

John Boccacino:

Hello, and welcome back to the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast, I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Adrian Autry:

It was definitely a surreal moment, I don't think it really hit right away. I think my mindset, I just dove in and this is what I had to do and didn't really try to put too much thought to it. Because I know it would probably paralyze me and I felt like, think about what has happened, and now since I've had time to think about that, it's a dream come true, it really is for me. I know people sometimes say that and it's cliché, but it really is to come back and be the head coach of my alma mater and Coach Boeheim to stamp me and give me his blessings, it means the world to me and I don't take that lightly.

And I think that's what you hear when I talk about our program and what it means to me. I love this place, I love coach, I love Syracuse, it was pivotal, and me growing as a young man, those years were important because I experienced everything there and I took everything. And the one thing I can say that I learned about was loyalty, and that's what Syracuse community, this university and the fans are loyal to. And that comes back to the family part of it, and that's what I've always felt and I embraced.

John Boccacino:

Adrian Autry came to Syracuse University from New York City as a talented men's basketball recruit, a McDonald's All-American intent on leading the Orange to success on the court. During a four-year playing career, Autry etched his name in the school's record books as a prolific passer and tremendous defender. He still ranks fifth in program history in career assists and is sixth in steals. Autry earned his bachelor's degree in speech communication from the College of Visual and Performing Arts in 1994.

Following a successful playing career that included stints in Europe and across North and South America, Autry embarked on his second act as a basketball coach. He learned from one of the best serving as an assistant and associate head coach for his mentor Hall of Fame head coach Jim Boeheim. And this past March, Autry was named the eighth head coach of the Syracuse University Men's Basketball program. Before the Orange opened the season against the University of New Hampshire on November 6th, Autry stopped by the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast to discuss this exciting opportunity, why he was ready to take over the program, his favorite memories from his playing days, and why Syracuse has always felt like home.

You've really been busy, everywhere you look, we're reading stories of you being on the recruiting trail, bringing in some really talented student athletes. Man, I don't know, do you sleep at all? You seem like you're going nonstop.

Adrian Autry:

Actually, it's funny, I probably caught up on all my sleep when I went down to Florida. I think I had an average of 10 hours of sleep in the bed, so probably that was my recharging time.

John Boccacino:

When you've been seeing these student athletes and talking to the students who might be coming to Syracuse, what's been your message about what they can expect if they join the Syracuse family?

Adrian Autry:

I think the biggest thing we talk about is, like you said, the family, but to be pushed, to be challenged, not only to grow as a basketball player, but as a person, as a student, all those things matter to us. We celebrate all those victories, we celebrate all those accomplishments, not just basketball, it's really about the holistic approach of building you up from the personal side to the athletic side.

John Boccacino:

And you mentioned the word family, I know that that phrase gets used quite a lot around the men's basketball program, and you've got that unique perspective of both having been a former student athlete here, an assistant coach, and now the head coach. What is it about Syracuse basketball that is a family?

Adrian Autry:

I think obviously having one coach for so long, that was always the connection, and I think when you talk about Duke, the brotherhoods, you have these certain sayings, we say Orange family, it's family for life, family forever. It is because you've had that one voice, that one coach that has connected decades, we were connected by coach for four or five decades, so think about how many players that all shared the same experience, had the same experience, not only with the coach and the stories, but the community, the dome. So again, a lot of people have come through and played under coach, and I think that was really the biggest connection.

John Boccacino:

When it comes to having that, you're taking over for a living legend, a Hall of Famer, I know he's someone that you respect and vice versa, he gave you great praise at every stop when he could and during the retirement press conference. It's clear that coach Boeheim respects you as a coach and what you bring to the table, what was it about your style that made you ready to take on this challenge?

Adrian Autry:

I only can do me, I can't try to be anyone else, I knew what I wanted to do and I've always been like that and I think I've never been much to follow, I've really been a leader in my own way, my own path and my own mind. I did things my way, I'm grounded in those things, when I believe in something, I believe in it. So you got to have those priorities, and I think just from the other aspect of it is that coach allowed me to grow under him, he gave me a lot of freedom, he gave me a lot of responsibility to do things.

I think through those 12 years, that I grew a lot each year and coach seeing me grow and he continually gave me more responsibility and let me broaden my horizons, whether it was going to improvement stuff, being able to travel and go and look at different people, different things, see different things, talk to different people, even when he was at USA, allowing me to come to a practice, allowing me to be around that stuff. So a lot of it was coach giving me that freedom to grow.

John Boccacino:

If you had to put your finger on it, what are one or two ways in which you really did grow as a coach during that 12 year tenure serving as an assistant?

Adrian Autry:

I think the consistency and to never get too high, never get too low. I think that's the one thing that I've learned, they are ups and downs of our profession, and watching coach handle it and go through

different things, trying times, whether it was a four or five game losing streak or whether it was a six or seven game winning streak, he would approach every day the same and never be too happy or never get too down.

John Boccacino:

I really appreciated in some of the press conferences you've held, you've talked about the importance of being prepared for a big moment. Who taught you the value of preparation, and how have you been preparing yourself to coach this program?

Adrian Autry:

Obviously, once I've graduated from college and being a professional and being able to play over there for 10 years, it was tough because it's hard, it's a lot of players for them to pick, so no different than the NBA. And to play at the level that I played at, I never could get out of shape because a phone call could come at any time, or once I was there, I always had to do what I needed to do because at any moment in time they can call and replace you.

I always had that mentality after I left to take advantage and never take anything for granted, each paycheck, each game each week. And I carried over into my journey as a coach and did my first stop working in college ranks with Seth Greenberg, man, he was the guy that prepared for everything, we were so prepared, when I got to Syracuse, I was already two and three recruiting classes ahead, that's how prepared Seth Greenberg was. And every meeting had a theme to it and every practice and everything just mattered, he didn't waste time. And I think between my planned career and starting off with Seth Greenberg, that really got me started in believing into preparation and being prepared.

John Boccacino:

I love to hear that, and I'm sure Orange nation loves to hear. Again, that emphasis on our teams will not be out coached, they'll not be out prepared, they will be ready for whatever challenge gets thrown in front of them. And that's clear, Adrian, that you are serious, you mean business when it comes to taking over this program. I want to ask you about that day back in March when you were introduced, just how surreal was it knowing that you were taking over at your alma mater as an ex-head coach?

Adrian Autry:

People ask me that question all the time, and it was definitely a surreal moment. I don't think it really hit me and hit me consistently, and probably until the last couple of weeks as we approached the school year, I think my mindset, I just dove in and this is what I had to do and didn't really try to put too much thought into it because I know it would probably paralyze me. And I felt like that and not paralyzed as far as just, but just like think about what has happened, and now since I've had time to think about that, it's a dream come true, it really is for me. I know people sometimes say that and it's cliché, but it really is to come back and be the head coach of my alma mater and coach Boheim to stamp me and give me his blessings, it means the world to me, and I don't take that lightly.

And I think that's what you hear when I talk about our program and what it means to me. I love this place, I love coach, I love Syracuse, it was pivotal in me growing as a young man, those years were important because I experienced everything there and I took everything. And the one thing I can say that I learned about was loyalty, and that's what Syracuse community, this university and the fans are loyal to. And that comes back to the family part of it, and that's what I've always felt and I embraced.

John Boccacino:

Give us some insights into some of the past players, maybe players you played with or players from back in the day who's reached out to you, and what have the reactions been since you were hired as the head coach?

Adrian Autry:

Man, I've had all guys that I've played with, guys before me, Derrick Coleman, Billy Owens, Stevie Thompson, Lawrence Moten, John Wallace, just to name a few, but they've all reached out and excited and are just looking forward to the new chapter and they were excited. They are going to support me any way they can and I'm excited to have those guys come back to campus and sit at a practice and meet our team and have them talk to our team. So it was all well received and excited.

John Boccacino:

It's always great when you go to the dome and the dome's rocking and you see the legends of the game, whether it's John Wallace or Lawrence Moten or DC, somebody coming back, Rony Seikaly, to cheer on the team, we have such a proud history of basketball. And it's intertwined with the community too, what's the reaction from the city of Syracuse and from Central New York been that you've perceived from you being hired?

Adrian Autry:

Me walking around, everyone's been very excited, congratulatory, wishing me well. So just excitement when people stop and talk and just excited that the job remained with a Syracuse alum, so it's just excitement.

John Boccacino:

Now take us back in the day, you had the nickname Red, you were a very talented high school basketball player coming out of St. Nicholas at Tolentine back in the Bronx. And you come up to Central New York to play for Coach Boeheim, what did you know about Syracuse and what made you want to come here to both play and study?

Adrian Autry:

Academically, I knew it was a good school, I think me originally coming to Syracuse, before that, I loved being on the radio and I used to listen to a guy named Von Harper and he was a Syracuse alum. So I knew that the academics were good, I knew it was a good school, it was in New York, it was far enough, but close enough for me, the proximity was important that I could get back to my family and get back to home. And obviously, the Big East and the dome and a legendary coach and at that time it was one of the best teams in the Big East and in the country, so I had everything I wanted four hours away, I couldn't pass that up.

John Boccacino:

I think a lot of times we fall into recency bias, we fall in love with Cuse-Duke, Cuse-North Carolina, Cuse-Florida State, the rivalry games in the ACC. But you lived those big rivalry games with Big Monday, with Georgetown, with UConn, with St. John's, with Villanova, unbelievable intense rivalries. Can you paint the picture for what it was like to play in that Big East?

Adrian Autry:

Man, it was a fight, it was a brawl, every night you went out, Providence with Rick Barnes, they were physical, when you played Georgetown, you knew the game was going to be in the fifties and you were going to get foul. If they called three, you probably got foul nine times because they were so physical. But that's just the way that band of basketball was played back then, it was a physical league. With UConn you knew that was like, get up and down, they're going to try to score a ton of points and they were going press.

Again, all those things, you had the different styles, but we had Riley who he could play fast, slow the game up, it just was in different styles. But it was a war every night and everyone had a respect, but they didn't like each other and they competed with each other, so it was fun, it was no easy games, no days off, no nights off. I think at the time, Boston College was the only team that struggled through my four years, and that was only the first two years because they played all freshmen. And then by their junior, senior year, they had Howard Eilsey, Bill Curley, Gerrod Abram, all those guys, that's when Boston College, they took off, I think they went to the Elite Eight, they beat us a couple of times, the league just was getting ... every team, it was a hard game.

John Boccacino:

I love hearing you reminisce about the good old days of the Big East, I know we have a good thing still with the ACC, but those are some ... growing up, I remember falling in love watching Cuse, watching the dome be packed for those big Monday games. And your teams were successful too, you had a cast of characters and you won on the court, any favorite memories that stand out to you? Any big games or big wins that really come to the front of your mind?

Adrian Autry:

I think obviously my last home game versus Georgetown, we actually won that senior night. One comes to mind, overtime or double overtime game versus Connecticut at the dome, I think the score was like 100 to 90 something, it was something, it was up there. And then I was playing against Kentucky and I'm a 14 in the country coming in at the dome, sold out, packed, a big game. It was so many big games, I remember Seton Hall, we had a really long winning streak against them up until my junior year, and I think remember one of those games we were down nine points for two minutes and we came back and won by five or six, so there's so many great memories.

But I remember the Kentucky game and it was sold out, it was packed, everyone was excited, I remember us playing against Fire and Ice, Rodney Monroe, NC State, Tom Gugliotta, that was the inaugural of the Big East ACC challenge, that was a great game, but there was just so many great games. I felt like every game we played at home was a big game, I really, really did, especially once you got to January.

John Boccacino:

No doubt, the postseason ramping up for a March Madness run, and you guys were no strangers to March Madness. How was it different playing in the dome versus coaching a team in the dome?

Adrian Autry:

I think it's very similar, the energy is unbelievable. Especially when the dome is rocking, I think you get that extra juice, you get that extra vibe sitting there encouraging your guys, encouraging your

players to feed off the energy and play and stay focused and not get too carried away. I think you still feel that way as a coach, I know I feel that way as a coach sometimes.

John Boccacino:

People love you and they love your story. I was going to ask you about Red and if your student athletes knew about the nickname and what they thought of you as a player.

Adrian Autry:

I don't talk about my basketball, I just walk past to show them my picture up there with a shirt and that's about it, so that I got my pride right there.

John Boccacino:

I absolutely love it. And when you graduate from Syracuse, you get this degree in speech communication and, for people that don't know, you had a really successful career playing over in European leagues, you had a stint in the US Basketball League. So it wasn't like you left Syracuse and stopped playing, you had a really good playing career. But when did you decide that coaching was what you wanted to do next?

Adrian Autry:

I think I decided I wanted to coach after I brought my family up and my oldest son at the time, he was young and I brought him up with my family, I wanted to show them Syracuse and let them see where I went to school and where I played at. And I sat down and talked with Coach Boeheim and then I talked to Mike Hopkins and they were just asking me what I was doing, what I planned on doing and then they both encouraged me to get into coaching and think that I would be great, "you should do this." And that started me thinking and then they put me in touch with a couple of guys and the next thing you know, it just happened just like that after that visit from Syracuse.

John Boccacino:

And we are very thankful that you decided to listen and participated in that coaching because we wouldn't be having this conversation, I don't think, if you hadn't decided to.

Adrian Autry:

No, I never thought of that, but that is absolutely true, if I never brought my family up here with Adrian Junior at the time, we probably would not be having this conversation.

John Boccacino:

I do want to give a little credit too, obviously you're well known as being a family man and we know coaching can be such a demanding profession. What kind of support has your family provided to you to pursue your coaching dreams?

Adrian Autry:

It's like that comment you just said right here, my wife, she's super supportive, she allows me to do my things. Obviously, it's difficult trying to raise a family and I spend time away travel or just even when I'm not traveling, getting home late. I think your kids, they adapt to that, they understand that, she's did her best job to keep me involved as much as possible, so very supportive. I don't think anybody can get

through this business without having that family support, you just have to have it because it's a lot of understanding, it's a lot of time away from each other, so you miss some things, so you got to have that support to keep a family. She and my kids are very supportive of that, I think the kids, they adapt and grow, but I think when you talk about your wife, that's the person that really has to make the sacrifice.

John Boccacino:

I know people are really excited for the opener and for this season to get underway, just how excited are you for the upcoming season? What really gets you amped up and motivated about how good this team can be?

Adrian Autry:

Well, I think you always feel good about your team before you start playing. I was fortunate enough to be here last year, so I've seen how these guys have grown, I've seen how these guys have adjusted to what we're trying to do. And we have our good days and bad days, but I do get excited and those good days have been really good, you really see everything clicking and jelling. So you take that and you sleep with that.

It's like that golf shot, you could play bad golf all day long, but that one shot you remember it and you fall asleep and thinking about it the next day and that's how it is. It's been moments this summer and during our workouts where they really have looked really good, so I think I get excited about that. But we still got work to do, we're far from a finished product and we still are going to be trying to grow and get better.

John Boccacino:

And there's so much talent on this team, both in the returners, obviously, Judah Mintz, Chris Bell, Benny Williams, Justin Taylor, Quadir Copeland, Maliq Brown, but you were busy bringing in some great talented recruits like J.J. Starling, Naheem McLeod, Chance Westry, Kyle Cuffe Jr. coming in. The cupboard seems pretty full for us, what are your expectations for the season? Just how far can this team go?

Adrian Autry:

I don't like to make those expectations, I think we have enough to be a good team, now it's just a matter of us putting the work in. So I don't like to put expectations, I don't like to put limits, sometimes expectations could be limits. I don't know how good we can be, I don't know where we can be, I just know that we have the pieces to be a good team, and that's what I get excited about and that's all I talk about.

John Boccacino:

Fair enough. And I appreciate the candor with the response there. What would you say for fans, what style of basketball do you imagine this team playing?

Adrian Autry:

Well, obviously, we want to get after people defensively, we want to try to create, make people beat us, we want to speed people up. And then on the other end, we want to be able to make our defense, create some offense, get out, transition, be aggressive, push the ball. So fast pace, we want to get up and down spacing and use our talent, just let our talent to have that spacing to take over and make plays and freedom. But we definitely want to be a tempo team, get up and down on both ends of the

floor, we want to speed people up defensively, and offensively, we want to go right back down and be aggressive and get the ball to court.

John Boccacino:

You guys will be a fun team to watch in the dome for sure. And I got to ask you this one too coach while I got you on here, how many times has somebody come up and asked you, "coach, you are playing the 2-3 zone?"

Adrian Autry:

Man, if I had even a penny for 5 cents and I'd be a rich man right now when it comes to when answering that question.

John Boccacino:

Look, we're all excited to see you put your mark on this program and I know that it's been really fun watching you in action, watching you on the recruiting trail, it's going to be great to see when the games kick off in the dome. I did have two more quick questions for you, you being an alum yourself, you also had two children who attended and graduated from Syracuse in Aliyah and Adrian Jr. What kind of pride does that give you knowing that two of your kids decided to follow in your footsteps and become Orange alums?

Adrian Autry:

That was very, very, awesome, I'm proud. And again, especially when you sit around and you start having these family discussions or you are talking to different people and having that pride of, like you said, not only did I have a great experience, but my two older kids shared the same experiences and have that Syracuse and alumni pride, it means a lot.

John Boccacino:

And I know there's probably not a lot of this now because the season's ramping up, but when you do have some free time on your hands, what do you like to do when you're not coaching or recruiting?

Adrian Autry:

If I'm not coaching or recruiting, I'm with the family, probably going to eat some dinner, listen to music a little bit and try to play golf. Man, I've been trying to play golf, that's something new that I picked up, so I definitely like to try to get out there and swing it, but I don't have as much time as I used to.

John Boccacino:

Well, I hear there's a Hall of Fame coach that is pretty proud of his golf game, you might be able to lean on if Coach Boeheim ever wants to share. Have you talked golf with him a lot?

Adrian Autry:

Not as much, we do talk, but not like that. He knows a little bit about everything, but we've talked golf, but not as much. More of our conversations has just been me bouncing some ideas off of him getting his thoughts and opinions on different things as I get prepared.



John Boccacino:

I know Coach Boeheim has said he doesn't want to feel like he's a shadow looming over you as you make this mark, he wants you to be free to be the coach that you want to be. But has he given you any other advice or any other ways that he's maybe tried to give some feedback or advice to you?

Adrian Autry:

I think anytime I ask him a question about something, he's there, he's open. The one thing about coach and the one thing about me is that I wouldn't feel that way, I'm happy, I'm excited when he's actually at a practice or he would be at a game, that doesn't bother me. I'm confident in my abilities and I'm confident in who I am and I'm going to make my decisions and that's just that. Even when I was his assistant coach, there were things that I would suggest and he didn't like it, I didn't take offense to those things that maybe he said, I'm like, "coach, maybe we can look at it another way." So again, we've always had that kind of relationship.

John Boccacino:

It's exciting to have somebody who you've formed a close friendship with from both being recruited by Coach Boeheim and working under his staff, and we can't wait to see what happens this year. Here is Adrian Autry, the head coach of the Syracuse men's basketball team, that dome is going to be rocking this year and it all kicks off November 6th. Listen, we wish you nothing but the best and definitely keep up the great work on the recruiting trail and give them hell this year on the court.

Adrian Autry:

Thank you, John, I appreciate it, I look forward to sharing with you in the future.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast, my name is John Boccacino, signing off for the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast.