

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Clemson Tigers

Coach Shawn Poppie

Rusne Augustinaite

MacKenzie Nelson

Women's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody, to the ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am pleased to welcome to the stage head coach Shawn Poppie, entering his third season, Rusne Augustinaite, and then MacKenzie Nelson. Thank you for your time today.

Clemson is coming off a 21-win season which marked the program's first 21-plus-win season in over 25 years, and 11 ACC wins for the first time in 27 years. And of course, an NCAA berth.

This team shot 43% from the field and 34% from three while setting a program record yet again for threes made with 266.

Shawn, you return five players while adding the No. 13 ranked freshman class by ESPN in and a top portal class as well. This program made huge strides a year ago. Obviously you've built from year one to year two. What should we expect in year three, and where is the bar now set for this program?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, well, first off, you sit back, like, keep talking. What else did we do? It was a really fun year a year ago. To be in year two and the talent that we got, but man, they really bought into our culture at Clemson and developed that togetherness and made strides to reach all the accolades you just mentioned.

I think we're even more talented. We're bigger. We're longer. We're more athletic, but ultimately, we got the same kind of people. As you're going to hear with Mackie just being one of the few transfers, the freshmen, they're Clemson kids. They work hard. They have fun together. They've bought into what we're doing.

And I say all that to answer your question. This group,



there's not really a limit, right? The ceiling, I think last year we kind of hit it. We got as far as we could get with the group we had minus .3 seconds, maybe a second round.

This group is as good as they want to be. We can get to it. Now we got to focus on the day in and day out of slowly getting better. Because we are young. We have a lot of inexperience in the sense of just haven't done it.

But they'll go as far as they want to go and very excited about what that's going to look like.

THE MODERATOR: Clemson plays an exciting brand of basketball, and we know the three-point shot is a big part of that, but what are the areas that this team needs to build upon from a year ago to take that next step?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, well, some of that was recruiting. You look out there, we just did not look like everybody else with size. We had been undersized the first two years we had been at Clemson, and to go get Kai Milton, 6'5", 6'7" wing span, and Edie Clarke, and we obviously had already signed Julia Scott in the freshman class.

Jenna Lawrence, 6'2" and can shoot it. We finally got the length that everyone else looks like. While we still had the skill and the brand, we can play to a skill set that matches how we want to play, but we got, you know, the size.

Then we added speed. Obviously Mackie can really get up and down the court. Sometimes it's like maybe slow down. You got to figure out when to, when not to. My point is we checked some of the boxes that we hadn't been able to check while we get to still play that brand that's fun and exciting to be a part of.

THE MODERATOR: Rus, you tied the single season record for threes made last season with 80. As the top running scorer, describe how and why you've had so much success under Coach Poppie.

RUSNE AUGUSTINAITE: I just think the trust that he has in me and just the work we've put in. To be honest, I never thought of how many threes I'm going to make or what's my goal. They have a goal for me for percentage-wise just to



... when all is said, we're done.®

be efficient as a player.

But for me just being in the moment and being present every day in practice and listening to him and the game plan, because I think we are really unique as a team. He puts us in positions to be successful, so I think that's why I was able to kind of showcase my talent and, yeah, just shoot the ball and try to make it.

THE MODERATOR: Mackenzie you averaged just under six assists a game a season ago, which was good for second in the ACC, and you're known as a true floor general. How does your skill set fit the system, and where do you think or how do you think you can help elevate this program?

MACKENZIE NELSON: I think, like Coach Poppie said, I bring a level of pace that Clemson was missing last year. I think I'm still figuring out how to go fast without going too fast, but I think just being that leader on the court. I think being an extension of your head coach is super important.

I'm a natural born leader, and I'm looking to bring that. Also, being surrounded around this team is super easy to be a leader, and I think it starts off the court. Like a lot of that was done in the summer. And just being able to talk to the team and share that message that Coach Poppie continuously shares with us and making sure that it's (indiscernible) to the team.

SHAWN POPPIE: And she can score too. Don't let her fool you.

THE MODERATOR: As a former coach, you are very lucky to have this true floor general. Shawn, last year your team averaged eight made threes. As you enter year three, and you've talked about the influx of talents, the experience that you have now, how many threes would you like to make a game and what is your recruiting pitch to shooters out there?

SHAWN POPPIE: The numbers don't lie, you know. I think for us we don't really set a number to that. It's take what they give you.

But I'm a huge believer you have got to have space on the basketball court. Part of that is you have got to be able to stretch the court.

For us, I think that it will be a unique year because I think that for the first time since being at Clemson, we have a threat to score inside by more than just one player. I think between our post play, we got some big, physical guards that can get down there while we stretch you out.

It's going to be a lot harder to make that decision where or you're going to have to make the decision.

I think that the game can be even easier for some of our shooters because of that threat and/or we can get more free-throws. That's the one thing that, yeah, we shot a lot of threes, but we got to get to the line a little bit more by playing a little bit more physical inside.

So I think it will be more balanced, which is, again, why we don't really talk about, hey, we got to make this many. It's really just can we get good ones? I think it's a group that can make a lot when we get them this upcoming year.

Q. Coach, what are you looking for from your incoming players as they adjust to college basketball, and what is the biggest differences that they're learning to navigate and how are veteran players helping them with that transition?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, the freshmen are super talented. You know, all the hype that came with that class, they're all of it. They're college-ready physically, athletically, and really skill set-wise, but just it's new.

You know, I joke about the summer and they get there, and like and like one class is overwhelming and no one at Clemson and yet is still overwhelming. Then the fall comes, and you got 15 credit hours and 23,000 people and the traffic that comes with it.

Oh, and by the way, we got to get an individual in, and then we -- like it's overwhelming.

You lean on the Macks and the Ruses of the world to just how we navigate this in the day-to-day because Mack is still trying to figure out how we do things at Clemson compared to Virginia Tech, so she's still trying to make that transition.

That is the thing that becomes very unique in today's really college athletics is how many new ones, with eight or nine new. But the freshmen have really started to figure it out. They're not as overwhelmed as much. I think the speed of, you know, high school to college is just different, and not only high school to college. You're playing with the best of the best, but still to play with a level of confidence.

I think I just had Mackie in my office this last week and talking about, you know, the roster, and one of the first names that she comes up with is Kimora Fields, who we call Boog, and the consistency she had been playing with, that's exciting as a freshman. We have a lot of expectations, but she's starting to figure it out.

So I think they've got to lean on each other. My cheat code right now is I have -- my staff is the same. It's been the same since being at Clemson, so it's not me having to teach the staff and the players. We got a big staff that's sharing the message, sharing their personality.

So it's the same message, but coming with a different voice. It is all one going in one direction, which I think has allowed them to grow up a little bit faster than some may go through.

Q. Walk us through your nonconference schedule. How do you choose those tough matchups, and then also the preparation?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, you know, it was very unique. I knew we were going to be very young this upcoming year between the freshmen class, kind of what we identified in the portal. You think about Taliyah Henderson who is coming in as really a sophomore. Mackie has multiple years. Edie Clarke. They all have multiple years.

But we knew that that freshman class was going to be a lot as well. We're playing a lot more at home than we did a year ago nonconference. That was, again, strategic because I wanted to get their feet up underneath them. We have South Carolina, which that's an every year thing. This is the every other year, so they'll be in Little John early November. So you're trying to get a little bit of confidence to try to get multiple games before you get to them.

You always know we have the SEC Challenge, SEC-ACC Challenge. For us we didn't know if that was home or away this year either. We learned the hard way a year ago going to the Bahamas and then turned around and played on the road to Alabama. I think we were still sleeping trying to play in Tuscaloosa a year ago.

So you learn from some of those moments and mistakes maybe as the scheduler. All while the ACC flips, right? The way this league works is we have the Stanford-Cal trip a year ago, and now they come to us. Historically with what that looks like, we play all the majority of the top teams historically at home this upcoming year, and you play, you know, some of that middle of the pack -- again, all the league is really good, but now those are on the road.

So that's the strategy behind the schedule. For us, you know, I think for us is we've just got to be ready by November 2nd. You can't worry about South Carolina and November 12nd and Kentucky December 3rd or 4th. You got to worry about November 2nd. We have to be the best version of Clemson on November 2nd.

Then you go back and watch film. What did you do well?

What did you not do well? You try to be the best version November 3rd. When you stay the course in that path because this thing is, like, forever, right, it feels like. Between the summer to now, it feels like a year and a half ago, you know?

If you look at that far in advance about ACC Tournament, all that, it's hard to stay locked in and focused. So it's just in the moment, in the day, you know, be the best version we can be come November 2nd.

THE MODERATOR: Mackenzie, I want to start with you, give me one word, and we'll go down the line, to describe Clemson women's basketball this season.

MACKENZIE NELSON: Sisterhood.

RUSNE AUGUSTINAITE: Family.

SHAWN POPPIE: Connected.

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