

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 25, 2023

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Miami Hurricanes**

**Coach Mario Cristobal**

**Kam Kinchens**

**Matt Lee**

**Tyler Van Dyke**

Press Conference



unique additions at the line of scrimmage, outside on the perimeter, in the secondary at linebacker.

I feel like our culture led and driven by our team leaders has created ownership in our program. In other words, the steps that you cannot skip, those things have been in full force since the end of last season, and it's led to a great offseason, a great signing day, class of best in our school's history, a top-ten portal class.

Most importantly, the retainment of our top players and top leaders led to a great spring and now has had a great summer. Now we're eager to get to camp so we can put all of that to good use, and the bottom line is just to get to work. Not worry about anything or anyone and just get to work and put to good use this hard work that we have done.

**Q. You've had as many as four players mocked as first round draft picks in the upcoming draft, and the question becomes, because Miami has always had great players coming through, how do you materialize that talent into success and wins that are on pace with your and Miami fans' expectations?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Absolutely. I think it always starts and ends with personnel. So, you know, we don't pay much attention to the mock draft stuff, but we also at the same time make sure that any type of publicity and brand enhancement that we can have for our players, we emphasize.

That's important. So there's no question that we do have some really talented young men that area really hard and we are surrounding them with more and more and more. When Miami looks a certain way, the locker room is littered with that caliber of player and person.

Then, also, littered with a coaching staff that knows how to put personnel to good use. Put guys in the right positions to make plays, making sure that we're teaching at a high level, that the onus of learning the system is as much on the player as it is a coach by doing it together. So it's as simple as that.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. The time has come. We are rejoining the 2023 ACC football here in the grand ballroom, the second floor of the Westin here in Uptown Charlotte.

We welcome the Miami Hurricanes into the building. We will spend about 15 minutes with their head coach, Mario Cristobal, and a total of 15 minutes with our three student-athletes. Questions for Head Coach?

**Q. Last year you guys had a tough season, up and down. What do you guys have to do to get better because I know a lot of Miami fans seek excellence in Miami, and they want Miami to be great like years ago? What are you going to do to turn that page?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Well, first of all, good morning. Thank you for having us here. Obviously a great setup, and appreciate you guys having us.

It's an honor to be here with these three guys because relative to your question, it starts with that right there. Elite people that are elite athletes and that hold really, really high standards.

So I think whenever you start up at a program again and it has a rebuilding aspect, you have to sometimes go through a season like that and not make any excuse or sugar-coat it, but you go directly at the things that need to be addressed, and it starts with people. People in the locker room, people on the coaching staff, people in a support staff role.

What we feel that we have done is that we have added some elite components in the personnel department, some

Our track record we've had great success developing some guys to really high levels to go on and play long careers in the NFL. That's certainly a huge part of our goals as well as the academic component and graduating with a big-time diploma from Miami.

**Q. It was announced yesterday that you guys are going to be playing for the Schnellenberger Trophy going forward. I want to get your thoughts on that game and what Coach Schnellenberger means to you and what it means playing for that trophy?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I love Coach Schnellenberger. I was recruited by him. My brother was recruited by him. He spent many, many days and nights at the house recruiting us. I more fond of the pipe than the boots, quite honestly.

I think it's the right type of honor to honor Coach Schnellenberger, what he did for the University of Miami, what he has done for the University of Louisville, what he represents in terms of football.

He made the game better. He was a great man. We refer to him a good amount of times, and he is just a significant contributor of the game of football and our community. We're honored to have the opportunity to honor him.

**Q. You mentioned earlier about the new Miami culture in particular. You have a lot of student-athletes that have transferred to Miami this year. What have you seen from them, and how have they kind of adapted to this culture from practices and the spring game up to this point?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: That's a really good question. I think what makes this roster work well is that the blend. The blend is the right percentages of the different kinds of roster make-up components. By that I mean you have some seasoned veterans that have been here that have seen a lot of football, played a lot of football.

You have an elite freshman class where some guys are going to be able to contribute and be impactful members on the field while others continue to develop.

Then you have some seasoned, experienced transfer portal guys that have joined our team. These guys can tell you more than anything the transitions have been seamless because we've been open and honest from the beginning that we are building and rebuilding. We didn't sell any lofty expectations or any BS dreams. We're very real about it. When you do that and you are introduced to the level of work that these guys are introduced to, it works well.

The mentality, the fact that every position has legitimate competition and the level of work ethic that these guys and the guys that have come in have all put together, it's a really good combination.

The diversity of the locker room as well, it's almost a reflection of our city, Miami, right? You see every color, ethnicity. You see it all. You see it on our team in terms of their backgrounds, in terms of the different ways they got to Miami, but with one thing in common. They like to work, and they are driven. They are internally driven and self-motivated, and it's been fun and exciting to watch these guys work.

I think they understand that the secret is out there in the dirt and to get their hands dirty and put in time and put in effort. I look forward to watching these guys get to work here in fall camp.

**Q. Do you have intentional thoughts on how much you want to rely on the portal versus how much you still want to rely on high school recruiting, and is that different for you at Miami than it was when you were at Oregon?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Very different. We never really used the portal much, if at all, at the previous stop at Oregon, but the rules have changed. You have to adapt. There's so many different ways to fill your roster now, right? There are players overseas. There's some up in Canada. Junior college players, high school players, transfers. Sometimes guys in your athletics department that are playing other sports could make the jump and become good football players.

We're always looking for ways to make our roster as good as it can be. So I hate to put a cap on it, but the importance of high school recruiting is still going to be at the forefront. I mean, player development and that word "development" always has to be an important and a sacred word when it comes to football.

I'll tell you why: Football is a developmental sport, okay? There is a lot to be said and a lot of value in putting in time and effort to develop into a great person, a great player, an accountable and trustworthy teammate. We don't want to stray from those principles and values. At the same time recognize that sometimes you have opportunities, one of them sitting up here on stage today, of a guy that could come in and make a tremendous impact, but he already has those principles and values and has put in that time.

At the end of the day they all kind of meld together, but just different pathways have been used to get here.

**Q. You bring in a new offensive coordinator this year. Can you just speak on what bringing in Coach Dawson, what do you think his new offense will do to unlock Tyler Van Dyke's skill set that we've seen in the past?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: I think what Shannon Dawson has done in his history really fits Tyler, his skill set, the pieces around him. It gives him the opportunity to enhance a supporting cast. The bolstering of the offensive line with not only the addition of Matt and Javion and the return of a healthy offensive line in Anez Cooper and a Jalen Rivers. Then we all heard about the heralded freshmen that we have and the expectations on them.

I think that's a great combination. You know, Shannon Dawson has led some really high-level offenses over the course of his career. Really understands the importance of the timing and spaces and precision of the passing game and has gotten the ball in the hands of his best players. He has been a hit. You know, he has been a guy that our team instantly recognized that, man, this guy is a really good coach, he is a really good person. We can connect here.

Probably one of the best things, and I think this is important to say because Miami has always been really, really good when Miami was really filled with people that wanted to be at Miami. Shannon Dawson views the Miami job as that job. Lance Guidry views the Miami job as that destination spot.

We're thrilled to have them. They've certainly made a tremendous impact so far, and we look forward to him continuing to evolve his offense and working with our players, and I think I'll let Tyler expand on his feelings on the offense when you guys get him up here.

**Q. Talk about your transfer offensive linemen from Alabama. How great are they in addition to your team?**

MARIO CRISTOBAL: Large human beings, right, that move things a long ways. Javion has a lot of experience. Certainly has played at a high level. One of the better linemen when he was playing in the SEC.

Then a guy like Matt, again, arguably the best if not one of the best centers in the country who was looking to enhance his game. I think he's -- I hate to put you out there -- 20 pounds? How much weight? Something like that. He still fits in the suit, so that's good, but he has worked really hard, along with the rest of the guys, to change their bodies and enhance their game.

He wanted to be challenged at the highest level. These guys, you can push them, and you can work hard because there are several goals that come with this. Your team, being a great teammate, being a great player, having a great team, great offense, dominant offensive line. One day playing in the NFL. Not just get to the NFL, stay in the NFL.

You couldn't ask for a better group of transfer portal offensive linemen than what we were able to be blessed to have.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can trade places with Kam.

Questions for Kam Kinchens?

**Q. What is it about your side of the ball that you like? Where are the strengths? Are there in any questions as you prepare for fall camp that you still feel like need to be answered?**

KAM KINCHENS: The first thing, our front seven. Those are some dogs. Especially the front -- the transfer with Kiko. Then you have Corey Flagg and Wesley. Those guys coming back with some experience under their belt, and then you got Akheem, you got Rueben, you got Nyjalik, Jahfari, L.T. You got Branson. We loaded down there. Then Jared coming back off of injury. I think that's the best group we have on our defense.

Not to take nothing behind the secondary. You know, we got Devonta Brown come coming in as a transfer, Daryl Porter. You got me and James back there. Arguably the best safety duo. Got some things going on for us.

**Q. Kam, you alluded to yourself and James being one of the best safety duos in the country. Let me ask you this: Do you lean into that labeling? Do you lean into that and say, hey, we are the best, this is who we are, or is it something like, it doesn't matter, we just go out there and do our thing? What puts you all at that level to where you are being mentioned amongst the most elite safety duos in the country?**

KAM KINCHENS: You look at it, and it's one of those things you kind of see on social media. Everybody on social media says. It's one of them things we don't try to buy into. It don't take away from our work ethic, and all the extra work we put in together to make sure it happens.

It's not bad to be a part of that. It's okay to be an underdog sometimes, but sometimes it's good to see other people recognize what you have been doing. It just goes to show our hard work ethic. You know, all them late nights or early

mornings we get in there trying to get extra work to be the best safety duo in the country.

So it comes all with that, and then production on the field.

**Q. So Coach Cristobal played at Christopher Columbus High School, right? Then he played, you know, at the University of Miami too. Then now we see this year, this upcoming class coming in. Players loaded with talent. How much does it mean to you, your teammates, the locker room, the fans that you interact with to have a head guy in charge that is Miami through and through all the way to the soil, you know what I mean?**

KAM KINCHENS: It's great. You know, he kind of knew the background that we come from in the Miami culture. It starts all the way from youth football. Football is not a joke down here in South Florida. He is one of those people that experienced that, and he doesn't let nobody forget it. It's crazy about the Christopher Columbus (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: Question from the podium. Community seems to mean a great deal to you. Where was the sense of community and pride instilled? Who put that in you?

KAM KINCHENS: My parents. Then just growing up, kind of seeing all the guys that's come from Northwestern, and just even from my boys club where I grew up and played youth football at, they just always found a way to give back.

Then my grandma and my mother, we didn't have the most, by any time we had extra, we found a way to give back. If it was extra clothes, giving it to Goodwill or just having some extra fries in a bag, and you see somebody on the side of the highway, you know, you just give them some food.

You know, just every time you see somebody, a little kid, it could be a boy or girl, and they look up to you and then it's just a thing that I made it out. I didn't have the best situation ever, but I made the most of it. You give those little people hope.

Every time you see a smile on their face because most of the time when you are going around them, unless they are around, like, teenagers, they don't know who you are. They don't know who Kam Kinchens is. When you give back to them, a toy, a book, or anything, it just puts a smile on their face. You're just doing it because you're a human being.

**Q. For a while the thing for Miami has been we're back, we're back, we're back. A lot of Miami faithful**

**are waiting for you to come back. You being on the defensive side of the ball and the history of all those great linebackers in college at Miami that went on to be future Hall of Famers at the NFL, what type of pressure is that for you being the guy on defense to help implement into your -- the style of play and to get Miami back to what they need to be?**

KAM KINCHENS: Of course, taking our lessons from those guys. They always try to come back and give us notes on how to be great.

I think the biggest thing is just the physicality and, of course, the playbook, knowing it in and out. I think it's everything, just being in the film room and being a student of the game.

For the most part those guys wasn't just waking up and becoming that. So it's always about something they was doing extra, and that's all they try to instill in us and Coach Cristobal too. He always mentions those guys like Dan Morgan, Ed Reed, Sean Taylor. Sean Taylor put in a lot of work, but he was just different.

The thing is, just being a film junkie. That's what I'm trying to instill in my game now. Just making sure I can get better at any aspect of the game.

THE MODERATOR: Kam, thank you. If you'll switch places with Matt Lee.

Questions for Matt Lee?

I will ask your first question from the podium. Why Miami? You had choices. Why did you pick the Hurricanes?

MATT LEE: A lot of reasons went into that. I'm from Florida near Orlando, UCF, my previous school. Growing up always liked the Canes, always like the U, Everything about Miami. I wasn't a direct fan, but being from Florida you see all that stuff a lot. On top of that, I got a lot of family ties in Miami, and then once I got a chance to go down and visit, do an official visit and really get to know Coach Cristobal, Coach Mirabal, TBD, other guys I got to meet, it kind of became a no-brainer. The work ethic, the discipline, the type of guys they are, the type of guy I am and what I want to be a part of.

**Q. You are a part of that special transfer class as far as offensive linemen that Coach Cristobal has talked about and whatnot. Seeing some of the struggles that Miami had last year offensively, a lot of those can be trace to do a lack of health or a lack of production from the offensive line. How do you see yourself in the transfer class being brought in positively impacting**

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**that? And basically what would you say going forward is like, hey, this is what I know we can hang our hat on and be our identity as an offensive line?**

MATT LEE: Yeah, I think me and Javion coming through the portal and also guys like Jalen rivers and Anez Cooper and the new freshman Francisco Mauigoa and Samson Okunlola and a couple of other guys as well. We're tough. We're going to get after it. We're going to work as hard as Coach Cristobal and Coach Mirabal push us on any given day.

We just have to hang our hats on being the toughest, meanest guys on the field every single snap, every single game. It doesn't matter. Always be able to rely on us five no matter what.

THE MODERATOR: Again from the podium. You continue to grade high, and you had multiple accolades in your last stop. So with all the grading high and the things that you have accomplished, what's left there to accomplish? It's a devil's advocate question, obviously.

MATT LEE: No, the accolades and all that stuff is cool. I don't really care about that. I want to win games, right? I want to win conference championship. I want to go all the way, all that. All that comes with that because individual stuff is awesome, but it don't really matter. All that matters is the team, winning the team, going as far as you can get the team to go.

**Q. With all of the achievements that you've had throughout your seasons, what is the legacy that you want everyone to know you for, like know about you, as far as what you do after football season? So what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind, and what do you want people to remember you for?**

MATT LEE: Yeah, probably just a work ethic, disciplined guy. Out of high school I didn't have really any offers at the FBS level. I had a couple. I had two of them.

Under-recruited, not really appreciated throughout that process. Then throughout college I kind of built that repertoire up. By the time I went in the transfer portal, I could have gone pretty much anywhere in the country, but I always pride myself on being the hardest worker, most disciplined, most mentally focused, and understanding of the mental side of the game. Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. You can trade places with Tyler. Tyler Van Dyke will be the last Hurricane with us over the next couple of minutes.

Questions?

**Q. Last year we spoke, and I asked you what are your plans for the future and upcoming goals, and you said, hey, we are focused on this season, we are focused here and now. That being said, what are your goals for this upcoming season? If you could give of me a tangible list, what's on that list?**

TYLER VAN DYKE: Last year didn't go as planned. Yeah, it's a new year. I think everything happens for a reason. You go through times of adversity for a reason.

Yeah, we're just looking forward are to this year, taking it one day at a time, staying focused in the present. Our goal is just to win. Just take it one day at a time, as I said, and just win.

**Q. Back to the question I asked Coach Cristobal, talk about the new offense for a second. What it is about it that excites you to elevate your skill set, to have a great season.**

TYLER VAN DYKE: The thing I love about Coach Dawson's offense, I mean, you guys saw what he did at Houston. Threw for almost -- did throw for 4,000 yards, over 2,500 yards rushing. The thing I love about it is the freedom he gives the quarterback. Change a run play to a pass play, pass to a run. Giving receivers routes based on what the defense gives you.

So just gives the quarterback a lot of freedom. It allows you to put the ball in the hands of the playmakers. That's my job to do. So yeah, I'm very grateful that Coach Cristobal brought Coach Dawson in, and I'm excited for this year.

**Q. Miami is known for great quarterbacks, like Bernie Kosar and Dorsey and all that. Have they ever talked to you and got you ready for the season? Have they gave you some good pointers?**

TYLER VAN DYKE: Yeah, identify heard from a few of them. I mean, the one that talks to me the most and texts me the most is Bernie Kosar. He texts me all the time, gives me great advice.

He is always down at campus watching practice. He came back for the alumni dinner, and I talked to him for a while. Always giving me great advice as long as with the other quarterbacks too.

Yeah, I've looked up to him a lot. He has had a long successful career. He is a guy that I look up to a lot.

**Q. After the Middle Tennessee state loss last year, you**



**talked about, hey, this benching was a thing that I take, and I learn from it, and I move past it. You know, in that moment I understand that it's like a very quick fire-off, hey, you learn from it and move forward, but after having time to reflect on it and being a little bit further removed from it, what specifically did you learn from that moment or from that valley of, like, this is probably the toughest moment of my college career? What did you learn from that?**

TYLER VAN DYKE: It was definitely tough. Everything went the way we didn't want it to go, but yeah, looking back on it, those next two, three weeks before I got hurt, that was some of my best games. I think that happened for a reason.

I think all the adversity that came to me and came to our team, you know, made us push through it. I'm still here, still love being a Miami Hurricane, and I think it made me a better human being and a better football player.

**Q. You've heard a lot of legends' names be thrown around in this conference, and most, if not all of them, have had the honor and distinguishment of having the "C" on their left shoulder. What does that mean to you having the "C" on your shoulder this season?**

TYLER VAN DYKE: Yeah, we don't have the "C". We have a huge group of leadership council. We have 13 guys, which grew a lot from last year. Last year we only had six.

The thing I'm proud of most about this seem is a lot of guys stepped up to become voices of the team, become leaders. A lot of people grew in the right direction. New guys like Matt, Branson Deen came in. Did a great job of coming in and being an older guy, being a leader to the young guys.

Yeah, being a leader of the team along with some of these other guys, it's special. We set the direction of the team. We get to show the young guys how to do it, show the new guys that came in how to do it. It's on us to win games, so...

**Q. Is there any pressure for you this season considering you had two conflicting seasons before previously? How are you going into this season?**

TYLER VAN DYKE: Just stay focused in the present. Not worry about our Boston College game at the end of the year. Just focus on Miami of Ohio at the beginning of the year, focus one day at a time, one practice at a time, one throw at a time. You know, just keep working to get better.

There's a lot of improvements I worked on over this

offseason and just trying to focus on that, trying to make the team better as a whole.

Yeah, just focus one day at a time.

THE MODERATOR: Tyler, thank you. Miami, good luck this season.

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