

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 16, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets
Coach Brent Key

Kyle Efford

Justice Haynes

Malachi Hosley

Press Conference



If you don't think that's driven myself in how we've built the roster, how we've trained, prepared, worked, built a staff to put the right men in place to be around these guys, then obviously you don't know me, and you don't know our program. Again, don't get me wrong, I'm very happy for what we've accomplished, I am. But I am not satisfied, not one bit.

We've done a lot in terms of rebuilding our staff, our roster to put ourselves in a position to now go out and continue to, you know, try to accomplish that mission. These guys up here are great examples of those two things of graduating our players, being successful in school, preparing for a life after football, and working every single day to win championships.

I'm just very fortunate to be here with these guys. I think we've got something special. I really do. I believe in these players. If I could fit the whole team on the plane, we would have fit the whole team, but I don't think the ACC would have allowed us to do that.

That's what our goals are. That's who we are. Our identity is not changing. Faces change. Names change. But the identity of Georgia Tech football is not going to change. We welcome any team to play us or us to play any team. I think we're one of, what, five teams playing 11 Power 4 games this year. Our out-of-conference schedule is as competitive as anybody in the country, as well with the ACC schedule that is as competitive as anyone in the league in an extremely competitive league.

We're super excited, and that's all I got for you.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Just really impressed by what you have done there at Georgia Tech in your time there, but you open the schedule with two really strong nonconference opponents in Colorado and Tennessee. Could you talk a little bit about kind of the mindset this summer and the players and the coaching staff to get ready for that slate?

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Georgia Tech into the room. We will start with Head Coach Brent Key offering a few words to start us.

BRENT KEY: Hey, what's up, everybody? Come on, we need some energy in here now. That midday right after lunch. We got to get some juice going in this room now.

Happy to be back here again. You know, appreciate Commissioner Phillips and what he's done to put this on and put it together. You know, it's kind of crazy. Fourth time, I think, being up here. It goes fast. It goes really fast.

But when I became the head coach three years ago, now going on my fourth year, you know, a lot of people say, well, that must be the highlight of what you've accomplished and what you've done. No, it's not. My goal wanting to be the head coach, my goal is to be the head coach of Georgia Tech and win championships. That's what our goal is.

Our goal is to graduate players and win championships. We've done a good job of progressing each year. You know, six wins, seven wins, nine wins. All right, but the mission is to win championships. That's not changing.

The great thing is from myself, President Cabrera, Ryan Alpert, our AD, who has been with us now a year, we share that mission. Like I said, we've made good progress, but we've not been able to accomplish that mission yet to this point. Last year was a good step in the right direction, winning nine games. But let's make no mistake: I am not happy about that, all right?



BRENT KEY: Yeah, no different than if we opened up with anybody in the league. Our mindset and focus doesn't change.

I don't have any corny slogans or sayings or anything like that to put together with the team. I'm sorry. I didn't bring that with me today. But we're going to show up every day and work our tails off so we can line up and go out and play the type of football that I envision us playing. That's regardless of who the opponent is.

But I think I said it last year, we would line up and play anybody any time, right? We're very excited about being able to play those opponents. The work has already been in play, and we're excited about them all.

Q. What stands out to you the most about Alberto Mendoza's game?

BRENT KEY: I don't know. He hasn't started a college football game yet. I mean, he throws it. I mean, he hasn't started a college game. You think I'm going to sit here and tell you everything he does and does well and doesn't do well? Come on, we just talked about the two people -- the people we opened up with.

He's smart, cerebral. Sees the whole field, can get us in and out of good plays, bad plays. He's accurate, has a good release. Mom and dad are great people.

Q. Coach, great to see you back here again. Everybody talks about what a motivator you are and how you do your thing in talent acquisition and whatnot. Onstage with you, you have a guy that was objectively running back one on a team that's won a national championship in the past few years, and you got him --

BRENT KEY: How many did they win last year?

Q. That's true. You got him to be your running back here. How did you do it? What went into that process of getting Justice out of the portal?

BRENT KEY: He went in the portal. I think we called him. Look, no different than anybody else. It's recruiting. It's relationships.

We've got two running backs here with us today, and I think we have, what, four more back at home we couldn't fit on the plane with us. If that tells you what type of team we're going to be. They all complement each other very well.

Excited to finally have Justice understand that Atlanta,

Georgia, is the greatest city on the face of the earth and to be there. I'm super excited about that entire group.

When you have a new quarterback -- and, look, quarterback is the most important position in all of sports, in my opinion, in all of sports. How do you take the pressure off of him? Right there. That's how you take the pressure off of him. Allow him to develop and grow as a quarterback. Doesn't matter how talented you are. There's firsts in everything at that position. That's on us as coaches to make sure we don't put him in a position to have to win every game all year long, right? Let him grow into that.

Very, very fortunate to be able to have these running backs with us on our team, the depth we have at that position, the unselfishness that they have. But also, we have a lot of experience on our offensive staff and within the whole staff of how to play these guys, how to practice these guys, how to train them, how to prepare them so that they're just as fresh in the fourth quarter in November as they were in the first quarter in September.

Q. With the ever-changing landscape of college football, there are some coaches who push against it. You've been one who has been vocally embracing of it. Can you just talk about the importance of being adaptable in that regard and how that --

BRENT KEY: What else am I going to do? Seriously. Am I going to object to it? No, I don't want to do that. I don't have a say in it. We could walk out of here and have three different rules or a change in something. You have to be adaptable. You have to be able to change.

People say, oh, you know, kids are different now. Well, so are the adults. We are too. We're the ones that set the example, but the same guys that want to complain about a lot of the things in college football need to look themselves in the mirror. They're the ones jumping jobs every two years too. Let's be real. The adults in the room sometimes end up being the bigger problem.

I'm very transparent with my team about that. We talk very real in terms of that. Look, we're co-workers. This is no dictatorship at Georgia Tech. I'm the head coach, I'm the leader, yes, but we have to work together, and they understand that.

It's about the players at Georgia Tech. Always has been and always will be as long as I'm the head football coach there.

Q. You said it's always been about the players at Georgia Tech. One of the guys that stood up here with

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you last year, Haynes King, left a legacy. What does that legacy do, and how do you see that domino effect into a season like this season?

BRENT KEY: He called me last night and asked if I was coming to Charlotte today. I said, yes, Haynes, you know the answer to that. Somebody said they saw him walking down the street the other day, down by Chipotle or something.

You know, very few people, very few -- when I say people, I mean players, coaches, staff -- will know what we went through over the last four years. Kyle is one of them.

When these guys matriculate through our program, whether it be Haynes, whether it be Clayton Powell-Lee, whether it be Kyle, Aidan Birr, those guys, they know the true story. The only thing I ask for these guys when they walk out that door is to leave this program better than when they walked in. That's the most proud thing I can say about those guys. Haynes, all of them.

Q. Every week we hear about programs with rosters that are 10, 15, \$20 million over what the revenue sharing cap is supposed to be. How difficult is it to compete at a place like Georgia Tech in that kind of environment?

BRENT KEY: What do you mean by that, compete at a place like Georgia Tech?

Q. A place that emphasizes academics, a place that emphasizes athletics?

BRENT KEY: I think we've been pretty good at both. I'm not arguing.

Q. I'm giving you credit.

BRENT KEY: Personally, Georgia Tech is, in my opinion, the greatest place in the entire country to get the combination of both, all right, and you have to find the right fit, to answer your question. You have to have people in your program that understand that football is going to come to an end, all right? There's a life after football. Not life when you graduate because I want every one of these guys to play in the NFL for a long time, to reach all their dreams. But you got to have the right fit, the right person. That's a culture that was established in our locker room three years ago, three and a half years ago, that they'll tell us.

That doesn't mean everything is rosy the day everybody walks in the door. The roster turns over 30, 35% every January on every time team. To find the right fit to come

into your locker room -- and I know every coach comes up here and talks about the fit, the fit, the fit. The fit is unique to each individual program in school. It's unique to where you are.

There's kids that don't want to go to college in a major city. Guess what, we're not moving the school. That's not a fit. Okay, but the ones that understand that there's a life after football that want to be developed and coached hard, all right, held accountable, high expectations on the field and in the classroom, and then be able to build the relationships that it takes to have successful life afterwards, I don't say it lightly when I say I want guys to come to Georgia Tech to be a first round pick and a CEO. I say that, and I mean that.

One of the coolest pictures I saw last year was a picture of Keylan Rutledge walking across the stage one week and a couple of weeks later walking across another stage. Obviously he was at his home. He didn't walk across when he got drafted in the first round, but it's figurative.

A first-round pick and a college graduate from Georgia Tech who is going to have success, and that's what I want for all of our guys.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. We'll now spend time with our student-athlete Kyle Efford.

Q. You mentioned last season that you wanted to become a more vocal leader. How has your perspective on being a leader changed from last season?

KYLE EFFORD: Oh, man, it's changed a lot. I'm at that point now where I'm in my redshirt senior year, man, my fifth year.

BRENT KEY: Eighth year.

KYLE EFFORD: Yeah, pretty much. Like ten years now, man. I have no other option but to be a vocal leader and to lead my team by example, but also, if I need to speak up, I'll speak up.

Q. Kyle, man, with Jason Semore coming into the fold with his new system, attack-style defense, how do you feel you're going to be able to benefit on the field from him coming in and changing things up?

KYLE EFFORD: Yes, sir. So Coach Semore is not only the best coordinator in the country, but he's the best linebackers coach in the country. And his defense is made for linebackers to run the show, be the quarterbacks, get us in and out of defenses. And that's what I'm willing to go



for the defense, for the best of the team.

Coach Semore, he definitely has enigmatic defenses. His major thing is offenses are not the same from the 1990s. Why are the defenses the same? That's his major point. I can see how it's going to be great.

Q. You and Recardo Wimbush are the only Georgia Tech players in the 21st century to lead the team in tackles in three straight seasons. What has brought that level of consistency to your game?

KYLE EFFORD: Man, just effort to the football. It ain't nothing but seeing the ball and running the ball every single play.

I mean, it's one thing when you know what you're doing, but it's another thing when you empty the tank on every single play. And that's all I've been doing, and the results show.

Q. You all, your defense improved as the year went on, but looking back at the autopsy of last year's season, it was the third-worst rushing defense in the league. What do you all take away from that and said we need to grow in this way, be it gap responsibility or effort to the ball or whatever the case may be? What is it in particular that you look at and say this is where we need to be better to improve that number?

KYLE EFFORD: Oh, man, across the board, from the first level, second level, third level. There's always places to develop.

I mean, I feel like from our big guys getting vertical, cutting the ball off, to taking double-teams, to the backers, you know, filling gaps, going sideline to sideline all the way to the back and communicating and getting down. There's room for development everywhere. There's not one specific area. But I feel like we need to develop across the board.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, your brother is an international professional soccer player. Granted, the term "football" is different for each of you guys, but what have you learned from him about the way you play your football?

KYLE EFFORD: Yeah, I mean, my brother taught me what it takes to be a pro. I mean, growing up from as far as I can remember he showed me my work ethic. I was probably in second, third grade, and he's getting me up 5:00 in the morning to go outside and work out with him.

I mean, him and my father essentially made me who I am, showed me what it takes to play at a high level.

Q. First of all, the one thing I know that the ACC prepares you from a competitive standpoint to obviously be as good as you can be, but that last game of the year I believe you played the University of Georgia, right? You kind of, like, get up for this in-state rival. What are your thoughts about playing the University of Georgia? I know last year, if I understand correctly, I think you played in, what, the Mercedes place, right? How do you like playing it there versus the on campus? Because, let's face it, Georgia always competes for national championships, and they --

BRENT KEY: We're about to also.

Q. Good, I wish I would have had a chance to talk to you about it. Thanks for speaking up. Coach, thank you. What are your thoughts about being able to play the University of Georgia at the very end of the year after you had a rigorous ACC schedule? Thanks, Coach, appreciate it.

KYLE EFFORD: We Georgia Tech men, it doesn't matter to us. Bobby Dodd, in between the hedges, Piedmont Park. It don't matter. We're a group of guys wired like that. We don't like to (indiscernible) on the road. We want to get them boys, and I'm sure we will.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, appreciate your time. We'll spend a little bit of time with Justice Haynes.

Q. Justice, returning to not only your home state, but just about an hour away from your hometown, correct? The coach said, Hey, our goal is to win championships here, and he said he also wants you guys to leave this program feeling better than when you guys had walked in. Your role in that, what is it?

JUSTICE HAYNES: You know, that was one of the reasons why I came back to college. Coach Key, I was blessed enough with the opportunity to come to Georgia Tech. That was one of the reasons why I came, to leave a legacy bigger than myself. To leave a legacy and leave this place better than I found it.

Each and every day I know that when I put in the work and the grind and all that, that's what I'm doing it for. It's for my brothers to the left and right of me and for the guys that's going to come after me.

Q. Your father was a professional running back as well. How has your father been an influence in how you approach being both a football player and as a professional?

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JUSTICE HAYNES: My father has been everything in my football journey. You know, from just the discipline that he's instilled in me at a young age, the work ethic that he's taught me. He's done a lot for me and just being there by my side through it all, being my No. 1 fan, teaching me the game.

My dad has always been any No. 1 fan. No matter what, he's been my ride or die. He continues to keep doing that, and he bleeds whatever school I bleed. I'm forever thankful for my dad and my whole family really, to be honest, because they my ride or dies, and they're always with me no matter what.

Q. You went from Alabama to Michigan. Now back to your home state of Georgia at Georgia Tech. What have been some of the lessons you've learned along this journey that you feel like are going to bring about the best season that you've had up to this point?

JUSTICE HAYNES: Just I'm forever thankful for all my stops. You know, starting at Bama, going to Michigan, now blessed with the opportunity to be here at Georgia Tech.

With all those stops, you know, the biggest thing that I've learned is just stay consistent. Stay true to who you are and just put in the work. Just come down and just put your head down and work hard each and every day. Control what you can control, and that's how you show up each and every day. Leave the rest up to God, and he'll work everything else out.

Q. In terms of who you are as a back, a lot of people, when you were coming out of Bama, saw you as a power back, and then at Michigan you were one of the nation's leaders in yards per carry. What is it that you bring to a backfield that allows you to blend that contact balance and power with the break-away speed and all that good stuff that allows you to end up as a statistical leader in those ways?

JUSTICE HAYNES: Yeah, I pride myself on being explosive, a complete playmaker in all aspects of the game. Being an efficient runner, being an efficient player with the ball in my hands. Whether that's catching the ball out the backfield, whether that's pass blocking, or whether that's running touchdowns.

You know, whatever it is, whatever my team needs me to do to win, I'm going to do to help my team win and just being efficient and being minute with my small details, which helps my game.

Q. As you come to what could be argued as "Running

Back U," how do you and Malachi Hosley complement each other?

JUSTICE HAYNES: I think we complement each other well. Malachi, each and every day, you know, we talk about it all the time. We call each other the bad boys. We call each other that because each and every time we step on the field, we're the baddest dudes out there, and we got to go out there and just ball, you know?

We look at it as iron sharpens iron. We're here representing the team and representing the running back room, but we got -- like Coach Key alluded to earlier, we got four other dudes out there that can go and make plays and do things and do great things as well.

In our running back room, Coach Smith does a great job. We talk about not being good to great in everything we do. Not just on the field, but off the field as well. When you look at Georgia Tech running backs, you see the best unit in the country, period, end of story, and that's our standard, and that's what we hold each other to each and every day.

THE MODERATOR: Justice, thank you. We will spend time with Malachi for a few minutes.

Q. Malachi, every running back on the roster at Georgia Tech is from the state of Georgia. What does that mean for you all to represent the state of Georgia, and just what is it like to be in that room knowing that it's home-grown talent?

MALACHI HOSLEY: I mean, it means a lot. Especially for me being from Georgia, playing for my home state is good. And I personally didn't want to go to the other school in Georgia. It's just a blessing that I got to go to Tech. I feel like most of us backs in our back field feel the same way.

Q. You all were one of the most explosive back fields in America last year, and it's expected to be more of the same with Justice Haynes coming in, and you, of course, upping your yards per carry going from Penn to Georgia Tech. What is it about y'all's running game that is so unique? There's only one ball, but all of y'all seem to make plays whenever inserted in.

MALACHI HOSLEY: I think we're very similar and different in same way, as in with me and Justice, we can literally see the same thing on a play, that we might hit the same hole and do the same thing. So I think our vision.

THE MODERATOR: You scored 50 high school touchdowns. You scored 23 collegiate touchdowns. Do you expect to hit the end zone every time you touch the ball?



MALACHI HOSLEY: I kind of do. At this point, yeah, I do. It's like an expectation.

Q. You talk about the talent that you all have in the running back room with Justice and yourself. How important is it with you having several different starters coming on the offensive line, how important is it for those guys to be in sync so you can put that talent on display?

MALACHI HOSLEY: It's very important, especially with us having depth as well. Like Coach Key always preaches, we want to play our best ball in November, December, January when we're trying to compete for a championship. Just us building depth through the portal and getting guys, it's been great.

THE MODERATOR: Who do you get your smile from? Mom, Dad, somebody else? Where does that come from?

MALACHI HOSLEY: I think mom or granddad.

THE MODERATOR: Can you show us one more time?

MALACHI HOSLEY: What? The smile?

THE MODERATOR: That's Georgia Tech. Thanks for being with us.

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