Moore. I'm a big fan of our staff and our players right now.

The other thing that we did this off-season, we doubled down on our team building. In today's game, with the influx of players, the transfers, the high school additions, now more than ever, and especially at a place like Virginia Tech, team is where it starts and ends.

The guys have embraced it. The coaches have embraced it. We've had several unique opportunities to grow as a team, to become more and more selfless and put this team first, put this brotherhood first. We're making great strides in that area, as well.

I couldn't be more excited about the team that we have the opportunity to be. Excited about the opener. That's why these young men come to Virginia Tech, to play on the big stage, to play on national TV, to play a marquee opponent that's very talented, well-coached, arguably a playoff team last year.

We've got a lot to prove in Blacksburg, and we've still got this preseason camp to attack and make sure we make the most of it.

I'll take some questions, please.

**Q. You were 0-6 in games by 10 points or less last year. Have you made that a point of emphasis, of closing out games this off-season?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, we've certainly talked about it a lot, as well as everybody else. First of all, it was coaching decisions, making sure we're making the right decisions, not just at the end of the game but throughout the game. Then secondly, being the team that is more mentally and physically tough and prepared at the end of a game to close it out.

So there's a couple different areas that we focused on to



make sure we're better there, and certainly we've talked about it. We've leaned into it as a program, how close we were to being the team that we want to be. We were competitive week in and week out and just kept finding ways to come up short as a staff and as a team.

We should arguably be improved in that area. We've put a lot of emphasis there.

**Q. I'm making my first trip to Lane Stadium this year. Can you speak on the advantage of having seven games at Lane Stadium every year?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, I'd like to have eight or nine every year, to be honest. One of the most unbelievable environments in college football. I'm glad you're coming. You're not going to be disappointed. From the entrance throughout, we've got an incredible fan base, blue jeans, sweatshirts, standing all game long, cheering all game long. Our guys can speak more about it, but it's a great atmosphere to play in, to coach in, to watch a football game in.

Certainly love a home game versus an away game.

**Q. As a former defensive coordinator for several years, could you speak to the transfers in the edge room? Could you speak to what are you most excited about with them?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, first of all, I'm excited about the coordinator hire we've made. Coach Siefkes is young, but he has some really good experiences. At the college level, tremendous success at Wofford, a couple of different ways, and then in the NFL, not just that he was in the league, but the defensive minds that he spent time with while coaching there.

Then the additions from the transfer -- we needed a shot in the arm in our secondary with some depth, some safety-type bodies, some guys that can track the ball and tackle. We helped ourselves there.

Then I love what we've done, we needed to reinforce the depth at linebacker with JK and Caleb, and we were able to do that with a couple of young men out of the portal. Then we've helped ourselves up front. We've supplied a bunch of depth at all positions along the front and end tackles.

We've added the depth. We've added the experience. We've added some talent on that side of the ball. We were able to do some of that with the new system in place, being able to make sure we have what Coach Siefkes needs from a personnel standpoint.

**Q. Your first two games out of the gate you're taking on two SEC schools. The first one is South Carolina with Sellers, possibly could be a Heisman candidate, and then Vandy, who got you guys last year in a close one in overtime. What's the mindset or approach you've got to take and tell the team when you're going against these two SEC opponents your first two games of the season?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, honestly, in general, we feel like we have something to prove, and that's been the mindset since the end of season.

The opportunity to play South Carolina, to play Vanderbilt at night in Lane Stadium, again, that's why these guys come to Virginia Tech. That's why I wanted to be back. The standards and expectations are to beat those guys, to win those games, like Tech did for a bunch of years.

It's challenging. South Carolina is a hell of a football team. They've recruited well. They've got a ton of momentum. They've got a dynamic edge guy. They've got an ultra talented quarterback. We've got our hands full.

But we're up for the challenge, and we're working every day to be the best team that we can be to go down there and play a good brand of football.

Then Vanderbilt, great respect for Clark Lea. I know Clark; he's done a tremendous job. I coached at Vanderbilt three years. I know the challenges in that place. He's done a tremendous job. They'll bring a really good football team in here, and they've got their own quarterback that's awful talented.

But I like our group. I like our quarterback. I like our guys. I like the direction we're going. This team right now is the closest to the vision I have for Virginia Tech football, for what I want us to be and who I want us to be. We're closer than we've ever been.

**Q. New offensive coordinator, Phillip Montgomery, has had a lot of experience, had experience as a head coach and an OC in a lot of different places. What did you see in him that you felt like was going to be the right fit for your team here with the Hokies?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, that's a great question. It's pretty easy to answer. First of all, I wanted somebody that would give us the best opportunity, us and Kyron, for him to reach all of his potential and then some. When you look at Phil's track record with quarterbacks, it's hard to argue that he's not the right guy to do that.

Then secondly, to bring a play caller in here that has a proven plan that he believes in, that he is super knowledgeable about, that you're not reinventing the wheel every week and trying to find answers and trying to find solutions, that we can invest and buy into a plan and a system and have answers, and Phil provides all that. He's an experienced play caller. He's a veteran quarterback developer, and he's an outstanding person.

I feel very fortunate to have him with us.

**Q. You touched on it a few answers ago, but starting the season with South Carolina, in your early preparation, what has stood out to you about that team? And then from your side, what are the strengths that you think match up well with South Carolina?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, first of all, I think the way they responded to adversity early in their season. A testament to Shane and to that group of coaches and players, to rally back and finish the way they did.

They've notched some big wins, which is where we're still trying to get. We came awful close on a Friday night down in Miami, but we haven't garnered that type of win. South Carolina presents an opportunity to do that.

They're arguably a top-10 group. They're talented on both fronts. They've got a really -- their defensive line is productive. They're athletic. They're tenacious. They've got a great plan defensively.

I think the quarterback is one of the best in the country, and he's only going to get better. I think the pieces around him -- the offensive line, down the stretch, played as well as any group out there. Veteran coaches, and I know they're doing it the right way.

We're going to have our hands full, but we've got a good group. We're hungry, and we're competing, and we're deeper. We've got a bunch of transfers, but these transfers have a ton of experience, guys with a lot of reps at other places, and they've really come together nicely.

It's going to be a dogfight. We're going to give them everything that we've got, that's for sure.

**Q. Coach, from a recruiting standpoint, the Richmond, Virginia, area, how does that stack up against other regions in the state of Virginia and also nationally?**

BRENT PRY: Yeah, Richmond has come on strong. KG is a testament to that. He'll be happy to answer that question, too. They brag about it and fight about it and

argue about it all the time. Richmond has been a great area to us. There's coaches in that area that are Virginia Tech guys, that went to school at Tech, that played at Tech. There's a long history of guys having success at Virginia Tech from Richmond. Obviously the whole Commonwealth is important to us. We've made a real emphasis to invest in our state. There's more than enough good football players in the state of Virginia to compete for championships.

But Richmond and the connections there have been very valuable to us and will continue to be.

**Q. Kyron, you've been the guy that when we've seen you at your best, we know you're one of the best quarterbacks in the nation, but the consistency and the injuries and all that have held you back a little bit here. What is it about this season and the changes in coordinators and all that that you've had that you believe will allow you to, like Coach Pry said, reach your maximum, full realized potential?**

KYRON DRONES: Just a level of consistency Coach Monte wants me to get to each and every day, the standard he sets me to. I just love our bond already, even though I've only been with him since January, me and him got so close, just him being a quarterback guy and he also offered me coming out of high school. So he's been wanting me to be his quarterback, and I'm just glad I get the opportunity with him.

**Q. How do you feel you've most grown as a player this off-season, and what is the biggest piece of advice that you'd give yourself a year ago today?**

KYRON DRONES: How I feel like I've prepared, just being a better leader. Like you said, we got hella transfers coming in this pat off-season, and even though I was dealing with injuries, just being that more vocal leader, since I couldn't be out there for some of the weeks during workouts. Just trying to get back, when I did get my procedure done, trying to get back and lead by example, getting the guys to be a closer team. Like Coach said, this is the closest team I've been around for the past two years at Virginia Tech. It reminds me of my first year at Baylor, and then we had a good season there.

Yeah, just being a better leader, and then just the advice I'd give myself is just to keep going no matter what and don't really listen to the outside things and don't really care what other people say.

**Q. Heading into fall camp, what is the biggest focus for you and the offense, and then heading into the regular season, what's the biggest thing you and the**



## **unit want to accomplish?**

KYRON DRONES: Just being more consistent, being more explosive. Coach Monte infuses that confidence that we needed as an offense, just allowing us to go out there and play freer, faster and do a lot of things. My job is just get the ball to playmakers and let them go make plays for me.

**Q. I wanted to take a look at the offensive line in front of you. There's going to be some new starters there. What can you say about the guys protecting you and what you've seen out of them?**

KYRON DRONES: They've been doing a real good job. They've been doing extra workouts outside of the workouts we've been doing, just being in that extra meeting room with Coach Moore. I'm thankful that I got that line for me. I wouldn't want any other O-line in the country. But my best five is Johnny, Laith, Kyle, Montavious, Tommy. They've been doing really good things, and I'm excited I've got them in front.

**Q. With you going to Virginia Tech, with prestigious quarterbacks like the Vick brothers, Tyrod Taylor, and you were training with Shedeur Sanders and Cam Ward, who's in the league now, is there a specific quarterback that brings the best out of you, whether you speak with them, train with them or watch their film or highlights?**

KYRON DRONES: I haven't got a chance to train with Tyrod yet so I don't know about him, but I would say I'm a lot self-motivated than anything. But training with Cam and Shedeur, you know, they compete in anything they do. So when I get with them in the summer, there's a lot of competitiveness back and forth, chipping and chirping there. So they really bring the best out of me.

**Q. When you think about your leadership skills and your decision making, how do you practice being a leader?**

KYRON DRONES: I mean, you've just got to go out there, and even when you feel like you don't want to say anything, you've just got to go say it. Everybody knows I'm not that rah-rah screaming type of guy. I've got my own way of being a leader. You've just got to know who you're talking to, know if you've got a person next to you that you can yell at and get on somebody that they can take it. And then a person that can't really take, you've just got to go out there and talk and see what they've got going on.

Just really getting to know my brothers and getting to know them and seeing how I've got to lead them to get them to

my standard and the team's standard and get them coming along.

**Q. Reading your teammates, like reading a defense, right?**

KYRON DRONES: Yeah, something like that.

**Q. Kelvin, you all are losing about 20 some odd sacks between AP-R, Aeneas and Pene from last season. What is the plan to replace that, because I know you don't expect to replace them one for one in terms of man for man, but as a unit, what's the plan to replace them? And who are some names that we should be looking for to step up, including yourself, that are going to fill in those gaps next year?**

KELVIN GILLIAM JR.: Yeah, those guys definitely did a great job last year. Like, you see them going to the next level. For them, me coming back and playing with those guys, those guys taught me a lot, whether it's their strengths in the pass game or any other weaknesses that they have. For them, my message to this D-line that's coming up, look what we did last year. Look at the success we had last year, regardless of the score. And so I told those guys, man, we can come and do the same exact thing, because those guys taught me a lot, whether it's their pass rush skills, whether it's get-off. For them, the success that they had, for me to come back and leave behind, has just been a great deal of stuff. Some guys that I get to mention is Benjamin Bell, James Djonkam, Keyshawn Burgos, Kemari Copeland. I could go on and on. I love to brag about these guys. These are the same guys that show up to work each and every day since January, and I told these guys, we are on a mission. We are on a mission for success.

**Q. You heard your coach talk about being a more mentally and physically tough team. Just speak to the mental side of things and how you personally have seen yourself grow on the mental toughness side.**

KELVIN GILLIAM JR.: Yeah, definitely you see in those close games how many times we just fall short. Most things, that could be a physical aspect, that could be a mental aspect. For them, since January, we're really just finding out where did we go wrong in those types of games. Coach Ferguson has really emphasized being mentally tough, whether it's been harder workouts, whether it's been extreme training. Whatever we've done, the whole point of that is to see, when we get in those dog fights, when we get in those close moments, to show what we're really about, what we really can do.

**Q. Heading into fall camp, what's the mentality that**

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**you and the rest of the unit are trying to instill in each other, and as you head towards the regular season, what's the thing you are most excited to showcase, whether it's yourself or the unit as a whole to the wider college football landscape?**

KELVIN GILLIAM JR.: Showing up every day, consistency. That's the first thing, because I'm telling you, everybody is going to be fired up and hyped on day one. It's going to be those practices, which I call those dog days of camp where you might really don't got it that day or you might really don't got the pep in your step that day. Those are going to be the days where we really see what we're about, and the mentality going into fall camp is going to set the tone for our season. It's going to be the same thing that we've been doing since the off-season. It's coming out there, getting ready to work, getting 1 percent better each and every day, and like you said, how can I be better in my game aspect. It's just the same thing, I came on this team and I came back to be a leader on this team. And on the same fact that these guys are counting on me to show up day in and day out, whether it's on the field, whether it's in the field, whether it's in a leadership standpoint. For me, these guys really look up to me, and that's the respect thing that I have towards my guys. For me, it's really being on that field, that guy that doesn't want to come out of the game, that guy that when it's time to make a play that I'm showing up ready to go.

**Q. There's a great picture of you from your bio page on the Tech website. You are sitting during warmups seemingly staring into an empty stadium before the gates open. How do you prepare mentally before a game?**

KELVIN GILLIAM JR.: Me preparing mentally before a game, it definitely shifted. I could see during Syracuse, whereas, okay, what am I looking for? What am I manifesting towards? What are my thoughts that's going into the game.

I know that exact picture you're talking about. Really, during that moment I'm just thinking about really reflecting on my past, maybe my past success, maybe my past failures, and really going into what I'm about to do, really taking that mental toll of what I'm about to really do in the next few hours.

**Q. What areas of your game have you really worked on during the off-season to make sure you are ready for camp and the season?**

JADEN KELLER: Definitely some of the areas we've worked on, just me as the linebackers, me, C-Wood, Mike Short, Santiago, all those type of guys, really just working

on the key reads, the key triangle, stuff like that. Having Coach Siefkes here, coming from the league, him being a linebacker coach and all that stuff, being able to learn and pick his brain on things he might have learned in the league, things he might have learned at previous schools.

So just really being able to fine tune our game going into camp. Camp is a crucial point for the season and what we're trying to do and get what we're trying to do and have the defense we want to have.

Just being able to fine tune all the little small things like learning the ins and outs of the new defense, this new coordinator, which is a great defense, and just being able to be that defense that Tech once was and we're ready to bring that Tech type of defense back. So really just being able to fine tune all the small things going into camp, run reads, pass reads, all that type of thing, so just being able to get better each and every day.

**Q. Jaden, last year at times it looked like you knew where the play was going before the offense fully got through running it. Is that a function of your film study? Is that a function of your instincts? Or is that the speed coming out from being a converted defensive back to linebacker?**

JADEN KELLER: I think it's a little mix of all three. There's so many different aspects that go into being a linebacker.

But yeah, definitely a big part of it is film study, watching film. We do a pretty good job watching film on our opponent, whether that's running backs, tight ends, tendencies, whatever that is. But the film study just comes with experience.

The more you play, the game kinda sorta slows down, the more reps you get, so really the more comfortable you're out there, mix that with film study, mix that with the DB experience and all the extra stuff, just being able to have an idea.

You want to be able to anticipate what they're going to do, not to really react and be surprised by their plays or anything but have an idea of their top runs, top passes, things of that nature. It makes you play faster so it takes the thinking out of football. You're just out there playing the game that you love, the game you grew up playing. So just being able to play that type of football where you're not reacting, you're just anticipating their type of plays, that's where that gets you the speed.

**Q. Jaden, you spoke about Sam Siefkes, the new defensive coordinator, a little bit. What is it about his leadership style that speaks to you, and to go a little**



**bit farther than football, just who he is as a man and how that relates to you?**

JADEN KELLER: Yeah, it's incredible, just having him, having someone that knows so much about ball, knows so much about the next level. Everyone on the roster aspires to get to that next level, to get to the league and to the next level. Just having a guy that knows so much about football that you can pick his brain and just learn so much.

From just the short time that I've met him, I've already learned so much. Things that you wouldn't even think about, like outside of football or the little details or offensive tendencies, why they do certain things, not just learning the defense but learning why offenses do certain things at certain times of the game. Not only is he making you a better football player, he's making you a smarter football player.

Once you're a smarter football player, it kind of plays into the point of playing faster. Once you're playing smart, using your head, you're anticipating, you have a feeling of what offenses might do in this certain situation, you allow yourself to play a lot faster, allow yourself to play a lot more confident, just knowing that your coach has given you all the skills, all the tools in your toolbox to go out there and execute each and every day.

But having him as a coach has been incredible, just him and this defense. He can coach any position. He knows everything. You can ask him about safeties, linebackers, D-line, anything. He knows. So just being able to pick his brain, like I said earlier, and just watching him interact, his coaching style is amazing. He can adjust to whoever he's coaching to, like kind of how KD was just saying. He knows how to coach certain players. Not everyone is coached the same. Not everyone needs to be yelled at. You've just got to figure out and got to learn the player. That's going to come with time. He's a new DC. He's learning the defense more and more each and every day. He's been being -- talking of him just being there for us. Just learning the defense and learning his players, it's only going to get better from here.

**Q. Last year you were chosen to be the person to wear No. 25 in honor of Frank Beamer. How great is it to receive that distinction as a player?**

JADEN KELLER: It's huge, just being at this university, special teams is huge, and that's really one of the key focal points for us at special teams because special teams can change the game. Our special teams coordinator always says it's like a play that averages 70 yards every play.

Whether it's punt, kickoff, whatever it is, we take that very

seriously. We start every practice with special teams, so it's very high on our board, and it's always important each and every day no matter if you're a defensive player or offensive player, special teams is very important here, and that's kind of what you sign up for and why you come to Tech, because you know the history about special teams and Beamer ball.

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