

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Miami Hurricanes

## Coach Manny Diaz

### Press Conference



**Q. You were one of the many teams in this division that has a lot of returning starters. From the macro, do you think that fact there are so many starters returning, how will that affect competitive balance? The sport is waiting for people to crack the Clemson, Alabama, Ohio State stranglehold.**

MANNY DIAZ: I think that will be one of the storylines of the 2021 season because so many people return so much experience, at the end of the day does it really cancel out?

What's been great from Miami's standpoint is having such an experienced team, some of the guys we brought with us here today for Media Day, is the off-season. How do we go through spring practice, through the workouts. Guys that are experienced but they came back for the right reasons, they want to see Miami win, and they want to set an example for the younger guys coming into our program which to me at Miami we've not always had. We've not always had really strong, veteran leadership that's been around long enough to influence or recruiting classes.

I think with the senior class, the super senior class that we have, they can help not just transform Miami wins and losses this year but actually going forward.

**Q. You have an All-American punter returning in Lou Hedley. Maybe he punted a little too often last year. What do Eric and Mike and the offense have to do to keep him on the sideline more? You don't have Jose to finish drives, what is the place kicking race look like?**

MANNY DIAZ: We love Lou Hedley. I do think it's time we want to see him on the sideline. Lou wants to get out there and punt, but he's also there for the team. We set the NCAA record for net punt a year ago, field position, being able to change the field. We know we have a great weapon in Lou.

Offensively we want to look at we have to give up less

negative plays in the run game, that's been a big point of emphasis in our off-season study, spring practice, going into training camp. Then be more explosive down the field. Being more efficient in our run game and more explosive in our pass game will help us punt less.

Now, in terms of place kicking, again, you're losing the Groza winner a year ago in Borregales and replacing him with Borregales. Having Andreas come in, taking on your older brother's jersey number, same name, guy just won the Groza, walks out of the program and you take his place.

The guy came in in spring practice in midyear and I think instantly earned the respect of everybody in the locker room. Had a bad day before our first scrimmage at Hard Rock Stadium. Went into Hard Rock Stadium, knocked it right down the clown's mouth every time we had him out there, including a 53-yarder in a one-minute drill situation.

I think that gave the team a lot of confidence in our kicking game. Jonathan Patke does a phenomenal job with all of our special teams, and we take a lot of pride in our specialists. Clay James, our long snapper. We feel like we have the best group of specialists in America.

**Q. You had a lot of players come out of this program with professional pedigree. Two of them being here today with Bubba and D'Eriq. Talk about the leadership role.**

MANNY DIAZ: I think it's a little bit what I mentioned before. Number one, they've been phenomenal leaders their entire time here at Miami. But they're back here for Miami to win. I think what we've recognized as a team is that when the team does well, all the individuals do well and that my individual goals can be met by the team meeting its goals.

So the way that they can set an example for the way these guys work, I mean, think about the stories of Bubba and Mike and D'Eriq, just in the off-season workouts. These guys, they're not just going through the workouts, This is my last year, I'm going to do whatever. They're smashing the run. If we're running 110s, they're not making the time,



they're racing the 110s. I'm a freshman watching that. People can say whatever they want to say, but ultimately we're going to observe, I'm going to see what you're doing.

The way that they've worked from all of Dave Feeley's reports this summer, that's the leadership, real leadership, maybe more so than the Hollywood speech of rah-rah, let's go. Players will follow those that will set the example. There are three guys over there that have done a phenomenal job of doing that in the off-season.

**Q. With the defensive new hires as well as the analysts, and you calling -- resuming the play-calling duties on the defensive side of the ball, what does that mean differently for the Canes' defense this year?**

MANNY DIAZ: We're going to be improved on defense this year. That is all going to be about the players. It's fun to talk about the coaches and the play calling, this, that and the other. But great defense is ultimately about the connection between the players on the field, the trust and the accountability.

That's where I felt like a year ago we didn't have quite have that. We take a lot of pride in how we play defense at Miami. We took a step back in that regard not to our standard.

Guys have a chip on their shoulder. We have new coaches. What that does, what I like is that it took all of our players, took every one of those guys out of their comfort zone. Now, maybe your coach that you recruited you, the coach that you've been around, here comes a new set of eyes, a guy that's going to challenge you in a different way.

That's what we ultimately needed. We needed to be out of our comfort zone defensively at Miami because we weren't proud of how we finished last year.

Doesn't matter what defense you call if the players don't have that bond and trust. That's what makes all great defenses. I think the new staff, some of the great coaches we've been able to add, that I'm honored to work with, ultimately it comes down to those guys in the defensive team meeting room taking ownership of it and playing with that Miami chip on their shoulder.

**Q. In the first nine games of 2020, Miami goes 8-1, then drops the last two. Does that influence the off-season compared to winning out at the end of the year?**

MANNY DIAZ: That's hard to say. Again, losing our last two games, it's not first and 12 in our opening game this

year. I think what set the tone of our off-season is when D'Eriq King and Mike Harley, Bubba Bolden, Amari Carter, and I could name so many more, decided to come back. I think that's the thing that had not been happening at Miami. It became the thing to do, and for the right reasons.

I think those guys have affected our off-season program regardless. There had to be something in that locker room a year ago that guys wanted to be a part of, and I think that's part of the reason -- and they can address it better than I -- of why a lot of the players made the decision to come back to Miami, to run it back.

I think we felt like we had a pretty good team a year ago. We went through some COVID things at the end of the year that had whatever effect it had, and let's have a proper year and go through and let's see how good we can actually be.

**Q. One report has the Hurricanes as having the most experienced offensive line in FBS. How much of a lift does this give you that a traditionally overshadowed group is getting good attention in Miami?**

MANNY DIAZ: We had to take some lumps a couple years ago. We started two true freshmen on the offensive line, and that's tough. But the great thing is freshmen become sophomores, they become juniors.

What it changed for us and I had not seen at my time in Miami, was the competition in our spring practice. We had guys -- Garin Justice did a great job of mixing and matching. We didn't want anyone to feel like they had a starting role locked up. Guys had to come to practice every day and they really had to bring it because there was no telling, there's still no telling who the first five are going to be.

All coaches can say that, but really having a guy that can take your job is going to bring out the best in you. I think this is the first time we've had a two deep on the offensive line of somebody that when I walk out to practice every day, if I am not at my best, I'm going to end up on second team by the end of the day. The players told me, Coach, it's amazing how much better everybody got because we had to compete every day in practice.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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