

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 16, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Syracuse Orange

Coach Fran Brown

Steve Angeli

Antoine Deslauriers

Demetres Samuel Jr.

Press Conference

FRAN BROWN: I'm very thankful for the opportunity that we have to come out and compete this year. Thankful to be the head football coach at Syracuse University. Means a lot. Thankful for my family, for all our fans, faculty and staff. Most important, we can't forget, thankful for the players. Without them there wouldn't be football. They've been working their butts off this entire off-season.

We got a lot to go out and prove for each other, with each other. I think we're a committed bunch of guys that care about each other. We're playing for the right reasons. We understand our mission, our purpose. These guys just love to compete and work hard. I'm thankful for the opportunity we got to go out and represent our school and our culture.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start Q&A.

Q. You lean on faith a lot. In these last couple seasons for you as a head coach, what have you taken as your biggest learning lessons that you build upon personally to lead this program?

FRAN BROWN: To have backup quarterbacks (smiling).

Honestly, just to stay yourself, stay grounded in your faith. I think I become more intentional of really understanding and knowing it. My whole life I was raised as a Christian. That meant a lot to me. But I didn't study and know everything about the Bible. I've been able to really, like, dive into the Bible and learn so many stories that have been going on and adversity that all those great people had went through. I understand and know that you go through adversity in life.

I would always tell the players last year, the best way to



face adversity is head on. If you don't know what it looks like, just watch me. I'm not ducking no wreck. Whatever comes my way. I've been through so much in my life, I'm very thankful for the opportunity I had to compete in the season last year, the previous one before that.

I think God knows who I am, knows my heart. He switched year one and year two for me. He knew I couldn't handle that year one. He understood I was a little bit more mature and seasoned to go through that through year two. Also our quarterback Steve, the freshmen we brought in, they were mature enough to understand and know who they were following and what they were supposed to be doing. That's why we got two sophomores here that play for us so young, but they're leaders already.

Everything we went through was lessons for us. I'm just happy I went through it with them, to be honest. I'm happy we got to grow together, our relationships are stronger. Going into my third year, I'm just thankful for these dudes, that I got the right players behind me to push, to be able to go out and show who we really are.

Q. You talked about growth, about the right players. What excites you about this season?

FRAN BROWN: The leadership. But also the followers. We learned that our culture is set by the followers. I think our leaders, they know me, we understand each other. They're not afraid to come and tell me when they don't like something. They won't just do it the whole time. They'll come and say, Coach, that shouldn't be that way, we don't feel that way. Makes it better for us so there's not different chatter in the locker room.

They understand NIL is important, something that has to happen. It helps provide for their families. It helps provide for all across the country. They know that's the way of life. They're men. They're not stressing and being upset about what other men are doing, what comes about.

That helps also, those things of that nature, right?

Q. I want to commend the kind of culture you created at Syracuse. It's fun to watch inside and outside. A lot

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

of your players do, too. I had a chance to speak with Zach Rice. When he transferred to Syracuse, he was huge about the culture. Can you talk about his development on the O-line. You have a lot of O-line prospects. How important has that been for you?

FRAN BROWN: First and foremost, how you doing?

Q. I'm doing good.

FRAN BROWN: Good.

Zach Rice is doing a really good job. He'll truly help compete. He's in there competing this year to try to be a starter. He'll definitely play regardless. I think he's a great kid. I think he follows his faith. He has bought into our culture. He understands what it takes to work hard. His new offensive line coach and him have a really good relationship.

I think that Zach understands and sees it's bigger than just football. He's growing in his faith, as a man, his education. He's learning financial literacy at an all-time high and really fast. When he goes out in the real world, he'll be successful.

He understands and knows it's a long season. It's not how you start, it's how you finish.

Q. What part of DART is hardest to preserve when talent, attention, and expectations increase?

FRAN BROWN: Repeat that. What part of DART is the hardest to follow?

Q. Preserve.

FRAN BROWN: Preserve.

I don't think it's nothing really hard. Same guy every day. I'm the same person all the time. Doesn't matter who you are, good you are. First All-American, came from Notre Dame. Educated, got his degree. This kid is a super freak athlete. I treat them all the same, just talking to them. It doesn't matter. Everything's the same. Doesn't matter how talented you are, what you don't, do have. I think everybody is treated fair. Let me rephrase that. Everybody is treated fair but not the same.

Accountability will be held, but I can't coach all three of them the same. They're all different guys. I have different conversations with all of them, but we can be talking about the same thing. I may be able to cuss Antoine out, because Antoine's mental is just like crazy; but with Meech, I'm going to have a personal conversation with him and

make sure he remembers his why. With Steve, it will be something else that I'll tell him of what you're looking to do, does that look the way it's supposed to look.

So all of us have a good relationship, I'm still DART with all of them, but you got to know your players to understand how each and every one of them need to be treated. Our overall culture has to be followed, but you have to have a personal relationship to truly instill into all of the guys.

Does that answer what you asked?

Q. Yes.

FRAN BROWN: Okay.

Q. Being a relationship-based person, when you look at NIL and the transfer portal, the constant movement in and out of a program, how have you tried to instill that culture that you're building and to have that family and to have some type of preservation?

FRAN BROWN: You got to get the right guys. I think that it's important that I'm involved with every one of them because I have a different kind of vision and a mindset than most of the other coaches. I know what I want and what I want to see.

I think you want to get closer to your faith to be able to come play with us, you have to want to get closer with your faith. You got to want to get an education, be a good person. Your heart has to want to be pure. We're all naturally selfish people, right? That's just naturally what comes. But when you want that and you understand and know that we're all going to get paid, certain things we're going to have to do, things that we want to do, it works itself out.

With the transfer portal, I'm happy about it. We got Steve Angeli from the transfer portal. He's one of the better leaders on the team. But you got to know what guys to go get. Like Antoine, everybody tried to take 'Toine. Guys were trying to take Demetres from right under our nose. But those guys stayed because you go and pick the right guys where we build the right relationship. It's about life, right? When those guys all get married, I'll be at their wedding. When they have children, I'll know that from them, not heard it through the grapevine.

The relationship's important. It's the culture and picking the right guys. We didn't always pick the right guys the year before last. The first year I came in, I picked them all. This year it was important that I picked them, but then they picked them. It wasn't just me. They told me who they wanted to play because of official visits. Who you're

around, allow them to drop the shield, and let's find out who they are. All the guys that came in now, they completely bought into the culture day one. As soon as they got there, they were ready to work.

Q. You were a heck of a player at Western Carolina. Your DC there was Geoff Collins. When you look back at your time there, what lessons that you learned there shaped you?

FRAN BROWN: Before you get into that, you tell them on defense I was a heck of a player at Western again. That sound real good. Tell them how I was hitting that corner (smiling).

No, he taught me to be tough. That's where a lot of the bag drills, extra work afterwards, practice, coming in, watching tape. Geoff Collins is amazing. I love him in that role forever. Rest in peace to my head football coach Kent Briggs, just died. He just passed away a couple weeks ago. He's been fighting cancer. He beat it, it came back, it came back again. I am the man I am because of Western Carolina. I'm a Catamount. I have that tatted on my arm.

It changed my life. It was a culture shock day one, but it was what was needed for me to be where I'm at today. Because of Western Carolina, because of coming to the south, it helped shape me to become the head football coach at Syracuse University.

Q. You faced some criticism earlier this year for letting Calvin Russell be on the field with the team practicing while rehabbing his Achilles. Can you talk about someone not from that area, the sense of belonging, the sense of belonging, and how his recovery is going?

FRAN BROWN: I think I'm responsible for the complete student-athlete, but also their mental. Calvin was on a scooter just catching the ball. He wasn't throwing anything. So should I just let him sit over there in the corner by his-self? Right? I think mental health is serious. It's a huge issue in college football. You're responsible for that.

Just because he's hurt doesn't mean his college career stops, you wait till he comes back. I think these guys on the stage, Calvin Russell, those guys were hit with a double dosage from God. They got to keep working, be active. That's what they feed off of, working and constantly doing stuff.

It was important we keep him involved and keep him going. If you see what Calvin is doing right now, you say maybe Coach wasn't crazy, that needed to happen. That's the kind of kid he is, to have him in the mix. I'd rather have him

in the mix than being somewhere feeling he's not wanted or needed just because he's injured.

When Steve was injured, we were around each other all the time. Antoine needed to wait out in the spring. So did Meech. I'm responsible for their mental health, right? I'm responsible to make sure that they know that I love them and they love themselves, right? I think if you don't do that, then that's going to mess the kids up.

Q. You're already a winner, you're winning at life, all the players that are coming here are winning at life because you're top 1% of your profession in the world. How can you take that winning in life and progress it onto the field?

FRAN BROWN: Just get back there, hurry up and get done with this ACC meeting, get back to the workout tonight. That will help.

Just try to win that day. I don't know. I'm really a basic, simple, very direct. I'm just thankful, right? I get up, pray to my God. Nothing happens without our Lord and Savior. It's not me, right? It's something that He saw in me before I was even on this earth. Just something that He wants me to be able to do. I try to make sure I live out my purpose. I bring all the players closer, right?

I work really, really hard. I hate saying I, but I try to work really, really hard, so they understand it. They see me with my sons, not just Fran who is on the team, but they see me with my daughter, my wife. They see me doing extra community service work. They see me doing things that most head coaches won't do. I'm pulling the bags, pushing the prowlers. I go in the weight room, work out with them. I try to do as much as I possibly can so they can see it, so they can know work, right?

The only place success becomes before work is in the dictionary. That's who I am. A blue-collar guy. I was born by a 13-year-old young lady who had me. Imagine what that life was like before other boys coming right after us every two years.

So like all I know is work. That's what I'm about. I like work. I continue to work. I love to compete. I can't wait for us to get out there and compete 'cause I see all the things that you guys say. But I'm excited about that, to keep the same energy all the time, 'cause that energy will help us feed off of it. Don't switch it when things change.

Appreciate y'all. Thanks a lot.

THE MODERATOR: You and Steve can switch spots.



Q. You have a lot of new weapons at running back and wide receiver. You have guys stepping up at tight end, the versatility of the weapons you have. Fran talked about how you build relationships with each person. How have you worked to build the bridges with the new faces?

STEVE ANGELI: Yeah, I think the biggest thing for me being a leader on this team, being the quarterback of this team, is making sure guys know how much I care about them as a person before we get into the football aspect. You heard Coach Brown talk about it. The way he treats us, has a personal relationship with us, checking in on us, calling us, making sure we're doing good.

The biggest thing for me is making sure the guys get around me, we go to dinner, do things like that, to have a relationship.

On the field the work takes care of itself. Our brand of work at Syracuse, we work our tails off. We make sure every day we're in there putting in the right amount of work, extra work, early mornings. When you get those new guys around, before they even came here, we had to make sure they fit in with our culture, know how to work, because that's our standard.

Q. How has recovery been since tearing your ACL last season? What are your expectations and goals for this coming season personally and with the team?

STEVE ANGELI: Yeah, I tore my Achilles last year. It's been a tough, long road to recovery. It's been a long nine, ten months. I'm 100% now. I feel great. Been out running around, getting into drills, doing everything we can.

Really just looking forward to the season coming up. Obviously last year is the way it went. But that's not what we're not focused on. We're focused on moving forward. We have a great team, great coaching staff. Can't thank my athletic training staff enough, our strength staff. Everyone that has been a part of my journey through rehab, it really takes a village.

Like Coach said, when I was hurt, he was checking in on me every day, coming down to see me, making sure I'm involved, giving me a task so I can feel I'm still committed to the team, doing things when I'm not able to physically participate.

From the past nine to ten months, I fell in love with Syracuse, fell in love with the university, everyone that's been part of my journey. I couldn't be more grateful, more thankful. From Coach Brown I've been able to get closer to my faith, closer to God, starting every day with a prayer,

making sure I'm thankful for everything I've gone through.

Q. Transferring in, how has your leadership changed, especially last season where you took a step back? How did your leadership process grow and develop?

STEVE ANGELI: I think you find different ways to communicate with people. As coaches or players, you really want to go out there and show people, you want to lead by example, do things physically.

But you kind of have to find a way to speak to people with a different way. You either pull them aside or you get them after a practice, after a game, watch some extra film with them. You have to have impact through your words more than your action during that time.

You spend more time with guys off the field, kind of the energy and the heightened awareness is down a little bit. You're able to figure out what makes those guys think, what gets them going, how do you motivate guys when you're not out there yourself showing them what to do.

It really helped me grow as a leader to be able to get in that room with them different, get in different aspects of their mind, being able to figure out what makes them go and how to motivate them.

THE MODERATOR: Steve, you and Antoine can switch spots. First question...

Q. Antoine, you heard Coach say there was a lot of other schools that wanted you, but you stayed committed to Syracuse. What is it about this team with a new defensive coordinator that made you want to be a part of this family?

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: Well, I think to begin with, it's not something that made me want to stay at Syracuse, right? It's everything that didn't make me want to leave.

So Syracuse, ever since I got here, it's been great to me, right? Great connection with my coaches, Coach Fran, and I think we got a great relationship going on. Ever since I got here, it's been we're on the same page about where we're heading, our plan, and the vision that we have for the Syracuse football program.

You mentioned our new DC who just got here, Coach V.K., and I couldn't be more privileged to be around somebody that knows so much about football, right? He's extremely knowledgeable, great teacher, and he's bringing that new wave of energy that we needed in order to be a strong defense this year.

Q. You played your high school ball under coach Derek White. Can you talk about your experience with him, how he was a mentor for you? What lessons have you taken from him into your collegiate career?

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: For anybody that knows Coach White knows what type of person he is. He's a down-to-earth person, great personality, great with connections with his players, right? I'm just thankful for him. I believe that he had a huge impact on my career at this point in allowing me to become a college football player, right?

I think making that move from Canada to Georgia was probably one of the most important parts of my process and my development simply because I learned American football, right? Just him always looking out for me, making sure I was good. Moving to another country is a big step.

I'm just thankful for him for what he did and how he helped me get to where I'm at today.

Q. What has stood out so far about Keyshawn Johnson and Chris D'Appolonia? How have you been trying to get them acclimated to the culture of Syracuse?

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: I'll start out with Chris.

I don't think I've had to help him get involved in the Syracuse community and team, right? I think he fitted right when he came in. He's a great person on and off the field. Extremely knowledgeable player, too.

To be honest, it's quite the other way around. When he came in, he already knew the defense at Toledo that Coach V.K. was running. He knew how we would play football on the defensive side of the ball. I just have a lot of confidence in who he is.

Keyshawn, we're really close, too. He's a big part of our D-line. I think he's going to have a great impact for us on the defensive line. He's also extremely knowledgeable, super athletic guy. Yeah, I just like who he is as a person overall.

Q. I had an opportunity to talk to Coach Brown after the Miami game. I was impressed, he wins with class and loses with dignity. When you have an opportunity to play for a guy like this, who builds relationships the way he does, do you think his example resonates through the team and even makes you not only better as a player but better as a person?

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

Q. With Coach Brown, his demeanor, the way he treats his players with relationships, become a better player and a person, him winning with class and losing with dignity, do you think this is something you can build on not only as a player but as a person, sustainable success?

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I just think it speaks to who he is as a person and his character, right, that he's trying to teach us how to carry ourselves.

You say losing with dignity, right?

Q. Winning with class, losing with dignity.

ANTOINE DESLAURIERS: Exactly. I think it's all about character, right? You hear him talk about his relationship with players. I just believe that he prepares us for the rest of our lives, right? It's just always some knowledge that we can keep with us and apply to the rest of our lives beyond football. I'm just thankful for everything that he's teaching us and how to act as men.

THE MODERATOR: You and Mr. Samuel can switch spots. First question...

Q. We know you play on both sides of the ball. If you had to play yourself, which side do you think would beat the other and why?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: I probably say corner. I feel like I'm more dominant at corner 'cause it's just like I feel like I'm more fluent at that position. Receiver is where I have fun. I just happen to be God-gifted to have the talent to play it. But I think corner, so...

Q. You're from Brevard County, which produces a lot of great athletes. What does it mean representing Brevard County and bringing what you learned from there to Syracuse?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: It's great. I got a lot of family who grew up playing with Brevard County: Reggie Nelson, Joe Cohen, Marcus Maye. It's an awesome opportunity growing up, being able to watch them guys. They let me work out with them, take me on for experience. It's kind of like a different feeling to be able to have the kids that's back in Brevard be up to me, from the same area as me, you can make it out.

Q. Coach has talked about relationship-based interactions as well as building this culture. When you're in the weight room, who's lifting heavier?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Secondly, in an ever-changing era of college football, how important is that relationship-based culture in motivating you guys?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: Who's lifting heavier? If it's bench, he'll probably lift heavier than me. He got old man strength (laughter). But anything lower body, no, he can't mess with me.

I feel like your relationship with your head coach and coaches in general is very important. Those are the people you have to see every day. Nine times out of ten you're seeing your coaches more than your family because you're here with them every day. I think it's very important to relate and talk to them, have a relationship with them where you can feel comfortable enough to go and talk to them about anything.

Q. How have you seen Chris Peal develop and grow as a leader?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: He is trying to wrap up his last year of playing. I feel like he's coming along great. He's really taking hold of the group. He's one of the more mature, older guys, being in college football a little bit longer than us. He likes to show us little new techniques, little new knowledgeable things for us to be better. He wants to push everybody to get better. I think he's a great big brother to look up to.

Q. Are we still going to see you try to play receiver this year?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: Yes, sir (smiling).

Q. How does this defense plan to make more negative plays this season?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: Really just hunting the ball. I feel like Coach V.K.'s scheme that he brought with him from Toledo gives us a chance to go play ball, be ourselves. I feel like being able to go dominate and understand what we have to do is going to lead us to play free.

Q. You have a track background in high school, ran the 100 meter, 200 meter dash. I assume you're probably the fastest player on the team. If somebody could compete with you evenly on the team, who would that be?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: We actually have a lot of fast players. We have a couple. I'd probably say Chris Peal, Tyshawn Russell. What is Cam's last name? Cam Hairston.

Q. Not Javon, not Javon.

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: Not Javon (laughter). I'd probably say them guys. If it's out of us four, but you know...

Q. As a two-way player, do you watch film on yourself from the same perspective as if you're watching somebody else to get better? If not, how do you go about developing yourself on both sides of the ball?

DEMETRES SAMUEL JR.: Absolutely. I think you kind of have to 'cause I also like to watch other people, too, to influence my craft. But I think if you don't watch yourself, it's easier for other people to pick up on tendencies that you do and you don't do. I feel like being able to attack the film room, noticing what I've did in certain games, certain areas of my game, help me in other areas.

THE MODERATOR: Syracuse, thanks a bunch.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports