

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 12, 2026
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Spectrum Center

NC State Wolfpack Coach Will Wade Ven-Allen Lubin Paul McNeil, Jr.

Postgame Press Conference



Virginia 81, NC State 74

WILL WADE: I thought we played with great effort today. We just didn't have the attention to detail that we need to win a game of this magnitude. Give Virginia a ton of credit; they were great. They blocked nine shots. Again, it's really tough for us to score in the paint against them.

But our guys were warriors and tried to gut it out. We just didn't have enough.

It was an NCAA Tournament game, so hopefully it will help prepare us for moving forward next week.

Q. Onyenso finished with eight blocks. What made him so formidable to deal with in the post today?

PAUL MCNEIL JR: I'd say his length. That's what he's been doing all his life. It was just we had to try to finish over guys. We couldn't finish over them. He did his part for his team, and we just came up short.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, what Paul said. Just his length, just his presence in the paint, the way he can just be very active around the rim, just blocking shots and just being a defensive presence for them.

Really just deterred us from being more efficient on offense. We're capable of getting to the rim. We wanted to finish through contact pretty much was our game plan. But when you have somebody like that who's very active, very disciplined, not settle for shot fakes, anything like that, but has great timing to block shots, it just becomes really difficult.

Q. The previous two matchups versus Virginia were blowouts. This one was a lot closer. That was the difference here?

PAUL MCNEIL JR: I feel like we played them twice, so we knew what to do. We put guys in situations and picked on the matchups and I think this game we hit more shots, honestly.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: I think it was just effort. I think the coaches did a really good job of creating a good game plan, did a really good job of just being aware of their plays and everything like that.

It all depends on how we want to exceed their energy, be able to dive for loose balls, win the 50/50 balls, chasing down long rebounds and being able to not let our offense dictate how we play on defense.

We didn't let that happen today because we're playing for something bigger. That's something that we should have done earlier, but we know that effort kind of covers up a lot of those things.

Anything that we do 100 percent, even if we make our mistakes, we can make up for it.

Q. Will, what did you see today that gives you encouragement for next week?

WILL WADE: I thought we played with an edge today. I thought we played with better effort. We didn't have very good attention to detail. We gave up two loose balls in the first half that led to five points. We gave up the free throw block-out late in the game, which didn't give us a chance at a comeback, and we squatted on four of their three-putt shots.

That's stuff bites you when you play a team as good as Virginia.

We haven't, quite frankly, played with this level of effort all the time this year, so it's tough to correct all the details, and

it's tough to correct all the little things when you're coaching effort and trying to get effort from guys.

So hopefully this will be a point where we can take this film and say, this is the effort that we need, and now we can coach some of the details and get better at the details.

Q. Coach, first half you came out with what seemed like a brilliant game plan, and you had Virginia on their heels a little bit. Talk about what that mindset was.

WILL WADE: Well, I'd hoped we'd try something different after getting our brains beat in twice. Unfortunately we didn't have a lot of time. We had a better idea of what to do. We just couldn't always get into what we wanted to.

But I thought we got the lead to six a couple times in the first half, and then we wasted some possessions. We took a bunch of mid range jump shots, a bunch of fadeaways.

We got bottled up, which is what their defense does. That really bothered us and stunted us from being able -- look, if we were going to win this game, we needed to stretch the lead, spread our legs a little bit and sprint, and then make them try to catch us from behind. We were never able to do that enough.

But look, they've got a great team, and we just -- Lewis has killed us every game from three. The only difference is he didn't make his first one like he usually does. But he's killed us every game from three, and we didn't -- weren't able to stretch it when we kind of -- we were ready to play, and we just couldn't stretch the lead enough.

Q. Those other two games were quite a while ago. This one just happened. The other two were blowouts. This one was in the final minute. Does that improvement reflect what you've seen in practice in recent weeks compared to what you saw two months ago?

WILL WADE: The second time we played them was a couple weeks ago. Seemed like a month ago. But I mean, look, we're not into moral victories. You either get the job done or you don't and we didn't get the job done today.

The reality is we should have played more like this the first two games, and we didn't. That's why we were in this position. That's why we were the 7 seed.

That's the reality of it, and we didn't get the job done today. We shouldn't have gotten beat like we did the first two times, either.

Q. Will, y'all kept Virginia contained for most of the

first half; didn't let them go on too many runs; held the lead for the majority of the first half. In the second half they shot out on a 10-0 run. What did they change in the second half to be more effective offensively?

WILL WADE: I think, first off, at the end of the first half to play as well as we did and we were down one at half, to give up the off-the-bounce three there at the end, that was a killer.

When you play like that and we're trying to get some -- we were trying to go from hoping we could beat them to some belief, and we had a little bit more belief at halftime.

But it would have been better if we had the lead. Like, you need the lead.

The start to the second half has been our problem most of the year. We just can't get stops to start the second half. We got fouled on our first possession. We made one of two free throws, I believe. Then they shot -- I think they were like 8 of 12 to start the half or they shot 60 some percent.

When the defense isn't in front of our bench and the staff and our guys and we can't communicate the defensive stuff, it's very difficult for us. We just don't talk enough. We don't communicate enough. We don't fly around enough.

In the second half the defense is away from our bench, and we've really, really struggled. That's something that we're going to practice and try to continue to get better at.

But Virginia just put their head down and started driving the ball and creating rotation and kicking it out for open threes, which is what they do.

Q. A lot of talk with you and potential position at LSU. I just wanted to see if anybody from that campus reached out to you and give you an opportunity to speak on that.

WILL WADE: No. Is the job open there? No? Listen, let me be very clear: I'm excited at NC State. I was hired at NC State to do a job. This wasn't going to take one year. I've already met with our administration about next year and some of the changes that we need to make and some of the things that we need to do to put this program where it deserves long-term.

I'm not on social media. I'm not into gossip. I'm not into any of that sort of stuff.

Look, we're going to win and we're going to win big at NC



State. That's what we're going to do. That's what we're going to do moving forward. We have the resources we need. We have what we need, and it's on me and my staff to get the job done.

Look, this year hasn't gone exactly how we wanted it to, but we're going to rally and we're going to work hard and we're going to have a team next year that's ready to roll.

Q. Paul McNeil not only in this game almost 30 points, but he's come up big for you throughout the season and there's been a lot of moments here at the tournament where he's come up big. Just what you've seen from him and the leadership and the hopes of next week for you and what he can do for you.

WILL WADE: Well, he's been shooting it well all year. I think he's close to the single-season three-putt record for us, so I think that he's been solid for us.

We're going to need him -- we're going to certainly need him next week at the NCAA tournament.

Q. Coach, this is your first season at NC State. How do you assess your coaching tenure in the ACC so far?

WILL WADE: I mean, look, we want to be better. We're not as good as we want to be. I haven't done as good a job as I needed to do with our team. We're going to get that corrected. We're eyes wide open. We understand. We understand where our positives are, where our negatives are, where our strengths are and where our weaknesses are, and we're going to attack those this off-season and get ready and be a little bit closer to where we want to be.

Q. With the regular season and now the conference tournament behind you, what did you learn about the ACC that maybe is different than places you've coached before, looking in the immediate rear view?

WILL WADE: Look, we'll do an autopsy when the season is over. We have some ideas of -- look, there's some personnel things in the ACC we've got to get right. So some of the stuff that's maybe worked some other places positionally, we need to have some different type of personnel.

We understand, our eyes are wide open. We know where we made our -- where we need to improve, let's put it that way.

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