

July 20, 2014



An Interview With:

**DUKE
LAKEN TOMLINSON
KELBY BROWN**

Q. For all the success Duke has had the last few years, Duke football still hasn't won a bowl game in 54 years. You're a senior. What would it mean to you personally and what would it mean to the program to finally break that drought this year?

LAKEN TOMLINSON: It would mean a lot to me. I mean, since coming in the past two years going to bowl games and losing, it puts a bad feel on you as a person and as a program, and you know, losing that last game means a lot. It's a good motivator for us to work even harder in the off-season so we can hopefully next season go to a bowl game and win a bowl game. It means a lot to me coming in as a senior my last season, and I mean, we're going to do whatever it takes to finally get that win.

Q. Two-part question. When the poll comes out tomorrow, do you expect Duke to be predicted to win the division? And second of all, there are more offensive linemen here this week than quarterbacks. Talk about the depth of offensive linemen including yourself as far as incredible talent across the league.

LAKEN TOMLINSON: I mean, so you want me to talk about just --

Q. The linemen across the ACC, some pretty elite company.

LAKEN TOMLINSON: Yeah, we have some great offensive linemen in the ACC, just looking at each school, at Florida State, Boston College. These guys, they exemplify great offense with a great run game, so that's what we try to kind of do at Duke, too. We're usually a passing team,

but over the years we've made major growth in our run offense, and that's definitely showing our winning record. I mean, I think the offensive line in the ACC is just phenomenal.

Q. Do you expect to be picked to win your division?

LAKEN TOMLINSON: Oh, of course. I mean, that's the goal, and even the entire ACC. That's what we want to do, and that's what we work hard every day for.

Q. What can you say about the progression of Duke football? Across the country a lot of people know about the basketball side of it, but you've fought to establish yourself in the ACC and nationally. Talk about that.

LAKEN TOMLINSON: Coming in as a freshman at Duke University, obviously Duke wasn't a strong program, but working under the leadership of Coach Cutcliffe and some fantastic staff members we have there at Duke University, it's just been an extraordinary experience to be a part of a team that's come from so little, like everyone expecting so little from us, to being one of the top teams in the ACC.

It definitely means a lot to me, and we're going to keep working hard every day to try to be No. 1.

Q. Your offense got so much from Brandon Connette the last couple years. What are you going to do to replace his playmaking and effectiveness in the red zone?

LAKEN TOMLINSON: Brandon Connette obviously was a very talented quarterback for us, he made some really big plays, really key plays for us last season that won us some games, but honestly I think our team will be just as fine without him because we have more talent coming out this year that can replace Brandon Connette. We have Boone, he can also run the ball, too, and we have Thomas Sirk, our No. 2 quarterback right now. He's been working with the 1s and trying to get

acclimated to the system that we're running here at Duke University. I don't have any doubts that we'll be just as effective offense-wise.

Q. Laken, you suffered major losses, Jim talked about one, and there are others. Obviously you feel Duke's football program has matured to the point where you can have losses and still thrive and get better. What about the change in Duke's program makes you feel that you can do that?

LAKEN TOMLINSON: Honestly, I would say it starts with the recruiting, getting the great athletes that we have at Duke University into the program has been just a phenomenal thing for us. Being able to replace guys even if they're hurt or not able to play, that's just the one thing that we have now that we didn't have three or four years ago.

KELBY BROWN

Q. I'll ask you the same thing that we asked Laken. Do you expect tomorrow when the poll comes out that you'll be picked to win the Coastal, and have you guys been treated with the respect of a champion?

KELBY BROWN: To be honest, man, I probably won't look at that poll. I'm sure someone will call me and let me know, but I'm not too worried about where we end up on that thing. We've been lost in that poll for years and years.

People have given us a lot more respect for sure. Luckily we have another season to prove that we deserve it.

Last season is over, man; I'm excited to move forward and do bigger and better things this year.

Q. Kelby, last year a lot of big 3rd-down situations in which the Duke defense came up big. What was the difference going into 2013 from 2012, and how are you preparing for this season?

KELBY BROWN: Yeah, speaking about 3rd downs, 3rd down is probably my favorite down, and what happened last year is we had a mentality change. 3rd-and-1 is probably my favorite play in football. I think that I can stop every 3rd-and-1 that I've ever faced. It's just a defensive change. It's a mindset change. It's guys that know we can step

up and make plays when we need to, and we're excited to do it.

Q. Kelby, Jim Knowles came from our area, coached at Cornell as you know. Defensive numbers statistically, though, maybe not what you guys wanted last year. Talk about working with Jim, what he does for the defense and what maybe he's trying to do differently this year?

KELBY BROWN: Yeah, coach Knowles is a technician. He's the big-picture guy. He knows where every single person has to fit. He could probably coach every position. It all stems from him. He's got those little details that we need to work on. That's what we've been working on all off-season is figuring out the little minute details that we missed on last year. I think if we can correct those things it will help us be more consistent and help us get the huge stops instead of letting up those big explosive plays that we let up last year.

Q. Kelby, you lost a couple really good pass defenders, and most of your pressure people, the guys that attacked the quarterback, are gone, and yet all the playmakers, leading tacklers, yourselves, David, Jeremy, you're all back. Talk about how Duke's defense will evolve this year, can you get enough pressure, can those guys keep the blockers off you tacklers?

KELBY BROWN: Yeah, man, the good thing is we've got a lot of experience in the middle, me, Cash and David, and we're the bridge between the front and the back. We're the guys that can help the defensive secondary stay on page and the front really get pressure. We've got a lot of athletes coming up. We lost experience in Kenny and Fox, but we've got guys who are faster than both of them who I think can put great pressure off the edges. It'll be a matter of helping those young guys in the middle step up and understand how to hold their own, how to be tough. That's probably the toughest position on the field is defensive tackle, so it's going to be our job to lead them and encourage them throughout the season.

Q. Duke is used to Final Fours in basketball. How neat is it for your sport to now have an aiming point of a Final Four?

KELBY BROWN: Man, I love it, because in the past no matter where Duke football finished, it would be really hard for us to make the National Championship. Now if we win our conference, with a really good record, I think we can make that playoff system. It's just, it helps us achieve our goals in a different way. It's cool to be in the playoffs, man. High school playoffs is one of the coolest things ever. We didn't have that in college, but now we do. For the four teams who make it, it still means you can't lose a game if you want to make it, but it's exciting to be able to play a playoff system for a National Championship.

Q. What can you say about the talent that's come into the ACC? You'll be playing Syracuse this season, you've played Pittsburgh, what can you say about where the ACC is heading and how it challenges you at Duke?

KELBY BROWN: I'm really proud to be part of the ACC. I grew up in the South, a lot of SEC fans around. I couldn't be prouder to be in the ACC.

I really love the additions. I think they're great fits, both academically, athletically, and it's cool, man, I had a fun time playing Pittsburgh. It's been cool getting to know some of these guys this weekend at the media kickoff. I think that they're great fits for the conference and they really add a lot, especially with Louisville coming in late, just a whole new dimension to our conference.

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