

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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NC State Wolfpack

Coach Dave Doeren

Duke Scott

CJ Bailey

Isaiah Shirley

Press Conference



how things should look. If you want to be in that conversation at the end of the year, a lot of things have to go your way and you got to make a lot of those things go your way yourself.

There's a lot of self-inflicted things in football. As you all know, it's a contact sport, it's a rough and rugged sport. You can lose players from time to time to injuries. But you can also beat yourself in a lot of ways.

That's the one thing that this team is really excited about, is going out and earning our opportunity to be special at the end of the season, trying to keep that week to week to week to week. I think that's one of the hardest things when competitor, is being the best you can be every single competition.

Coming off of a real high win, coming off of a real tough loss, it doesn't matter. The next one matters the most. Trying to keep these staff, coaches, trainers, strength coaches, nutritionists, players, you name it, in that mode of one at a time.

It's an awesome place. If you haven't been to game day at the Carter, you're missing out; 27 straight packed houses, and we can't wait to get back into our stadium with our fans. And the city of Raleigh, I mean, what a year with the Hurricanes. So proud of Coach Brind'Amour and their team, the city, just how we celebrated safely. That city partied its butt off and had fun. The enthusiasm and the spirit.

They can't wait for football to start. Our crowd is antsy and excited that we're playing in Virginia instead of Brazil because they get to be a part of it now and go tailgate.

But this is a team that has a lot of new parts. There's 50 new players. We'll talk about them as you ask questions. Some unique pieces of it. I know CJ will talk bit, as well. When you lose good players, you have an opportunity as a coach to go recruit good players. So we lost some and we've added some.

Some of 'em come in with lifelong relationships where the chemistry him and Jojo Trader have or CJ and Davion

DAVE DOEREN: You guys are going to be really sad that you give me a microphone (smiling).

Four score and 14 years ago I got hired here (laughter). I came in really excited about running this program, and still am. Since that time the landscape of college football has changed a lot just within our own state. I think each school I go up against has had a minimum of three different head coaches at each university, and some of them more than that. I think that says a lot about what we've built.

As media, a lot of times your job is to talk about what we don't do well. Today I get to talk about what we do do well.

I think having staying power, being a consistent winner. Won the second most number of games in the ACC in the last six years. We've won the second most number of conference games and non-conference games.

With that being said, I'm sick of being second. These guys know that. We're here to do more. That's what drives us. It's the competitive spirit of winning, the brotherhood that comes along with that that's so special.

It's a tough business. I mean, it's not an equal lineup anymore from conference to conference, from school to school. Some people have more of this, some people have more of that.

What we have is a bunch of guys that have huge edge. They're tough. I have so much respect for the leadership of our team, the way these guys have bought in to running the accountability part of what we do.

It's not just the coaches that get on these guys anymore, they get on each other and lead the way when it comes to

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Gause have. It's unique because they grew up playing Pop Warner football together.

Yeah, you lost a good player, but we've added a good one and they've known each other longer. That's how it goes.

We have a lot of talent coming back. It's about proving who you are on that field. I think that's the thing I'm most excited about is seeing the work that these guys have put in, getting on the grass with them, putting it all together, and in short time because we play week zero, as you guys know. It's right around the corner.

This is such an incredible opportunity for this football team. We're one of two schools in the ACC that can say they have a third-year starter at quarterback. As rare as it is to have a head coach for 14 years, it's just as rare now to have a quarterback for three. It says a lot about this young man. I think it also says a lot about our culture.

For him to want to be in it means it's right for him. Makes me feel good because it is an exclamation point that we are doing right things for people, giving them opportunities to grow into the best versions of who they are.

That's why we do this as coaches. It's not for the money. Most of us got into college football - at least I did - making \$400 a month, and my rent was \$390. It wasn't because I was making money. It was loving the fact that I was helping guys get better at that sport, get better as men. I still get to do that. I get to do it with really good people.

From the staff to the players, I mean, I'm blessed to come to work at a place like I am, one of the greatest places to live in the country with a fan base that's just crazy, crazy good. We love that they show up. We love the night games. We're looking forward to our opener on 9/11 on a Friday night.

So many things to talk about. I could ramble on here for a long time, but I don't want to because I want to get home. I'll open it up for any questions.

Q. There's meat on the bone has been an expression that you kind of stuck with for the 2026 season. What is still on that bone and how do you clean it off this fall?

DAVE DOEREN: Last night, remember? Yeah, we went to the Crunkelton last night. You guys ever been there? Great steakhouse. They have tomahawk steak, big bone like this. You pick it up right at the end, take the knife and clean it off. That's the best part of the steak if you didn't know that.

It's the same. Being second, there's meat on the bone and as a position coach and as a head coach at the previous school, I've been on several teams now. Every school I've worked at, even as a player, won a championship, a conference championship. I was part of a National Championship. It's what I came here to do.

I know that this school can reach that goal and those heights, so it drives me. I want to put this place, always wanted to leave NC State better than I found it, for sure. But I want to put it at a place where it's special for everybody for a long, long time. That's what this is about.

It's definitely a driving force for me.

Q. I want to talk about the way your season ended last year. You rebounded nicely by winning out the way you did. When you look at the fact that you said a mouthful during your opening statement where you don't want to finish second anymore, how much would it be important for you to not only win an ACC title but get to 10 wins? Talk about some of the new guys you brought in that will take a 7-5 record to get it to where you want to go.

DAVE DOEREN: What's the question?

Q. The question is, how much progress have you made during the off-season to try to reach some of your goals to improve the football team from just mediocre to a lot better, elite status in the ACC because you obviously have a loaded conference?

DAVE DOEREN: Yeah, I think we've made a lot of progress. In the second year of our system defensively I think for those of you that were around our team, you know defensively we went through a lot last year.

It's one thing when you change schemes from a 3-3 to a 3-4, have a new coordinator, new language, new players, then to go through what we did with Coach Eliot and his family and his loss, it was very challenging. Then to have nine defensive starters injured throughout the season, very challenging.

Fast forward that, we got a lot better on defense the last five weeks. There was a lot of momentum. We recruited well on that side of the football. I'm super excited about the returners we have and the additions.

The biggest area of improvement, to answer your question, defensively is our pass-rush. We have to get quarterbacks getting rid of the football before they want to, we got to have more sacks, more forced fumbles, more interceptions because of pass-rush.



We've added some pieces that we're excited to see. That's what training camp is going to be about, it's going to be about what Harvey Dyson is going to be like. We saw him in the spring, sample what he is, but fall camp is a lot different than spring football because you're on the field every day.

Really excited about the competitive depth in the secondary. Last year in the Pitt game we have four freshmen playing in that game. I think we had eight different starters throughout the year in the back end because of injuries. They're all back. So now you have a lot of competitive depth. So those things are important.

Last year I think we went into a lot of games thinking we're going to have to outscore people. That's not normal for us. This has been a program that's played really, really good defense over the years. Getting back to where we're not just out scoring people but we're stopping people and when we need to lean on a stop, we can.

We've added a lot of players. If there's one in particular you want to ask about, happy to talk about him.

Q. Looking back at this off-season you gave Duke the No. 1 jersey pretty quickly. How conclusive was that? What made him worthy of wearing the No. 1 jersey?

DAVE DOEREN: It's being that represents the totality of who we are. Obviously he's got to be a really good player, which we all know Duke is a really good player, okay?

He's got to be a guy in the off-season that's a grinder, that just kills it in the off-season program, which he's on the freak list, right? The guy's gifted as an athlete, as a weight room guy.

He's got to be a guy that treats people with respect. He's a leader, cared about in the locker room. He's got to be a guy that handles his academic load the right way. Really a total representation of a student-athlete.

It really wasn't hard, to be honest. Sat down and thought about a lot of guys on the team. It's really obvious when you get to know Duke. Duke doesn't talk a lot. Getting to know Duke is hard sometimes, right?

He's a special young man. I know he's going to wear the number well. He's earned the opportunity to wear it. I know that he'll go out and play well for us in that number.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, you and CJ can switch spots and we'll spend some time with Mr. Bailey.

Q. I've had the pleasure of watching you grow as I've covered the ACC throughout your career. What do you feel has improved from your first year at NC State as you prepare to enter your next, what is it, third season coming into the Wolfpack?

CJ BAILEY: I feel like a lot has improved since I first got into college, first season in college. I can honestly say like my first year I was winging it, I was just out there making plays, being an athlete. I really didn't know much about the game, to be honest with you.

Going into that next off-season I learned a lot. It changed my whole perspective on everything about football, defense and everything like that. I learnt a lot. From now, everything is slow for me right now. Everything is moving fluent. Shoot, I got (indiscernible) with the whole offense, the whole team, and everybody believes in me. I'm just ready to make some plays for NC State.

Q. You just heard your coach talk about how he's tired of finishing second place. What are you going to do as an individual and leader?

CJ BAILEY: You know what, what we need is an alpha leader. That's what I am right now. That's what I got to be for us to win more games. I have to be consistent every day, come in the building with the same mindset every day, which is I want to win an ACC championship. We want to win an ACC championship, pour into my guys every day, like I've been doing.

Taking that next step into my leadership, growing it even more. Every year, every day it's got to grow even better for the program.

Q. When you look at going through your history, your journey, collegiately, quarterbacks have been jumping into the portal and finding other homes every other season. You've stayed committed to NC State? Why the Wolf Pack, one goal mentality?

CJ BAILEY: NC State is a different place. It's a different place for me. It's home for me.

Throughout my whole process of the recruiting or whatever the case may be, they were loyal to me. Coach Doeren was loyal to me. Coach Rupert, they poured into me. It's only right I give it back to those guys.

Sometimes I often think, even though it was off-season, I was thinking like, Why would I go anywhere else to learn a new offense, build a new relationship with other people when I got a good home right now, right here? They going to prepare me for the next level.

I'm ready to win with those guys, so...

Q. You've kind of built your own little south Florida pipeline, childhood friends joining you at NC State. What has it been like having some old friends joining you on the team now? What does that do for the team now and what does that do for the team chemistry moving forward?

CJ BAILEY: Yeah, it's very important because I grew up with those guys since seven, eight years old. Like that connection, that bond is very different.

Going into that spring practice that first day, it was like everything was clicking. We all was on the same page already, and it's our first practice back together. That's big. It's going to help us put more points on the board, especially on the offensive side. It's going to help just keep everybody with each other.

That brotherhood is big. We need each other, especially throughout this whole year. That's the most important thing for us to win, go to the ACC championship, staying together through thick and thin. There's going to be a lot of bumps in the road, ups and downs throughout the season. As long as we stay with each other, we going to be fine, we'll be a hundred. It's simple.

Q. You had arguably your best game against Georgia Tech. How were you able to dominate Georgia Tech the way you did? How big was that for you and the team?

CJ BAILEY: It was very important for the team. Like going into that game, we had a really good game plan. My coaches prepared us as perfect. We had a good game plan, especially on the offensive side. We just dominated the offense. We scored a lot of points, put a lot of points on the board.

Like I give a big shut out to coach Oprah. His game plan was spot on. He knew what we wanted, we knew what we wanted, we just took advantage of it. We went after it.

Q. Obviously there's been a lot of new faces that have been added. Have there been any guys that have emerged early on this off-season that you're excited to play with?

CJ BAILEY: Yes, sir. I'm just going to speak on the whole team. Of course, Davion Dozier from App State, he's been tremendous. If you watch this spring, he had a great spring. He going to make a lot of plays for us.

Chase Bond is coming along, he's been really good for us on the defensive side.

Brian Nelson is stepping it up.

We got guys that's not talked about enough. You're going to see them play this year. They're going to make a lot of plays for us and help us win.

Q. Coach talked about Rod Brind'Amour and the Hurricanes championship team. What lessons have you learned from their tight-knit culture? What do you look to adopt in the NC State locker room?

CJ BAILEY: Like, with teams around, especially Carolina, like they locked in. Like they stay together. They stay together. That's one of the things that we try to incorporate every day with our team, being together.

Like I said earlier, that brotherhood is very important. As long as we stay together, as long as we keep doing what we doing, we going to be great.

THE MODERATOR: CJ, thank you. You and Duke can switch spots. We'll take questions for Duke.

Q. You were honored with that No. 1 jersey for this upcoming season. How much does that mean to you? What's the significance behind that for you?

DUKE SCOTT: It means everything to me. Like getting honor, getting that coveted honor as No. 1, it's something that I take pride into since I got here on campus. My grades, my work ethic, how I lead the team. Being able to, like, represent my team in that way, being that face, it just means everything to me. I'm extremely excited about it.

Q. I believe in high school 4500 rushing yards, 66 touchdowns. What you have already done in your career, how you've shown yourself, what we can expect to see after everything you've already shown?

DUKE SCOTT: I always plan on staying true to myself, stay the same person. Regardless if that's college or high school, I come the same person every day. I come with the same work ethic, same mindset. That's just to dominate the day. That translates to game day. I try to dominate the opponent in front of me. That's what you can expect this year.

Q. You power clean 405 pounds. You boast a 575 pound squat, and you you've run a 4.35 40 dash. How do you maintain those numbers? How does that translate to your performance on out onto the field?

DUKE SCOTT: Coach Thunder is great. He holds us to a standard, that a standard is never going to get dropped for anybody.

I make sure to be the best man I can be every day. I came with the same mindset, that's to work as hard as I can every day. That leads to incremental improvement every day.

Q. When you were asked to step in for Hollywood Smothers last year in the Georgia Tech game, one of the biggest questions that media members had was what would the running game look like without him. All you did was put up 200 yards and some pretty long runs, including a 60-yard touchdown. Did that build up some momentum and confidence in you to be the lead back and take over as that workhorse?

DUKE SCOTT: 100%. It definitely built my confidence, made me understand I can do this against everybody. Georgia Techs was coming in unbeaten, No. 8 ranked. Let me know you're here, too. This is the same thing you've been doing, it's just football at the end of the day.

Having that confidence, having Hollywood in my corner telling me, You're ready for this, you've been ready, you played football, this is nothing. It all just helped propel me to have a good I guess end of the year.

Q. Isaiah, you're a four-year player at NC State. It's kind of rare. Talk about your NC State journey, and coming back.

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: Yeah, so being here for four years, going into my fourth year has meant a lot to me. It's really come down to three basic things: I wanted to come somewhere where I could grow my faith, play football at a high level, be around good people.

That's what I've gotten and continue to get at NC State. To answer your question, that's why I've stayed. I believe in what we came here for. Guys back here are trying to do something special here. We have all the resources and all the great people to do so.

Q. There was a lot of doubt about the defense, what it would look like coming into this season based on last season. There seems to be a lot of confidence inside the locker room. What does it mean to you to hear the members of the team and locker room so openly talking about the pass-rush is coming along, defense is improved?

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: It's extremely encouraging, right? You want your teammates to believe in you. When they believe

in us, CJ, Duke and those boys were talking about, hey, the defense, we know you're going to step it up this year. We want to be the backbone. We want to get back of playing our brand of hard, tough, together defense together. We want to be the backbone of the team. Whenever things go wrong, we can punt the ball if something happens, we can punt the ball, we know we're getting the ball right back.

That's the mentality we want to take. That's the mentality we're trying to get back to. I think we have the right guys on the defensive side of the ball from the D-line, to the linebackers, to the DBs that have that mentality of wanting to be the reason that we stop guys and win games.

I'm excited to see what we're going to do. I know we're going to go out there and play our brand. I can't wait for it.

Q. This year pretty big opportunity for you after playing in more of a rotational player role the last few years. How big of an opportunity was this for you? How much have you felt like you need to step up into this leadership role?

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: No, exactly. Appreciate your question.

Getting to come here and representing NC State, that means a whole lot to me, probably more than Coach Doeren knows. I appreciate being able to do that.

Like you said, being a rotational player, getting some experience to play, now it's time to step up and lead the team.

Like I said, me and Duke are similar in personalities, believe it or not. I'm a little bit quieter in terms of the set of like talking to people. But it's been good. I've been able to speak up and really feel like what I have to say matters.

Like you guys have said, four years I've been around this program, seen what's been good and what's been bad. That's why I'm super excited to be able to go out me, play some good football with my teammates, also be able to serve these young guys, hold me accountable, this I can hold them accountable. That's what I'm excited to do.

Q. Obviously football takes a lot of energy. How do you stay prepared and fueled? How do you plan on doing for the days to come?

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: I appreciate that question. Yeah, I think it's a full-time job, right? You got to worry about your hydration all the time. People that go the whole day without drinking water, I just can't do it. It's from sunup to sundown, I'm preparing my body for the next workout.



When we have a workout, as soon as I'm done, I'm hydrating, eating, stretching, getting in the cold tub. If I want a little bit extra work, I got to get that in, too, recover even harder.

It's a full-time job. What I do is just stay focused, set reminders on my phone to eat snacks, drink more water. Ultimately you're trying to build edges. In football, the margin of error is like this. Every edge you can get...

Q. You were one of four male athletes in the finalist for the 2026 Arthur Ashe Junior Sports Scholar Award. The only football player amongst the finalists. That's pretty special.

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: Thank you. Is there a question or do you want me to speak on it?

Q. Just discuss.

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: You want me to speak on it?

Q. Yes.

ISAIAH SHIRLEY: Okay, cool (laughter).

Yeah, it's a huge honor. I want to shoutout Ally, she's one of the people that works for us in case, student academics. She nominated me for that award. I appreciate her for doing that.

I'm grateful to God for giving me the opportunity to come here and be able to serve others and do well in school, be able to have something like that. Also get to play some good football, be able to get nominated for something like that. I couldn't be more thankful to the people that decided to do that and vote me for that. I'm just grateful.

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