

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Jim Phillips Ph.D**

Commissioner Press Conference



COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Good morning and welcome the 2026 ACC Football Kickoff. It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces here from our schools, media, television and corporate partners, bowl partners, and the many friends and stakeholders who support the ACC throughout the year.

We deeply value each of you and recognize there are many demands on your time, so please know that I don't take your attendance for granted.

It's my hope you've enjoyed a great summer. I'm glad we once again are together to celebrate the ACC and ACC football.

I have to share a personal note. This has been a really special summer for Laura and I and our family. We had the joy of celebrating the first wedding of our five children, son Luke married Katie Rose Blachowicz on June 27th. Why is that important? Well, I have the microphone this morning, but it's important because Luke and Katie Rose are former ACC student-athletes.

For any of those who have experienced a child's wedding know, it was truly an amazing milestone.

Before I get into a little bit deeper the thoughts about the ACC, I want to begin and take a moment to recognize two individuals whose recent passings have been deeply felt across the college athletics community.

Kenny Klein was a trusted friend and colleague whose service extended far beyond his time at Louisville. He was loved and respected throughout the industry. His unwavering commitment and genuine kindness earned the respect and admiration of everyone who knew him.

We also honor Dr. Terry Don Phillips whose visionary leadership as Clemson's director of athletics helped shape one of the most successful eras in the university's history. He left a lasting legacy across the ACC and beyond.

Please join me in a moment of silence in memory of Kenny

and Terry Don.

One of the greatest privileges of serving as ACC commissioner is spending time with our incredible student-athletes. I'm thrilled our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee is here again for its annual summer meetings. I look forward to visiting with them later today.

Members of our ACC SAAC, please stand so we can recognize you.

(Applause.)

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Speaking of our student-athletes, we're coming off another outstanding Unity Tour in Washington, DC. Now in its fifth-year, the Unity Tour provides student-athletes and administrators with unique experiences beyond competition.

This year's program explored the intersection of sport, leadership and diplomacy, including opportunities to engage with our elected officials.

Our annual kickoff is always filled with excitement for the football season, but it's also an opportunity to reflect on the past year, celebrate our accomplishments, share our vision for the future, and answer your questions.

This past February marked my fifth-year as ACC commissioner, and has truly been the opportunity of a lifetime. I remain incredibly grateful for the trust and confidence our presidents and chancellors have placed in me. I'm humbled to serve our 18 world-class institutions that make the ACC unlike any other conference.

As I prepared for today, I found myself reflecting not only on the accomplishments of the past year, but on what we've achieved as the league over the last five years.

I'm proud of how the ACC has navigated one of the industry's most transformative eras. Staying true to our values, embracing change, positioning our conference for continued success, and strengthening our position as a national leader.

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Today I can confidently say the ACC enters the 2026/27 academic year from a position of tremendous strength. Our conference is thriving athletically, academically, financially and we are leading nationally during one of the most consequential periods in the history of college sports.

During the past academic year, 14 different ACC institutions captured conference championships. Our teams won seven national championships, while eight additional ACC programs finished as the national runners up, including Miami's run to the CFP National Championship game.

Over the last five years, ACC programs have captured 36 NCAA team championships in conference-sponsored sports, the highest five year total in our 73-year history.

Across football, basketball, our Olympic sports, the ACC sets the standard for competitive excellence.

The success is most recently reflected in the final Learfield Directors' Cup standings where three of the top five, six of the top 25, and every one of our 18 schools ranked among the nation's top 90. It's a testament to the depth and consistency that defines the ACC.

With the world's attention focused on a different kind of football this summer, FIFA's World Cup, it's worth recognizing another example of ACC's excellence on the global stage.

Six campuses are located in FIFA World Cup host cities. Eight former ACC student-athletes, more than double from any other conference, are representing their countries. It's a fitting reflection of the conference whose current programs have combined to win 12 national championships in the last 10 years, seven on the women's side, five on the men's.

While our competitive achievements reinforce the ACC's place among the nation's elite, academics remain a clear point of differentiation.

For the 19th consecutive year, ACC leads all conferences with the best average ranking in the U.S. News and World Report best colleges. Our student-athletes are graduating at an extraordinary pace, with a graduation success rate of 94%, and setting the standard nationally for academic achievement.

You've heard me talk about these accomplishments before, but behind these numbers there are young people earning life-changing degrees. Many are first-generation college students; still more would not have the opportunity to earn a degree without the tremendous support provided by

college athletics.

As our industry continues to evolve we must never lose sight of the student and student-athlete. That commitment to excellence in both academics and athletics is what makes the collegiate model so special.

Beyond our success in competition in the classroom, our strength is equally reflected in our business portfolio. The ACC is projected to produce more than \$900 million in gross revenue in 2025/26. Our seventh consecutive record year.

Over the past five years, conference revenue has grown by more than 56%, and has doubled since 2019, even without a new television deal.

Average member distributions continue to reach new heights, and the ACC remains one of the top three highest revenue generating conferences in the country.

These results didn't happen by accident. The successes reflect thoughtful leadership, strategic decisions and a willingness to innovate by our membership.

Together we welcome three outstanding new institutions to the ACC, extended our long-term ESPN partnership through 2035/36 and viewership based initiatives.

We've also expanded our corporate sponsorships, doubling our portfolio over the past five years. To build for the future, we've added the conference's first chief revenue officer, chief marketing and brand officer, and vice president of sport technology and innovation. Investments that strength our business and better serve our institutions.

Innovation remain a hallmark of the ACC. From enhanced replay transparency, availability reporting or expanding our sport technology efforts, our goal is to not simply keep pace with change, but to help lead it.

From how our teams operate, how games are officiated and administered, how conferences serve their member institutions, and engage with fans and partners.

We'll continue investing in technology and solutions that strengthen competitive integrity, improve operations and enhance the student-athlete and fan experience.

Most importantly, we've achieved all of this without compromising what has always made the ACC exceptional. This is a direct reflection of the steady leadership from our presidents and chancellors, athletic directors, administrators, coaches, and most importantly our student-athletes.



Together we've positioned the ACC to enter this year with tremendous momentum and strength.

Speaking of investment and sponsorship and innovation, I'm excited to announce, together with Disney and ESPN, the ACC has entered into a new multi-year partnership with ReliaQuest as the ACC's official cyber security sponsor.

As the global leader in agentic AI-driven cyber security, ReliaQuest has built its reputation on innovation and performance. This partnership reflects our commitment to aligning with innovative organizations that strengthening the ACC and help shape the future.

We are proud to welcome founder and CEO Brian Murphy, not to be confused with our favorite media member from Raleigh, who is also an FSU alum and a member of the Board of Trustees to the ACC family.

As the ACC continues its upward trajectory, we also have a responsibility to remain industry leaders during this period of unprecedented change. As current chair of the NCAA Board of Governors, president of the collegiate commissioners association, and through our leadership within the college sports commission, College Football Playoff governance structure and national legislative discussions, the ACC is helping shape the future.

On federal legislation, the Protect College Sports Act, sponsored by Senators Cruz and Cantwell, along with Senators Schmidt and Coons, and passed by the commerce committee last month, represents the best chance for Congress to assist college sports and address some of the major issues that plague it in the near term.

We are engaged daily with members of Congress as this time has come for action.

A great deal of negotiation has led us to this point, and it's notable to have bipartisan bills that provides for continued protections for student-athletes, liability protection on a new eligibility and transfer model, state preemption, and enhanced federal regulation of agents.

I look forward to continuing the collaboration with members of Congress to stabilize and modernize sports for the future.

The college sports commission has also made meaningful progress under Bryan Seeley's steady leadership. They were asked to build a fair, consistent, and credible framework to help implement the House settlement and bring greater stability and accountability.

While there's certainly more work ahead, we've already seen validation that the commission is working. The ACC remains fully committed and will continue providing leadership as this is an important structure for all of us. Still in its infancy, but it is evolving.

The ACC will also play a leading role in shaping the future of the College Football Playoff. As I shared during our spring meetings, we strongly support a model that provides greater access and ensures every program willing to invest, compete and earn its way into the Playoff has a legitimate path to play for a national championship.

We look forward to the ongoing and thoughtful discussions with our colleagues.

Finally, I want to recognize NCAA president Charlie Baker and his leadership. Following extensive collaboration and thoughtful deliberation across the Division I membership, the NCAA's modernization of its eligibility framework is an important step towards a greater clarity, consistency, fairness, and long-term stability of the college sports.

While the immediate lawsuits challenging the new eligibility rules are incredibly disheartening, the changes create a sustainable model, a model that more closely aligns with the traditional educational timeline after high school, provides a meaningful participation opportunity for student-athletes, protects competitive equity, and preserves opportunities for future generations of college student-athletes.

We will remain working alongside the NCAA and our colleagues to build a fair and sustainable future.

Now let's talk about why we are all gathered here in Charlotte: ACC football. The 2025 season was one of the strongest in our history. For the third straight year the ACC produced at least 11 bowl-eligible teams, the longest streak in the country. We set conference records with seven teams winning at least nine games, and nine teams reaching eight wins, which also led all leagues.

Our seven-post-season victories against fellow Power Four opponents were the most by any conference.

With Miami's run to the national championship game last season, following Clemson and SMU earning CFP berths the year before, the ACC has firmly established itself in the national championship conversation.

Our country has noticed. Regular-season ACC football viewership increased 68% year over year, leading all Power Four conferences in audience growth. Three of the nine most watched regular season games featured ACC



teams, all of which were in ACC stadiums.

Miami's CFP National Championship appearance drew more than 30 million viewers, the decade's most-watched CFP game.

ACC football has always embraced challenging ourselves composure and that tradition continues in 2026. Our teams will once again play the nation's strongest non-conference schedule, including 25 games against Power Four opponents in Notre Dame, which leads all conferences.

Every ACC program will at least play 10 games against Power Four opponents, and three of the five BS teams scheduled to play 11 such Games are from the ACC.

Those numbers don't happen by accident. It's a reflection of the confidence of our coaches, the commitment of our institutions, and our belief that championship teams should play championship schedules.

The ACC will help launch college football season in week zero with three marquee non-conference games, the year's first conference matchup. The spotlight will shine on North Carolina as it faces TCU in the Aer Lingus College Football Playoff in Dublin with the ACC again opening the season internationally.

From there the ACC will own Labor Day weekend with five consecutive days of football, featuring 12 games highlighted by SMU's first-ever trip to Florida State on Monday night.

The weekend also features five Power Four non-conference matchups, which leads the country and provides a showcase of what is once again the nation's strongest non-conference schedule.

Another measure of ACC football's momentum is the ongoing commitment from ESPN and ABC to showcase our programs on the national stage. Following significant viewership growth last season, including an increase in games carried on ABC, we expect another outstanding television lineup in 2026.

That exposure extends well beyond Saturdays with a conference record 15 Friday games, providing more opportunities than ever for our programs to shine and standalone nationally windows. From Thursday night through Saturday, fans across the country will have unprecedented access to ACC football.

After 13 weeks of outstanding competition, the road to Charlotte will once again culminate with one of college

football's premier championship events. On Saturday, December 5th, our top two teams will meet at Bank of America Stadium for the ACC football championship. Airing at noon on ABC, it will be the only Power Four championship game in that window, giving our student-athletes and programs the national spotlight.

This year also marks the introduction of a new championship tiebreaking procedure. Following a thoughtful data-driven review by our athletic directors, including the evaluation of more than 10,000 simulated season outcomes, we have adopted an approach that is built on three guiding principles.

First, head-to-head results will always matter most.

Second, no team will be unfairly rewarded or penalized based on the number of conference games it played.

Third, when head-to-head competition cannot separate tied teams, the team with strongest overall body of work will earn the opportunity to compete for the ACC Championship and the CFP AQ.

We'll share full details shortly. I think there's going to be a sheet passed around. But we're confident this approach is fair, transparent, data-informed, and assures our game features the two most deserving teams.

Before I close, I want to recognize our outstanding partners at Disney, ESPN, and the ACC Network. Their continued investment, including ESPN's direct-to-consumer launch and our four-year extension with the CW further elevates the ACC and expands the visibility of our student-athletes and institutions.

Together we've embraced innovation, including being the first conference to provide enhanced replay transparency, which we will further build upon this season.

Thank you to Josh D'Amaro, Jimmy Pitaro, Burke Magnus, Ros Durant, Nick Dawson, and the entire Disney, ESPN, and ACC Net team for your outstanding partnership and commitment to the ACC.

Very directly, I've never been more confident in the future of the ACC. Our accomplishments are significant, our foundation is strong, our momentum is real, our opportunities are greater than ever. Together with our 18 world class institutions we will build upon the remarkable momentum, remain at the forefront of shaping the future of college sports.

Again, my sincere thanks for being here today. Enjoy your time with our outstanding student-athletes and coaches,



and thank you for sharing the stories that make the ACC so special.

With that I'm happy to answer any of your questions.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions. Thank you, Commissioner. We'll get to as many people as possible.

**Q. You mentioned at spring meetings the concept of hope. Do you find that message is resonating with your fellow commissioners, and are you confident that television projections will give you all reason to expand the Playoff as far as you would like?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Thank you. Appreciate you being here. Thank you for the question.

I have been vocal about the idea that if you have a championship, and you have teams that truly could win a championship, and they're not invited, which we experienced a few years ago, and others have experienced the last couple years, you don't have the right format.

So it is about greater access, if you're going to have a true national championship. I have continued to advocate that we should increase. There's a debate between 16 and 24. I've gone on record that I believe 24 is the right number for us.

It would absolutely have to alter the regular season, when we start, and the calendar is really compressed. We'd have to deal with that.

There's good momentum. In our room, our coaches were unanimous, our athletic directors were unanimous coming out of the spring and into the summer. Nothing has changed.

What we've asked the CFP, when I say 'we' I'm talking about all of the commissioners, Pete Bevacqua at Notre Dame, the 11 individuals in that room, is if our consultants to look at what is the value of those additional games, when could we play those additional games.

We're waiting for some of those answers back.

We have the ability to make a change, not for this upcoming year, it will stay at 12, but if we're going to make a change for the 2027 College Football Playoff National Championship Playoff, that would have to take place by December 1st of 2026.

Again, I do feel like there's good momentum, there's good support. You have to do things in a collaborative way. Are you can't force anything down anyone. I really have tried

to have a career built on that.

We're working collaboratively, but there's certainly a lot of momentum about expanding the Playoff.

**Q. You talked about the tiebreaker situation for the championship game. When you say the team with the overall strongest body of work will earn the opportunity, how will that exactly be measured and/or quantified?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Good question. Good to see you.

A team's success ranking from sports source analytics, we've used them in the past, it will be the third element of the tiebreaking system. It's what the CFP uses. I think you have to go and give an opportunity to place your two best teams.

What's changed this year is that there's an AQ awarded for The Power Four conferences. So you have to do everything you can to position your championship game with those two best teams.

So we're going to stay -- head-to-head matters. That's always most important. Then we will look at the grouping and how teams fared in the regular conference season.

It will come down to body of work. Who you play, when you play, the games you win, conference and non-conference will matter. That's a major change in college sports and certainly for the ACC.

I'm looking forward to that. I had just say this. We talked a lot about it, used a lot of consultants, did 10,000 algorithms of different scenarios. It warranted that kind of time and commitment so that we can position ourselves to put those two best ACC teams forward.

Our schedule's not perfect coming up this year because we're going into that transition period where we're going to nine games, we have an uneven number of teams in the conference. 12 of our schools will play nine conference games, five of our schools will play eight. Everyone will play 10 Power Four games, so there's some balance there.

We'll continue to watch how this thing goes. But I feel incredibly strong that we have gotten to the right place with unanimity with our membership on what this new tiebreaking policy states.

Thanks for the question.

**Q. You mentioned about looking at the fact that this is**

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**a conference that's staying true to their values, while embracing change. How do you balance the two with so many things changing in collegiate athletics to stay who you are but also be prepared for everything that's come with the transfer portal, realignment that's happened, the College Football Playoff expansion?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Well, this is a proud 73-year old league. I know what matters to the presidents and chancellors at the ACC. It really is still about academics and athletics in that order. So certain things I think are forever as it relates to the ACC, and that I very much value.

But the industry has changed and the league has had to change along with that. I think you end up staying true to who you are. Everyone's trying to see around the corner of where college athletics is going, but nobody can truly predict that.

Fundamentally it's about our student-athletes, it's about competition at the highest level, it's about providing resources and telling our story with our network.

But I like what we've done. I like what we've done with our staff and some of the new hires. I really like what we did with the transparency on replay. You'll see more of that this year.

The ACC, just like college sports, continues to evolve no matter how long these organizations have been around.

The guiding north star for all of us across our 18 campuses are those 12,200 student-athletes, trying to do right by them, trying to give them the best experience that we can. I hope that we're continuing to do that each and every day.

Thanks for your question.

**Q. NC State and Virginia, the moving of that game from Brazil to Charlottesville at a relatively late date, I know there were releases put on it, but what light can you shed on why that really happened?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Well, a few things. It's great to have you here, as well. Hope Chappell is behaving himself.

I can just speak during the five years that I've been so privileged to be in this role. We have tried to broaden our reach. One example is how we're using week zero.

The Brazil game was something that Virginia and NC State kind of came together on, and we started to talk about that opportunity. You need to have a sponsor. There has to be some support in another country to be able to pull this

game together.

Things seemed to be going along well over the course of the last seven or eight months. But very truthfully, I think it was in May, there was some serious doubt about whether the city and the area involved, the managing area involved, would be able to pull this game off.

I think it was an educated decision that you could leave it to chance and maybe there is an issue with the field, maybe there's an issue with some logistical pieces of putting on an event, or we can bring it back home and have it be a true ACC Conference game on somebody's home field. That's what we determined was best. That was the first step.

The second step was getting a chance to plead our case, plead, state, whatever word you want to use, but this should still stay at week zero because both of those institutions and the conference office put together the entire ACC schedule based on some of the teams that were playing in week zero. That would have been a real disadvantage to those student-athletes.

I'm very pleased at how the NCAA took that information on and then decided that it could stay at week zero.

The international piece is big. I mean, we've gone to Ireland several times. We want to go to a couple other places. We talked to the Holiday Bowl about maybe going to Saudi Arabia. To sprinkle the college game out internationally is great. This year it will be North Carolina playing TCU in Ireland. Next year Pitt is going to go to Ireland to play Wisconsin.

We have a really nice kind of cadence there. I'd like to continue to look at other areas around the world to showcase ACC football.

Thanks for the question.

**Q. You mentioned the viewership up. How much of that is a result of changes to the way that they're monitoring and looking at television ratings? How much of that do you think is based on the placement on ABC? How much of it is based on the success in the College Football Playoff? Can you divide out some of how you reached that number?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Thanks. Good to see you, as well. Thank you for being here.

The viewership growth is staggering when you think about it: 68%. But I would say there's a few factors there, then I'll go into maybe how we're looking at those numbers, et

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cetera.

It's about investment, it's about placement of games, it's about schools challenging themselves in the non-conference. We have the most difficult non-conference schedule in the country with those 25 games. That's been part of the ACC for a period of time. That draws attention in week zero, week one, week two. Sometimes schools could play lesser caliber teams.

But I think that which has been in the DNA of a lot of our coaches in the league, athletic directors, certainly the conference has tried to push that and advocate for that, that along with the changes we made with success initiatives and viewership initiatives as it relates to distribution dollars from the ACC, that's been a motivator.

You eat what you kill. You have a chance to help yourself financially by playing good games, meaningful games that people want to watch, because at the end of the year if your viewership numbers have gone up, you're going to get a bigger piece of that pie. There's an intrinsic motivator that's there.

That combination to me equals that 68%. Now, you have to have good teams; they have to win. But we've been doing that. Certainly last year was a great year, having 11 teams in bowl games, seven times with nine wins or more, all those stats that I relayed earlier.

I'm very pleased with that.

We have to carve out a little bit on Friday night. I know the coaches don't love that completely. I respect that. I had the five coaches that are here today down for a meeting to start with. We didn't talk about that, but we have the best coaches in the country. I love that group. They're committed. They can be salty at times, but they're competitive and they understand the importance of college football.

They have helped us elevate college football with our presidents and chancellors that have committed to it. I like where we're at. The point about the Friday night is there's so much compression on Saturday. Everybody can't play on Saturday anymore. They just can't. There's not enough outlets with 136 FBS schools.

So we have done well to place some of our games on Thursday and Friday, not a majority of our games, but the right ones, and have worked with our TV partners on that.

We try to ease that, that no one has to play more than someone else at a bigger discrepancy, but those things have been very good for the ACC.

I'll just finish it off by I'm excited about the championship game time this year. We have been at 7:00 at Bank of America Stadium, and it's been great. We have a tremendous relationship with the Teppers and the folks over there at Bank of America Stadium.

But the weather is dicey. It just is. It can be 70 or it could be 38 degrees. To be able to play at noon, unencumbered by any other Power Four games, I'm interested to see what happens there.

Probably more information than you wanted, but the TV piece is important. Feel like we're in a really, really good place.

Thanks for the question. You are not the CEO of ReliaQuest, right (smiling)?

**Q. Not that I know of.**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: All right (laughter).

**Q. You stated your support for the safe college sports act. You also talked about the fact that there are a lot of first-generation college students who are student-athletes. A lot of detractors are people who are against the Save College Sports Act by saying it's Congress' way of suppressing the wages of people who have been economically disenfranchised. What would you say to those people who offer that pushback in terms of I still support this in spite of, or maybe that's not the appropriate way to view this?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Yeah, just an awesome question. I don't agree that it's going to limit wages. What we want is more transparency about what's happening. We want those deals, whether names are attached or not, we want those to be transparent.

We want agent registration because student-athletes are being taken advantage of. There's been nobody that is more supportive of that I think than the ACC has been. We're working with the Senators involved, we're working with our historically black colleges and commissioners across the board because that can't be the outcome. That's not the goal of the Protect College Sports Act.

It's a chance to stabilize the future of college athletics. A major part of that is making sure that student-athletes are compensated, not getting ripped off by agents. It's also a reaffirmation of the benefits that student-athletes get, going to school, housing, books, meals, all of the intangible areas that there's a real value on, and allow student-athletes to have those kinds of experiences.



We're making progress. We have to continue to educate and bring along some of those detractors. Even the commissioners are at odds over some of the pieces of this particular act. That outcome needs to be, again, one in which there's great transparency about what's happening and how this benefits student-athletes financially and other ways.

Really appreciate that question.

**Q. In Amelia Island you were talking about Clemson-Ole Miss; specifically said there needs to be repercussions for improper behavior when it comes to tampering. Obviously a noteworthy situation with your conference champion, national runner-up. What steps has the conference taken in trying to handle tampering? What steps can you take?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Thank you. Good to see you. By the way, the Cubs beat the Orioles two-out-of-three recently. Every year I remind you of that. Every year it's the same statement: Cubs beat the Orioles, either swept them or beat them two-out-of-three.

Anyway, the tampering is serious. Whether it's in the league or nationally, those are serious things that people are looking at and certainly have to be dealt with.

What I would say is between the college sports commission and the NCAA, we have to have support for them to do the work that they're capable of doing in order to hold schools, institutions and coaches accountable.

The best way to hold people accountable is for others to bring forward those types of situations and cases, and specific information about what has happened with a particular student-athlete or a particular instance.

So what I think there's frustration of, which I completely understand, but part of this is when you have several impediments right now with legal cases and people going to judges and some conversation about the clarity and some of the rules, it allowing people to play in the margins.

As we modernize college sports, we have to make sure that we are supporting and imploring the CSC and the NCAA enforcement group to do their job.

What's sad about what I see with some of the tampering that's going on is there's a failure to have restraint in college sports like I've never seen before. Tampering, expenditures, how we don't maybe work together collaboratively as much as we should. That has to change. It just has to.

Again, I can't emphasize enough individuals that have information about tampering need to continue to come forward on that. There has to be consequences. Until there's consequences, then we'll get similar behavior.

Thanks for the question.

**Q. You alluded to this a little bit, but you and your fellow commissioners have spent countless hours in DC pushing for federal legislation. The SEC and Big Ten have come out against the legislation based on language in there that doesn't benefit them. How confident are you that you can get to some unanimity behind any sort of legislation among the conferences? Along those lines, the SEC in particular, there's been rumblings about, oh, we'll have self-governance instead, take our bowl and go home. Is there concern the other two conferences can do their own thing?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: I'm still optimistic that we can get something done in Congress. I am. When you look at the bill, 127 pages or so, I think we're in lockstep about 90 of those pages. There are some specific areas that we don't have alignment in.

You got to work together and you got to collaborate, get to a happy medium. Maybe it's not perfect for either side, but you get to the middle ground that at the end will absolutely help stabilize college sports.

We have a responsibility to do that as commissioners. We just do. We have certainly first and foremost responsibility to our own schools. But then you have a responsibility to the greater good and the sustainability of college sports.

I know my fellow commissioners feel the same way. So we're getting closer. Yesterday I had a chance to be on a call with Senators Cantwell and Cruz. We're making some more ground with not only conferences but overall on both side of the aisle.

I remain hopeful. I still remain confident that we can get something done, because if we don't, it's all on us. That's our fault. It just is, because we're supposed to be the stewards of this thing called college sports. Whatever that looks like, however long we're in these roles, you want it to look better when you leave than when you first started. You have a responsibility to 550,000 young men and women that access higher education. It's made affordable by coming through college sports.

Was it a breaking away or something? Is that what you said?

**Q. Self-governance.**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Self-governance to me means no governance.

**Q. It seems like a lot of eggs are being placed in the basket of the Protect College Sports Act. What is the contingency plan if it does not get passed? Is it getting more legislation, like gathering yourselves to try and get somebody else to sponsor a bill and approach it differently? Is it collective bargaining? What are the other things being thrown around?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Good to see you. I know you had a nice friendship with Kenny. I was thinking about you and thinking about the Louisville community and all that Kenny has meant. Glad to see you here.

So this is our last hope relative to getting some help from Congress. I don't know that I could share, you know, what does that look like beyond if we're not able to get some help there, because I don't think anybody wants to go in that direction just yet. We are truthfully working as hard as we can to make this thing work.

I don't know how much more disrupted college sports could be, but we would enter that ecosystem if we can't get something done.

Thank you.

**Q. Regarding the new five-year rule, you mentioned that the lawsuits you find disheartening. How concerned with you those could throw a monkey wrench this summer? The five-year rule is good for student-athletes, giving them a fifth year to play. How concerned are you the high school threats in the future, fewer roster spots?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Common sense to me is something that we can all use a little bit more of, including the commissioner.

Having five years to play seems really fair for a student-athlete.

I have daughters and another son that is going to play college sport. It's entwined in my personal life, my family.

Five years, beginning your 19th birthday, allowing you to play till 24, where the old model was an 18-to-22-year window. That has to be upheld. That has to be the foundational piece of how we move forward from an eligibility standpoint.

It's never been more attractive to be student-athlete. It certainly has never been I think more difficult at times, the challenges, the rigors of going to school, getting a really good degree from an ACC institution, the pressure that the student-athletes feel competing at a high level.

There's NIL dollars for some of them, a few of them, depending on what subset you're looking at.

They're smart. They're really smart. Why wouldn't you want to stay around a little bit longer? If you can get another degree, an undergraduate degree, and a masters, have it paid for, have all of the services that you could ever want at a particular school, unlike any time in their life, no matter how rich they are or successful they are, they'll never have 500 people in an athletic department willing to do anything for them. And they're able to make some money. That's a good thing. Why would you want to leave?

But what it's unfair to is the group of student-athletes that are trying to access higher education, ie, high school students. So you have to have some common sense to this thing. It can't be a situation where a student-athlete comes in and they have an unlimited amount of time.

The five years seems really fair because if you get injured, if you lose a year, you still have the four years, which is still a nice period of time to be able to play your sports. If not, you get a chance to play all five years.

Where there's trouble in the system is if you tonight like the NCAA ruling or a conference ruling, that you're ineligible to play because you've exhausted that eligibility, you've played too much, whatever the circumstances are. You just go to the local courthouse in whatever community that school is, it's going to be hard for a judge to not take the side of a student-athlete, an 18- 19- 20- 22-year-old. I get it. But that becomes a problem.

If we can get this piece of legislation that would codify that, 19 years, 24, we think we can even do it without this piece of legislation, but we'll see if it holds up in court, that would help us.

It will take care of the current student-athletes, but it will allow the package of these young kids in high school that want to do the same thing that our current student-athletes and student-athletes that have graduated have been able to do. I'm big on that.

We'll have exceptions. If you go on a Mormon mission, religious exceptions, pregnancy, military duty, you have to have a few exceptions. It needs to be as outlined and clear as possible so there is no misinterpretations.

I don't blame a student-athlete for wanting to get another year of eligibility no matter what the circumstance is. But as it's done in our conference, sometimes you have to go against that. I don't like that. I don't like going against student-athletes, but I did in the springtime with one of our student-athletes because I just didn't feel like another year of eligibility was appropriate.

**Q. There's provisions in the PCSA about essentially freezing realignment. What is the ACC's thoughts on that? Are there plans for not retention of our current members but a growth within the conference?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: Appreciate the question.

Here is what I would say very directly, and I've said this multiple times. I've always wanted this conference to be a place where schools want to be, not that they have to be. So I'll leave it at that. I feel very good about what we've done over the course of the last five and a half years. We strengthened ourselves during that time of movement, conference expansion with three great schools in two new markets.

Again, I want people to want to be in the ACC, not forced to be in the ACC.

**Q. You've referenced enhancing the replay review that you let viewers listen in on last year. What does that mean when you talk about building on it? Sheer volume of more games? More you can do with technology to pull back the curtain, so to speak?**

COMMISSIONER PHILLIPS: You'll have to watch and find out (smiling).

I would say we're going to be doing a lot of the same things. We got I think a couple new elements to it. It's really about volume and having more of our games be administered that way, which I think it's cool as a flat-out sportsfan, to see how those decisions are made.

Just really proud we took that step. I think a couple other conferences are going to do it.

The one place that I have never stepped foot in, and I'll never step foot in, is that replay booth during any of our games. But I'd love to sometime, but I'm not going to do that as commissioner because it just captures you (smiling). You want to hear what's happening, why that decision on the field is either going to be upheld or overturned. I hope we can have maybe even a few more camera angles that will help us because we want to get it right.

I do want you to watch; I want you to watch more often.

Appreciate this group. Again, I know I'll see a bunch of you throughout the next few days. I know you could be a lot of other places right now, especially in the summer. I'm really, really grateful you showed up here at the 2026 ACC Football Kickoff.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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