

# American Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena At The BJCC

## Wichita State Shockers

## Coach Paul Mills

## Kenyon Giles

## Will Berg

### Postgame Press Conference

Wichita 81, Tulsa 68

THE MODERATOR: We are joined on the podium by Wichita State head coach Paul Mills, Kenyon Giles, and Will Berg. Coach, why don't we start off with just some general comments from you about the game.

PAUL MILLS: We're really happy for our guys. I thought these two along with Karon Boyd that -- Will Berg and Kenyon really carried, and then Karon was able to make shots.

It's really just how Tulsa plays. Tulsa makes you shoot over the top, and if you're not being able to shoot over the top, it can kind of be a long night. We were able to do some things back when we played them back on February 14th, get more shots at the rim, but you could tell it was squeezed a little bit more and made it difficult even for some post entries.

The biggest thing for us is our identity is just rebounding the ball and it was 20-20 at the half and then to be plus 8 in the second half. Had four in the opening media.

And so to really clean that up, just really happy for our guys that we were able assert ourselves on the glass because at the end, this becomes a possession game.

This guy to my right, 14, had a lot to do with us having that ability.

**Q. For Coach, you talked a lot about eliminating losing basketball. Do you feel like this was a continuation of that just shrinking those plays and playing winning basketball tonight?**



PAUL MILLS: Yeah, again. I thought they were way more aggressive. One of the things we're obviously good at is being able to O board. I thought their aggressiveness early got us back on our heels; We had to battle back.

We had to battle back and our guys did, but they shoot a number of threes. They end up shooting 31 of them tonight, so it expands your radius. There's a lot of long shots. It's not just, hey, Will Berg, E-Man, TJ, Dillon Battie go get us rebounds.

Our guards needed to be able to chase them down. You see Karon with six and you see Michael Gray with six. I just thought Mike was, 13, points, six assists, two turnovers. I thought our guards were being able to get in there and able to make plays, and you just can't give teams second chances. You have to eliminate those plays from the game.

What were second-chance points? I mean, they still beat us 15-14 but they end up getting a lot early. I thought we settled down and our guys were able to make the changes necessary in order to give us a chance.

**Q. Like any team is going to be dangerous when they hit six of eight threes coming out after halftime, but with the way you guys play, you don't need to shoot well with the way you guys rebound. How dangerous is this team when shots are falling from the outside?**

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, one I would tell you a week off helps a in regards to just being able to have legs and our players have confidence. They believe in their work. You have to trust your work.

I have guys who work and care about the right things, but there was no hesitation and that's what you don't want to see. I thought KB obviously being able to go four for seven, KG being able to make seven of them.

I thought Mike's shot was big but it does and then when you have a top ten offensive rebounder like Will Berg, it's an advantage sometimes when we shoot it because Will can go find the basketball more often than not.

We were able to keep some possessions alive, and I just really appreciate the fact that our guys trusted our work, because to be honest with you, it's kind of what Tulsa wants you to do, is shoot over the top.

**Q. Will, tied rebounding margin at halftime; finished plus eight on the glass. What was the message at halftime?**

WILL BERG: Just stepping up our physicality. I think Coach (indiscernible) pretty well. They had us on our heels in the beginning, but then we gathered and collected ourself and trusted the work we put in every day.

Our identity is getting boards so we knew that as long as we're focused and locked in, we're going to make up that margin.

**Q. And then KG, you hit seven threes today. I think it's a program record for a single game in a conference tournament. Got going out there early, what was going for you tonight?**

KENYON GILES: Really just being aggressive, understanding it's a do or die game. I'm going to come out aggressive every time. I missed a few early and just kept shooting. My teammates gave me confidence, that's all it was.

**Q. KG, I'll start with you. Two things that really stuck out to me on your season: Your cardio and your confidence. Tell me about the luxury this coaching staff trusting you to play 40 minutes in several game this is season and tell me about how you overcame the slow start.**

KENYON GILES: My coach has always been giving me confidence since I stepped on campus, even when they recruited me. And that helps when you have teammates like Will Berg, a lot of guys. They give me the utmost confidence. You can see in the interview.

Even when I'm tired them guys give me so much confidence to where I'm not tired. Like I'm not tired for these guys. I'm not going to take a play off for these guys. I'm I love them. I love them. I want to win for these guys. I want to win for myself.

That's really what it is, my love for these guys and how much confidence they've giving me and I just want to prove them right.

**Q. This team had a 20-point lead with about 11 minutes to go. It evaporated to about ten with three**

**minutes left. What was going through your head as Tulsa is closing the deficit, and what did you think of your players in that final stretch?**

PAUL MILLS: One, I kind of have to be a little dismissive about your opening question. KG got 30 seconds worth of rest. It's not like he actually played 40. (Laughter).

And then I would tell you the medias help. I don't think when you're 7'2" and you're Will Berg it's different when you're under 6 foot. Those guys have a lot of stamina. You understand the ebbs and flows to a game.

I really didn't think much of it. The only thing I was probably disappointed about with TJ kicked the ball out of bounds. I thought, one, KG was a little too close and we needed to kind of give TJ some room and that was the only one. We were getting good shots, like shots were around the rim and I'm telling you.

Like I'm at a point in the season where I just trust our players. It's our job to make sure we come up with a formation that they can give them space, and it was one of the things we actually talked about at halftime. They were blitzing pick and roll on KG.

We told our bigs, Will and E-Man, you've got to make yourselves available at the knell, and so when we threw the to the knell and Will gets the assist to TJ Williams I'm like, all right, and then KB ends up with a knell play during that hectic time.

And so it was something that we actually talked about at halftime, and so to be able to execute. But leads come, leads go. I go back and we led for 34 minutes of this game. We were able to be pretty assertive, but we just can't get away from what we do well and that's rebound the ball, take care of the ball and we had six turnovers at the half. We only finished with 15 assists.

We had six assists, six turnovers. 9-4 there in the second half. I thought the ball was moving and I was really comfortable with our guys being able to handle the pressure.

**Q. Will Berg, tell me about the tradeoff with you and Emmanuel Okorafor. Seems like regardless who has the hotter hand during the game, you're supportive of one another. You guys have had a pretty 50-50 split in terms of minutes throughout the season. I feel like you're really coming on strongly with your physicality, as well as Okorafor. How have you two sort of battled just having that 50-50 split throughout the season and supporting one another?**

WILL BERG: Me, Manny, and Noah, too, we have been battling each other now for the past year. The battle don't stop in practice, either. When you're waking up early in the preseason and going through hard workouts with Coach Eilert, like you create that ball and to see that one succeed, it just makes me as happy as when I succeed or happier as well. I think that's the common theme with all those guys.

Just so happy to see someone else succeed and it just makes our chemistry so good.

**Q. For Will, you won plenty of NCAA Tournament games at Purdue, but I don't think you ever won a Big Ten Tournament title Championship. What would it mean to win a conference championship?**

WILL BERG: Huge. Especially with these guys as well. Going through the NCAA Tournament is something we have been striving to do all season long, and it's something I think all of us are hard set on doing and it would mean a lot to be able to get our seniors that ring at the end of the year.

**Q. And for Coach, I usually ask about how you're going to defend a guy but since Izaiyah Nelson has ten steals against you this year, how do you plan to attack him?**

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I don't know that answer. I have watched zero south Florida. Izaiyah, you're player of the year, you're newcomer of the year, you're defensive player of the year. He's a good player. I don't think it's lost on any of us.

Now that you say that, I'm starting to get some flashbacks here, but I just think we have to be way more assertive and I don't think he was able to get much at their place. He did get at our place. He actually did open up the second half, so I'll have to go back and look at the film. But everybody in our room knows that there's good players because every team has them.

**Q. Coach, you have been part of some long winning streaks. When they build confidence and just kind of have that it factor in March, this group is starting to remind you of some of those winning traits that you're seen in the past?**

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, but I wouldn't tell you it's just now. We haven't had an issue with a guy being a second late until Will overslept the other day and that was the first time we had a situation the entire time, but I'm telling you, these guys have been engaged.

To Will's credit, Will came up, came out on the court and

was saying I'm sorry but there were some words in between there and you knew how sorry he actually was and we didn't say anything. He went and he handled business.

But I'm telling you, I've had a committed group all year, ever since we first dialed in in June. I don't think it's something that's new. We just had to get -- we had to play together. We needed to be around each other. We need to understand counters and everything that was done. But this group, again, the character in our locker room is phenomenal.

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