

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Thursday, July 16, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Clemson Tigers

Coach Dabo Swinney

Sammy Brown

Will Heldt

Olsen Patt-Henry

Press Conference



These guys have been working since January. This is just kind of the next step in our 2026 journey. Look forward to getting on the field and now we get back to playing some games and see if we can, you know, go have a great season. That's our objective, and that's our focus. That's what we're going to work towards.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Coaching with faith, integrity, and a focus on family is something that's always been important to you. The climate of college football has changed drastically. Yet, you have spoken about staying true to your morals and your values. To just speak to the way that you coach and why you focus on what you focus on in a world that's kind of losing it.

DABO SWINNEY: Boy, what a question right out of the gate. Oh, man (laughing). Oh, boy. Well, man, I could, like, go on for that one.

I mean, the bottom line is I think that my identity is not in what I do. You know, I know a lot of people, that's what they see me as, the Clemson coach, or they see me as whatever, but that's really not my identity.

Man, my identity is in Christ. The foundation of my life is built on faith. I was talking about this to somebody the other day. I don't even know who I was talking to, but I was just saying, like, in this world -- and I love it all. I love it all. I mean, it's what we signed up for, but you get a lot of love, and you get a lot of hate in this world. Especially this journey that we are on. You get a lot of love; you get a lot of hate. I've had a bunch of both, enough for a lifetime.

All of that stuff is circumstantial. You know, it's based on if you do this, then that. If this, then that. Man, if we got that one more yard and won, they love you; but you came up one yard short, they hate you. That's all circumstantial.

But that's, again, why I've built my life on a foundation of faith because, you know, God's promises, God's peace and grace, that never changes. You know, that's not circumstantial. I mean, that's how I live my life. That's how

THE MODERATOR: The Clemson Tigers are with us. Head Coach Dabo Swinney will offer his opening comments. Coach, the podium is yours.

DABO SWINNEY: All right, good afternoon, everybody. I know y'all are so excited. This is it, right? We're the last here, so we'll try to get y'all out of here as soon as we can.

I know y'all don't want to hear a lot from me. Y'all want to hear from these guys and, I'm sure, ask some amazing questions. The biggest thing I would say is, man, just grateful to be here. Just grateful. Grateful for another opportunity to do something that I love to do at a place I love to do it with a bunch of people that I love to do it with.

It's been a great time up here today. It's always fun to talk about Clemson football, talk about football in general. We got three great, great young men with us. Truly great young men that hopefully y'all have had a chance to interact with today in Will Heldt, our defensive end; Sammy Brown, our linebacker; and OPH, Olsen Patt-Henry, our tight end. These are three great representatives and ambassadors for our program, great leaders in our program, and also great players. Glad they're here for you and, again, for me.

It's my 24th year at Clemson and my 18th as the head coach, and my 37th year in college football. It's been a blast, and I am just grateful to have the opportunity to, you know, have a new season and get a chance to get back to camp. That's what I love to do. I love camp because we got no clock, and we just get to hang out all day and do football life together. There's just nothing better. Early, late, we're all there together and kind of building our team for this year, this stage of a team.



I have perspective in whatever else and how I have the ability to manage. Things still stink. Circumstances are bad, but it gives me the right perspective to believe and have hope it's going to get better.

So thankful for that.

Q. You keep referring to this past season as similar to 2010. That was 16 years ago. For younger viewers like myself, because I was 3 at the time, can you explain what it means to get players like Sammy Watkins and DeAndre Hopkins to come in and change the tide?

DABO SWINNEY: Well, DeAndre Hopkins was on that six-win team in 2010. Sammy came in '11. Yeah, those were -- I mean, you know, you -- we all draw on our experiences and things that we go through in life.

I mean, for me, you know, not for these guys, because they don't know. Olsen has never had a season like that. Sammy has been there two years. He won a championship, went to the playoffs, and then we stunk. He's got two seasons to draw experience upon.

Will, heck, he won more games last year than he won at his whole time at Purdue, I think. His perspective was very different last year. I mean, it's all about kind of where you are.

In 2010, you know, we lost five games by six points or less: one in overtime at Auburn to the national champion Auburn, one on a 100-yard field goal by Dustin Hopkins in Tallahassee. Not that I'm still bitter about that. You know, it was brutal, and we go 6-7.

We had a bunch of guys drafted. We had a good football team, but that team stayed together, and I could feel it. Hey, we came back the next year. We won the ACC, won ten games. If you go back and look at the predictions probably going into 2011, I will be willing to bet we weren't picked to win the ACC. In fact, most predictions were probably I would not -- that would be my last year coaching at Clemson in '11. Kind of been on a one-year contract ever since. I'm still there.

Fast forward, you know, we've had 15 winning seasons, 13 ten-plus win seasons, 14 nine-plus win seasons. We've won 11 championships in the last 15 years, and then you have a season like last year, and that's kind of what everybody wants to focus on, and I get that. We earned that. There were a lot of similarities. There really were.

We lost three games by 11 points. We lost two games on the last play of the game. We are 151-7 all the way back to 2010 when we lead in the fourth quarter. Two of those

seven were last year. So we didn't finish in the fourth quarter. We didn't -- we lead the nation. We're No. 1, 138 schools, we're No. 1, all the way back, 15 years, in one-score games. We're one, and it's either Georgia Tech -- I mean Georgia or Ohio State is two and three.

We've won close games. I've had some 12-0 teams that were four plays from being 8-4, all right? We didn't win the close games. We didn't finish in the fourth quarter. We didn't run the ball effectively. We played the worst pass defense in my coaching career. So that's my fault, but it's football stuff. It's football stuff. That's our focus.

We got to fix the football stuff. You get what you earn. It's not what people predict. If it was about what people said, what they predicted, we win the league last year and go to the national championship, all right?

This year, ain't none of y'all going to pick us. Ain't none of y'all going to say anything good about us. I've been dead. I'm gone. I think I'm still here, all right? But it's not about that either. It never has been.

If it was about what people predicted, I would have been gone a long time ago. All right? It's about what you do. That's what it's about. You know, we didn't do the football stuff well enough last year. You know, we got everything we need. We don't make any excuses. We're going to get what we earn this year. That's what we're focused on, doing what it takes to earn the results that we want.

These guys have been working toward that, but, you know, it's not about what we say. Haters hate, right? As I said, there's a bunch of hate. I don't know who wrote that song, but the one thing about haters, when you win, it don't matter what they say. And when you lose, it don't matter what you say.

So don't focus on that. Let's focus on let's go get better. The good news is, hey, man, we've got a lot to stand on. We've been -- we've won this league three times this decade, and we talk about all that we haven't done. Even with seven wins last year, we're still one of the top-10 winningest programs in college football this decade. We're seventh in wins. I think we're second in championships this decade. Georgia is first. We're second. We're No. 1 in draft picks. We're No. 1 in graduation. We're No. 1 in retention. These aren't, like, make-believe things.

But you know what else is true? We stunk last year. That's true, too. We've lost some games that, man, we should have won. How about we give the opponent some credit? How about we give some other coaches some credit? Football is not easy. It's hard. We've had 15 winning seasons in a row, and I think there's only four



teams out of 138 that can say that. 15. It's not easy to win.

So we're not perfect, and y'all know I'm far from perfect, but we're consistent. This is a new year. We're excited about it. Hey, we put our head down and see if we can go find a way to win some games.

Q. I'm from Clemson Women in Sports Media. We've seen a few glimpses of Christopher Vizzina last season. What has been your message to him as kind of the new face of this offense as he takes that first snap down in an electric Baton Rouge Tiger Stadium?

DABO SWINNEY: Okay. All right. So keep me focused on the CV question, but this is the Women in Clemson Sports media day that we have going on here? This is like a thing? What is it again?

Q. Clemson Association of Women in Sports Media.

DABO SWINNEY: Awesome. Okay, I didn't even know we had that. That's great.

CV has been great. He really has. I know y'all write about it. I know y'all talk about it. We have fans that talk about it. At the end of the day, you got to make decisions. You can't make decisions that please everybody. If you want to fail drastically, try to do that.

We made a decision that, you know, we weren't going to go and get some shiny, you know, object at quarterback. Well, we understand that. If it doesn't work out, we're going to be just raked over the coals for that.

But, you know, you got to make decisions that you believe in. You know, we always do what we think at Clemson is best for our team, for the long-term health of our team and our organization, et cetera. There's a reason why we had confidence in the decision that we made. That's because we're there every day. CV has earned the opportunity to go be the starting quarterback at Clemson based on everything we've observed.

Now, if we didn't think he was good enough and we hadn't -- he hadn't demonstrated the things that he controlled at that point in his career, we might have made another decision. The other thing is we knew who was coming in, and we believed in him and Brock.

You don't ever know until you get there, but we knew that CV was a guy that incredibly loyal to our program. This guy could have left ten times, and somebody would have paid him a ton of money. You know, he could have gone and done that, but this kid has stayed loyal to Clemson,

and he has done everything he's been asked to do. When he's had an opportunity to play, he's played well.

Now, does that anoint him to be the guy? No, he has to go do it. It gives him the pole position, and that's what he had in the spring ball. Tate came in, and there were four guys competing. Who is going to be 2? We knew who 1 was, but now we can't create competition with five guys. We need to create competition.

Tate separated himself and became the 2. The team needed clarity. The team needed -- we needed clarity going into the summer. It became very obvious that, hey, these were the two guys that gave us the best chance.

So now coming out of spring, now Tate, he can put his eyes on CV, all right, and he can go beat him out, or CV can feel the heat from somebody else. So either way, we're going to get better because competition makes us better. You know, that's just football. That's the way it is. We're very -- we don't have a ton of experience at the position. That's well-documented, but we believe in the talent that we have.

The other thing we believe in is we've got a bunch of playmakers at running back, at tight end, at wide receiver that they're ready to make plays for whoever is under center. I think we believe that we have four guys in that room. We got a lot of talent in that quarterback room that we feel good about, but right now going into camp, it's CV, and it's Tate. It's CV's job to lose, and it's Tate's opportunity to go win it.

What happens in camp? I don't know. I don't have a crystal ball. Does it go into games, season? I have no idea. So we just got to see how it all plays out.

But I will say this: I believe in the guys we have.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. We'll spend time with Sammy Brown.

Q. Sammy, earlier this week Coach Ben had talked about for this position it's going to take a lot of communication, and he said that, you know, you called him and kind of told him how you all were kind of dealing with how to come about with that. Can you explain, you know, the importance for you to be able to step up and be a leader on this defense verbally?

SAMMY BROWN: Yeah, I would say this goes back to my freshman year just looking at the linebacker room. We had Barrett Carter and Wade Woodaz in there. I think they set the tone and set the example for me coming into this leadership role. So I picked up a lot from both of them on

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

understanding not only what a leader is, but how to be a leader and how to lead not only a linebacker room, but a defense and a team.

I give a lot of praise to them. Like you said, I talked to Ben. I have talked to Ben multiple times about becoming a leader, and I think Ben is a very good resource to have because he's climbed that mountain before. He's gotten to the top of the mountain. He's a really good resource to have and a really good resource to lean on when it comes to not only being a leader, but playing the linebacker position.

Q. Coach has talked about in the past about guys being all in. What's the mindset of you taking that motto going into this season after what happened last season and the magnitude of that Game 1, CV stepping out there in Baton Rouge and the whole real battle, real Death Valley and Lane Kiffin, him and Coach never faced each other before as head coach? The magnitude. The Cajuns is going to be waiting on you guys. It's one of the hardest places to play at night down there, Baton Rouge, at 7:30, Week 1. What do you think about that? How are you going to get set for a game of that type of magnitude to kick off the 2026 season?

SAMMY BROWN: Yeah, first off, going from last year to this year, I think the biggest thing is that you want to put that in the past. I don't think you want to dwell on that, but at the same time, you don't want to completely forget it because there are many aspects of not only the game of football, but the game of life that you can learn from a season like that last year. How to overcome adversity, how to be a man and face adversity and be able to overcome it. There are a lot of lessons you can learn from last year.

At the end of the day, we really are focusing this offseason on resetting and, you know, resetting our goals, resetting our standards and learning from last year, but this is a new season, this is a new team.

Then for the first game, it is a big game, and you know, there's a lot of headlines around it, but at the end of the day, that football game is going to be the exact same football game that you're going to play Week 7. For me there's not going to be any different kind of preparation or anything like that that will go into the game. I'm still going to come in on Monday and, you know, really watch tape for two or three hours. Throughout the week my preparation will be exactly the same.

THE MODERATOR: Sammy, thank you. We'll spend a couple of minutes with Will Heldt.

Q. Coach often talks about players who love the grind. How does that philosophy show up in your daily routine, especially coming off a big individual season?

WILL HELDT: Yeah, I think personally I'm someone that's really routine-based. I like to stay consistent in my routine, in my daily habits. I like to think that that amplifies in my leadership, and people can take that from me.

Yeah, that's just who I am.

Q. Tell us the difference between ACC and Big Ten Football since you've been there. And also, since you've been at Clemson, what's been the greatest thing outside of football you noticed about the culture and the atmosphere that's been cultivated there?

WILL HELDT: Yeah, I think as far as Big Ten to ACC, I think it's not all that different. At the end of the day, it's just football. It's Power 4 football. Everybody is big, everybody is strong, everybody is fast. It's fair to say that there's different body types that look different at different positions and maybe schematically things look different league to league, but pretty similar.

I think to answer your question, coming from up north in Indiana down south, I think the southern charm is real. It's nice to not have snow in October. But yeah, the community down south is different. People love college football. It's definitely college football country.

THE MODERATOR: There are a lot of great images of you laying out for a tackle. Your commitment to the game can be seen through the photos and through the clips. Where does this commitment come from?

WILL HELDT: Yeah, I think just the love of the game. Ever since I was a kid, all I wanted to do is go out and play football and play my heart out. I think that's just been instilled in me from my dad and my coaches growing up. Everything I do, I'm going to give my all in it, and so just playing my heart out.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Will. We'll spend time with OPH, Olsen Patt-Henry.

Q. Chad Morris recently made his return to Clemson. What has it been like learning under him this offseason?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: It's been very fun just to get to know the type of person he is. He's passionate, energetic, and he just wants us to meet the standard that he expects out of us and just trying to match that intensity every day



has been great.

Q. Last season, when you guys kind of hit a couple of bumps, a lot of people were saying, well, what's with Clemson? I remember during every single press conference Coach Swinney was saying people tend to forget about the draft picks and the championships at a national level and conference level. The confidence that you have in this program to take you through those moments, what does that look like for you?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: I think it's just being instilled who I am as a person, just continuing to trust in Coach Swinney and my teammates. I think the biggest thing was just keeping that locker room together and just figuring out, like, all right, that we're not -- this is not only happening to us as an individual, but as a team. So continuing to just believe in each other, believe in the coaches, because they believe in us, so we can continue to do what we have to do.

Q. You're a two-time academic and honor roll student. Can you just talk about the importance of the academics, and how do you balance the lifestyle of playing football with your academics?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: Yeah, it's always been important to me. My mom is a nurse, so just her instilling academic part in me has been always important because one day football is going to go flat. And I think in the world of college football we live of in now, NIL has been involved, and just not being able to have a degree while getting money just doesn't sit right.

I think we live in a world where guys are just chasing checks and not having the structure of getting an education. I think that's just been always important to me, and just having a degree has always been one of my goals.

Q. You've mentioned before that you want to model your NFL game after NFL tight ends Dwayne Allen and Jordan Leggett. What about their games stand out to you the most?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: Just the totality of how they do everything as a whole. Watching Dwayne since he was in Chad Morris' offense, just him being able to run block and catch the football and just being diverse in everything he does. And just Jordan Leggett, how diverse he is in catching the ball and being able to make great plays in open space.

Q. From your standpoint, what have you seen out of the two quarterbacks, Tate and CV?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: Great competition. I think every day since I'm out there with them, they continue to push each other. Like Swinney said, CV has won the job, but Tate comes in every day and puts the same amount of work in.

Competition is not only meant for their room, but the entire building. I'm not entitled to go out there and start. They're not entitled to go out there and start. We have to go in and work every day. The same rules apply to everybody else.

Q. What culture and personality do you see in this revamped offense? What kind of energy are these guys poised to bring that will differ from last season, especially heading into Game 1?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: I see a great culture. I see an OC that believes in us and who we are and sees what we're capable of doing. And just having an OC that believes in not only the offensive line, but the quarterback, the receivers, and the tight ends is important. Because I think having a coach that believes in you says a lot, not only as a person, but as a coach. As a player, that means a lot because it gives you belief and confidence to go out there and be able to execute what he's asking you to do.

THE MODERATOR: You helped ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange back in December. As a communications major, what were your takeaways from that experience?

OLSEN PATT-HENRY: It was good. It was just very interesting just to see the different things that go wrong around the world. I'm in a sports bubble, a school bubble, and I don't really know what's going on. Just to see how the importance of, like, you know, someone you don't think their job is as important, just to see how everybody was communicating and just to be able to, you know, be on the same page and just see how big their job was was cool to see.

THE MODERATOR: Clemson, good luck.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports