



2024-25 CLEMSON BASKETBALL  
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## Brownell's policy of honesty and the portal

BY LARRY WILLIAMS, TIGER ILLUSTRATED  
DECEMBER 4, 2024

CLEMSON -- Brad Brownell's head hit the pillow this morning at about 2:45.

He was back up before 6, and not by choice. "I woke up at 5:50 or something. Couldn't really sleep. And then I started getting a bunch of texts early, too. So then I started watching a little bit of the game."

A few hours later, Brownell was in the middle of his morning walk around Littlejohn Coliseum when he spoke with Tigerillustrated.com about the victory.

The scoreboard alone -- Clemson 70, No. 4 Kentucky 66 -- paints an impressive enough picture by itself.

But this goes so much deeper.

If you saw it, you know what was behind it and we don't even really need to explain it or describe it to you.

Seth Greenberg went through wars against Brownell while coaching Virginia Tech. Now he's analyzing the game for ESPN, and these words from him last night get to the heart of it:

"Brad has built a program on toughness, resilience, player development and character."

Those pillars aren't new; the "Clemson Grit" thing has been around for a while, and Clemson fans have become well acquainted with it in recent years as the Tigers' profile has elevated substantially.

And it wasn't just last year's spectacular run to the Elite Eight; they were really good before that, too.

The stirring and almost stunning thing about what we've witnessed to date this season is how quickly the Tigers have rebounded from some substantial losses. PJ Hall's name is going to be in the rafters one day. Joe Girard was an exceptional shooter. Jack Clark was a valuable piece. RJ Godfrey was no small departure.

If you're thinking deeply about how this can happen, this quickly, you can't think for long without thinking of the transfer portal.

Jaeden Zackery and Viktor Lakhin have been here for a matter of months. If you didn't know anything about Clemson basketball and were told last night that they've been here for five years you wouldn't have spent a second questioning it. Same with Myles Foster, a transfer.

If we take ourselves back to the pre-portal era, perhaps the biggest skepticism most of us had was the cultural drawbacks of frequently adding players who have not spent years being steeped in the DNA of a program.

And sure, there are plenty of examples out there of those fears being realized.

But what does this do to the locker room thing?

Here?

No.

Right here, right now it's officially laughable to say that the right type of transfer at the right time cannot be absolutely perfect for your program and the culture that underpins it.

All these new faces, and this team's collective mental and physical toughness is still strong enough to make Kentucky wilt.

On top of making Penn State wilt last week.

"Our margin is still smaller than some," Brownell told Tigerillustrated.com. "But man I love the tenacity we play with, and the way our guys are playing for each other. I do think our guys are doing that. We've gotten team buy-in. That's not easy to do all the time, no matter whether you're recruiting transfers or high-school guys. It's still managing people and parents and everybody else, too. There's a lot of voices in these kids' heads."

The elephant in the room here, of course, is Dabo Swinney's approach to the transfer portal. We believe he's more serious about it now than before, and his roster-management actions in the coming weeks should bear that out.

Basketball is different from football; Brownell became a deft navigator of the NIL and portal world in large part because he didn't have the luxury of tradition and highly regarded recruiting classes year after year. Swinney's high-school recruiting model has worked quite well until now, when the 2025 class is suffering an eye-opening number of defections.

So in a lot of ways the premises and priorities between basketball and football can be viewed as apples and oranges.

But Brownell's successful approach nonetheless imparts essential, basic lessons that most certainly should be considered enlightening to football or any other sport.

We asked him how he's perfected the art of portal speed-dating while also identifying not only the right players, but the right type of people between the ears.

His full answer was really good. So we'll just get out of the way and give him the floor:

"It's hard. There's research just in terms of phone calls you're making. There's film watching. And there's a little bit of luck, no doubt.

"And then it's a little bit of how you recruit them. You've got to recruit them the right way. In my opinion you've got to recruit them with: 'This is what it is.' I'm very honest as a recruiter. My strength and my weakness is my honesty. I'm more undersell and overdeliver rather than tell you you're going to be an All-American and you're going to average 18 points a game, 10 rebounds and do all these things. I don't know; that's just more who I am as a person. But in some ways you can say people out there are lying to kids in recruiting, and they really do. That sounds pretty harsh, but that's what it is in a lot of ways. And kids get disgruntled when you promise them something, especially a kid that's transferring.

"But when a kid is transferring and he's older, especially really older -- grad student, senior, that kind of thing -- a lot of times by that point it's playing time. It's a role. It's chance to win. It's basketball. It's not the other things. It's not academics. It's not how cool your campus is. It's not all that stuff, especially if you're recruiting the right kind of kid -- a basketball player that wants to win and wants to be good and wants to be coached and likes the way you play and the system and the style, and they've done their research on you.

"But you've got to be honest with what it is and why you're recruiting them, what you see their role being. And then it better be pretty damned close to that. Like, it better not vary much. Or you're going to have a problem when you're coaching them. And then you can have a problem with your team. That's the critical im-

portance of what it all is, is being honest with role definition and expectations and how we do things, and here are things about our program that are hard and if that's not something you're interested in you probably don't want to come here.

"And we've gotten a few kids out of the ACC, so I think with the kids in the league there's been some respect for the success of the program, how we play, and when you go against us what it's like when you look at our guys. What kind of team camaraderie do we have? You don't know all the stuff from playing against us, but you know some stuff playing against each other. I think that was appealing to some of the guys, certainly Girard and Zackery and Jack Clark. All three."

For the cultural fit to work with transfers, the burden is not just on the guys coming in. It also takes buy-in from the players he's joining.

The addition of Girard doesn't work if Chase Hunter isn't fully on board with it. Same with Zackery and Hunter.

Brownell and his staff could've gotten away with not pursuing another guard from the portal this past cycle after losing Girard. Chase's brother Dillon has already shown some major developmental gains this season from last year, and freshman Del Jones has been more than ready for the moment.

"We told Joe Girard we thought we had a team that could go to the Final Four and we needed someone to play alongside Chase Hunter. We told him: 'This is what we are selling you on because we've seen you. We know you.'

"With Jaeden Zackery, we liked the fact that he was different from Joe. That meant Chase was going to play a little different from the way he played last year. It was: 'We think you guys fit together and here's why you fit.' And then you've got to have guys on your team who want those guys to come. That's just as important, especially when you're recruiting proven, high-major players like Girard and Zackery. Chase Hunter's got to want to come in and let Joe Girard get some shots. Chase Hunter has been here a long time. That's pretty unselfish. He just wants to win.

"We knew Dillon was going to take a big step. But giving Chase an older, experienced guard was going to give Dillon some room to take that step."

Brownell has been at the transfer thing for quite a while now, dating to when Shelton Mitchell and Marquise Reed and Eli Thomas played such integral roles in the 2018 team advancing to the Round of 16.

More words from all those years of portal wisdom:

"At the end of the day, guys that have transferred once or twice and are at the end of their careers -- that's what they're looking for: The basketball better be right. It better be what you say it's going to be or it's going to be hard to manage them and you're going to have locker room trouble. ... It's hard enough to beat your opponent. There's a lot of teams that beat themselves. We really try not to do that. We really try to be rock solid, and that's our daily approach with how we do things and care about each other and role definition and accountability and appreciation for each other. I just think we do a good job in all that.

"And you don't always know with the high school guys either, even though you have done more research on them because you've been recruiting them longer. You probably have a better

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feel, but you don't always know how they're going to develop as players, how quickly they're going to learn. Some of them have trouble learning things. How competitive are they really when it gets hard? Do they kind of give in when things get challenging? Are they excuse-makers, or are they guys that stand and fight? So you're dealing with that with anybody.

"The hard part with young players is it's the first time in a lot of their lives that they're not playing as much as they want to play, and not as much as their families want them to play. So do they stay and stick it out? Or do they just leave? So that also goes back to being honest in your recruitment of them -- like, 'Hey this is what we see and it might take a year or two to get significant time.' So you can still have all that, and you don't get all the high school guys right because people can surprise you and leave. It happens.

"But there's a lot of kids in the transfer portal who are good kids. They're good players and they're good kids. They're leaving because they want something different. They want a better situation. Maybe things weren't what they were told when they were at the place they were their first time, you know? Maybe they're just looking for something different and they look at your program and see a lot of really good things."

Good things like last night.

And plenty of good things still to come.

## Brad Brownell, Tigers enter new season with different identity, heightened expectations

BY GRAYSON MANN, TIGERNET  
OCTOBER 28, 2024

CLEMSON - The spring brought a fast-paced race throughout the NCAA Tournament.

Brad Brownell led Clemson to its first Elite Eight berth since 1980 and gave the Tiger faithful a rush of adrenaline for two weeks the program hadn't felt in decades.

Even after their run was over, the sprint truly didn't stop.

It was back to the portal, with Brownell holding a different kind of sales pitch to retool a roster that was losing PJ Hall and Joseph Girard.

The Tigers added players from across the country, including Jaeden Zackery, Viktor Lakhin, and Christian Reeves.

With a new-look roster, and veteran players like Chase Hunter and Ian Schieffelin to lead the charge, suddenly it was back to work.

Brownell sat in Littlejohn's media room with a week to go before the Tigers' opener pleased with the team's progress, but knowing there's plenty of lessons along the way.

For someone who's become one of the longest-tenured coaches in the ACC, he learned there's a different pace to bringing this new roster up to speed.

"Just the thrill of a new group, putting the pieces together to try to make the puzzle fit," Brownell said. "I mean, as a coach, that's some of the stuff you enjoy. Very challenging. As I've said before, when you have this many new pieces, there's more than we've had in a long time, so it goes a little slower. And I've been reminded of that, and that I go to one practice thinking that we've already got this part figured out and we

don't quite have it figured out, or we got it figured out for a couple practices, then we go on to some other things, come back to it, and we're not quite where we need to be. But I have to remind myself that we have a lot of new players. And so even the terminology, and there's a lot of new terminology for everybody that it takes a lot of getting used to."

When the roster has as many new puzzle pieces as Clemson does, the reliance on the veteran leadership becomes essential.

Once, it was Hunter Tyson's team. One year later, it became Hall's team to guide. Fast forward to the present, and Hunter and Schieffelin have become the face of leadership.

At Charlotte's ACC Tipoff media event, both admitted that leadership hasn't come easy but that Hall and Tyson's examples have been good to draw from. Schieffelin has contacted Hall to help navigate this part of his career. Certainly, both feel ready for this chapter.

Brownell has shared in that sentiment, especially when things slow down, guys like Hunter haven't been "bored of the fundamentals."

"Our older guys have done a good job of that," Brownell said. "They understand it. They've come to practice excited. Chase Hunter has been great for a guy who's been here as long as he has. I mean, he could very easily get tired of this and he really hasn't shown that at all. He's been practicing really hard, and I know he's excited for games to come, just like some of the new guys. But he and Ian especially have done well."

This new look roster comes with a different identity from Clemson hoops.

Both Hunter and Schieffelin feel the excitement growing for the program and are ready to embrace it. Despite their lack of familiarity with it, Hunter feels this team is ready to show a community full of energy a new-look squad.

"Yeah, I think we've created a new identity here," Hunter said. "I think it's more on the defensive end, and we brought in some people who can help on that end. I think going to this year, I think the guys have really done a good job of buying into the culture and I think it'll show on the court."

## Hamilton: Perception and expectations now different for Clemson basketball

BY SCOTT HAMILTON, CHARLESTON POST AND COURIER  
OCTOBER 19, 2024

CHARLOTTE — It was lunchtime on Oct. 10, the final day of the ACC Tipoff media event.

A boisterous man with a shiny, bald head came over to say a few loud words to Brad Brownell that echoed through the Hilton Charlotte Uptown's dining area. The man then departed about as quickly as he arrived, leaving Brownell to sit back down and resume his lunch.

"Who was that?" Ian Schieffelin, a senior forward for the Clemson men's basketball team, asked.

Brownell, now in his 15th year as Clemson's coach, paused from a plate of veggies and fish, and explained. It was Seth Greenberg who'd ambled over.

That's the same Seth Greenberg who was a college head coach for 22 years, twice winning ACC Coach of the Year while at Virginia Tech. The Hokies fired him in 2012, prompting him to become, fittingly enough, a talking head for ESPN. Greenberg's one of the network's main college

analysts and has spent a majority of his time with ACC-heavy coverage.

So he knows all about Clemson. And, presumably, the Tigers should know all about him.

But the 6-8 Schieffelin defied that logic.

He quickly absorbed Brownell's words and nodded before plunging a fork back into a plate of glazed salmon that had all of his attention. It was the kind of polite nod that communicated "cool" or "good to know" or perhaps even "oh, that's nice."

Otherwise, it was merely an acknowledgement to his coach for the courtesy of answering his question. And everyone resumed their meal.

But that interaction perfectly sums up life now for Brownell and the Tigers.

### Different look

They're getting more attention these days, for one thing.

That's what happens when a program makes a run deep into the NCAA Tournament, as Clemson did last year. The Tigers' 24-12 season (11-9 ACC) was capped off by only the second Elite Eight appearance in school history.

"I had a some folks reach out, certainly," Brownell, Clemson's all-time wins leader, said. "But it was really more when you're out on the recruiting trail. It was 'We were pulling for you guys. We loved your team, we loved how they played. Your team was extremely fun to watch and enjoyed watching it.'"

Brownell stops again to acknowledge a couple of folks wanting a quick word as they walk past him. Always affable and accessible, he makes quick chitchat before they move on.

The steady walk-and-chats drive home the point that the perception of the program is different, even if it's foundation hasn't changed much since Brownell took over in 2010.

A steady narrative going into last season was Clemson missing out on the NCAA Tournament the previous two years. There was a belief the 2022-23 Tigers were shafted by not getting an invite. They finished tied for third in the ACC, but any claims of being shorted were negated when they lost to Morehead State in the opening round of the NIT as that event's No. 1 seed.

Still, buried beneath all of that, the reality is Clemson has the fifth-most wins in the ACC since making the Sweet 16 in 2018; that trip ending a seven-year absence dating back to Brownell's first season. The Tigers are also one of only 22 schools to go to both a Sweet 16 and an Elite Eight over the past six years.

### Facing expectations

But the situation now is different. The program actually has some momentum collected from over the last two seasons, that one-game NIT flop out stricken from the equation.

Leaving this question: Is it more difficult to maintain that momentum, or was the real challenge getting to this point to begin with?

"It's going to be challenging," Brownell said. "This new world order we're kind of in certainly is different. It's now an 18-team league and it's competitive as ever, if not better than it has been the past year or two. There's been a raising of the bar in our league and we've got to try to help that."

He's right. It will be rough, even if the ACC's nightly grind has been masked by all of the foot-

ball-focused conference realignment.

Lots of veterans teams return with lots of veteran coaches, even if Tony Bennett's sudden departure from Virginia is jarring. And the uncertainty getting attention on the football side with regards to the transfer portal and NIL impact basketball more than most realize. Clemson, like any other program, is just as impacted.

The difference for the Tigers, however, is that Brownell has learned to deftly leverage the portal to fill gaps. That much was evident last year with the addition of guard Joe Girard from Syracuse, who came in to average 15.1 points and make a team-record 105 3-pointers.

He's gone now. So is P.J. Hall, arguably the greatest player in school history. Brownell has brought in four transfers in an effort to make up their production and fill some other gaps. And that's aided by guard Chase Hunter opting to return for a sixth season.

"I think it's just playing with that same chip on our shoulder that we did last year," Hunter said. "We're bringing back a lot of older guys, a lot of transfer guys that played a lot of basketball and that know how to win."

They figured that out on the go last year. Clemson was 4-6 in league play last year and on the brink of disaster before turning things around. The final result, understandably, raised lots of eyebrows.

That jibed with a typical Brownell pattern of beating expectations; Clemson has exceeded preseason polling in 11 of his 14 years as coach.

For the record, the Tigers were picked to finish fourth in this year's preseason poll.

## After Elite Eight run, Clemson finds itself near the top of ACC preseason poll

BY JON BLAU, CHARLESTON POST AND COURIER  
OCTOBER 15, 2024

CLEMSON — At the ACC Tipoff in Charlotte last week, Clemson coach Brad Brownell was asked why the Tigers always seem to outperform the conference's preseason poll.

"I guess folks don't think much of us," Brownell said. "Sometimes, the real answer is because our media situation is probably a little smaller than some in the league, and people don't know our team as well."

A run to the Elite Eight last March certainly allowed the Tigers to catch a few more eyes. The exposure seems to have had a positive — but slight — improvement in perceptions of Clemson heading into the 2024-25 season.

Clemson was voted No. 4 in this year's ACC preseason poll, which is a tick up from last year's predicted No. 5 finish.

The Tigers were slotted at No. 11 two seasons ago before they finished third and just barely missed the NCAA Tournament.

The conference's bluest of blue bloods, Duke and North Carolina, were voted No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, heading into the 2024-25 season. The Blue Devils received the most first-place votes with 42, while the Tar Heels took home 11.

Wake Forest, No. 3 in the poll, received the only other first-place vote.

Considering what the Tigers lost, though, a No. 4 ranking in the preseason poll could be seen as a sign of respect. Clemson graduated star center

PJ Hall as well as a respected ACC sniper in Joe Girard III and senior wing Jack Clark.

One of the stars of the NCAA Tournament, Chase Hunter, and the conference's most improved player, Ian Schieffelin, were both voted to the preseason All-ACC's second team.

Duke is led by the ACC's preseason rookie of the year, No. 1 overall recruit Cooper Flagg. UNC is spearheaded by the league's returning high scorer, RJ Davis, who was voted preseason player of the year.

In the end, the season will reveal what's what. Clemson added a host of transfers alongside Hunter and Schieffelin, including Cincinnati center Viktor Lakin, Boston College guard Jaeden Zackery and Duke center Christian Reeves. A junior wing, Chauncey Wiggins, is expected to take a step forward.

"I think we have better players more times than people think," Brownell said at the ACC Tipoff, "and our players bear that out with the way they play during the regular season."

## Why Chase Hunter returned for sixth season on Clemson basketball team

BY DERRIAN CARTER, GREENVILLE NEWS  
OCTOBER 10, 2024

Clemson basketball guard Chase Hunter revealed Thursday at ACC Tipoff in Charlotte why he returned for a sixth season.

"My dream is definitely to play in the NBA, so I wanted to try that out," said Hunter, who withdrew from the 2024 NBA Draft. "I got some feedback and had some talks with (Clemson coach Brad Brownell), and we thought the best decision for me was to come back."

Hunter tested the NBA draft waters, participating in team workouts throughout the spring. Still, he was not one of the 45 prospects invited to the NBA G League Elite Camp in May and did not receive an NBA draft combine invitation.

Hunter looks to boost his stock this season like former Clemson forward PJ Hall did when he came back for another season and signed a two-way contract with the Denver Nuggets in July. While building his profile, Hunter wants to help Clemson make its first Final Four after it fell short in the Elite Eight last season.

Hunter averaged 12.9 points on 42.4% shooting, 3.2 assists and 2.6 rebounds over 36 games in 2023-24. He made the 2024 NCAA Tournament All-West Region team, averaging 17.8 points, 5.8 assists, 4.3 rebounds and two steals over four games, after helping Clemson reach the Elite Eight for the first time in 44 years.

Hunter's return boosts Brownell's roster, which lost key contributors like Hall, Joseph Girard III, RJ Godfrey and Jack Clark. Brownell added four transfers to pair with returning players and three incoming freshmen.

Clemson coach Brad Brownell on replacing PJ Hall

Hall was Clemson's unquestioned leader last season, leading Clemson in points and blocked shots. With him in the NBA, the Tigers need Hunter and last year's ACC most improved player, Ian Schieffelin, to fill his void.

Brownell, who signed a three-year contract extension in July, said both have done a solid job so far in the offseason, but their real test will happen

when Clemson faces adversity during the season.

"Do I think these guys have the qualities necessary? I do," Brownell said. "These are two great young men who are extremely positive examples of our program. I'm proud of them, but there's going to be a lot of challenging days ahead for all of us, and I think they'll handle them."

Brownell said Hunter and Schieffelin answered the call last season with Hall when the Tigers were 4-6 in conference play and made the necessary adjustments to finish 11-9 in the ACC. This season, they will have to do it without Hall.