

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Roy Williams

North Carolina Tar Heels



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Williams.

Q. Over the last few years, your centers have given you scoring, defense, passing at times and most of all offensive and defensive rebounding. As you look at the young guys who will take up that position now, which areas do you feel most positive about and which are you most concerned about?

COACH WILLIAMS: Well, I think that's really a description of the way I like to play. And right now it's the biggest worry I have. Are the big guys going to get a rebound? Are they going to be able to make a pass without turning it over? Are they going to be able to score a basket?

We've gone this year probably more so than any team since about 1993 at Kansas. That team had Adonis Jordan and Rex Walters, our two leading scorers. But we still had Greg Ostertag up front and Richard Scott and a few guys like that. We might be more perimeter oriented, but we still have to get the basketball inside. You have to.

The way I believe the easiest way to be successful is to get more rebounds than you get. You get the ball, I get the ball. You get the ball, I get the ball. So the only way to change that, if I get some offensive rebounds and don't allow you to get any. So I think that's the most important factor in the game.

We've got to figure out a way to get some rebounds. And the other thing, I believe in getting the ball inside so you get fouled. At the end of the game maybe I'll be playing against a group that's not your five best players because you've been in foul trouble.

And so those things that I believed in so much I still believe in. But we might have to change a little bit of it.

Q. One of the guys you talk about that you kept from JVs to rebound was Aaron Rohlman. He's now a senior. What does he bring to your program?

COACH WILLIAMS: Tremendous enthusiasm in practice every day. Tremendously intelligent young man who is fun to be around. He's been a great addition to our team. And he's pushing the young

guys.

He pushed Tony. He pushed Kennedy. He pushed Isaiah. And he's doing it even more effectively with the young guys.

Q. Many of us have seen the report online, but to hear it from you, how did Joel hurt his hand? And what was your reaction when you first heard it was in fact broke?

COACH WILLIAMS: This was a question I was asked what are you going to say? I said, I'm going to say he was silly for a little while. He's playing video games with Theo and one of our managers. He lost and he got up and punched the door.

My trainer called me on Sunday as I was driving up here to Charlotte in fact to see my third grandson, he's 25 days old today. And get a call from the trainer. He tells me what happened.

I said you've got to be kidding me. Got off the phone with him, got on the phone with Joel and Joel tells me, yeah, Coach, it was just silly. He said, I remember you telling me about somebody that hit the backboard support and broke their hand and couldn't play in the tournament.

And I said, yeah, it really was effective. It made you change what you were doing. So he remembered it but it didn't change it. But you've got to remember that Joel Berry played in the NCAA Final Four last year with two really bad ankles, swollen, didn't feel good, discolored.

He couldn't play his regular game. And yet he was extremely successful because he's such a tough kid. And winning is extremely important to him. He made a mistake here because winning is very important to him. And he's so competitive and so silly.

And his greatest characteristic is that drive to win, and sometimes you've got to peel it back a little bit.

Q. I suspect I know the answer to the first question, what game was Joel playing, do you know?

COACH WILLIAMS: No. But I don't know any of the games. I don't ever play those games, so I've got no idea.

Q. Theo said --

COACH WILLIAMS: I did throw a ping-pong paddle through a window one time after losing a ping-pong game, so what can I say to Joel?

Q. Theo said Joel is the pit bull of the team but he said Kenny Williams is maybe second in line. That moderately surprised me, I guess. What about Kenny fills that role while Joel is maybe out?

COACH WILLIAMS: Joel takes it to another level. I really think. I told our team, I said, Joel is one of our leaders. He's one of our best leaders, but do not expect him to put his arm around you and put your hands together and sing Kumbaya. That's not going to happen. If you want somebody to bless you out for screwing it up, that's Joel.

But Luke and Kenny, Theo, all those guys have some leadership traits. But Kenny does push the guys. There's no question about that. And he pushes himself. And I still think there's a pretty big gap between him and Joel, though.

Q. Cameron Johnson coming over from Pitt, what do you think he can do for this team right away and why he was a good guy to bring in?

COACH WILLIAMS: Last year he shot 41, 42 percent from the 3-point line and we had nobody on our team that did that.

So the ability to shoot the ball. The ability at 6'8" to go get a rebound. The ability to be a tough matchup for somebody else and a guy who came in this summer, has worked extremely hard, everybody loves him, worked extremely hard in practice and I expect he's going to be a very good player for us.

And I was trying to think, I think I had Justin Knox as a fifth-year transfer and Cam I think is only the second one.

And they contacted us first. And he's the kind of young man that everybody would enjoy coaching and I'm hopeful that he'll be able to be really successful for us this year.

Q. What are the challenges of coaching a team following a national championship?

COACH WILLIAMS: The challenge -- first of all, you really enjoyed your offseason a heck of a lot more than the year before when you lost on the second to last play. And let me make sure even if Kris Jenkins's shot go in it was going to overtime. I'm not saying we were going to win. They made a great play. It was a harder summer last year than it was this summer, no question about that.

Last year I was able to use the feeling they had in the locker room of pain, agony, all those kind of things to use that as fuel, use that as motivation to work extremely hard in the offseason. This year I just tried to appeal to their pride: Let's be the best we possibly can be, work as hard as you possibly can, let's try to do something that hasn't been done a lot, see if we can go back to Final Four for the third straight year, see if we can do all those great things.

But probably more this summer was about the internal individual motivation than it was about the team.

Q. In sport, you hear defending champions. Do you buy into the fact that this squad, which is somewhat new, are defending, and is there an obligation to defend?

COACH WILLIAMS: You know, I'll answer that the same way they said redemption. I didn't see it as redemption because Marcus Paige, Brice Johnson and Joel James weren't there. So Marcus doesn't feel -- he feels better because we won but it doesn't erase the pain of what he felt the year before.

We're not defending because it's not the same team playing against the same teams. But we're the only team that can go out and say we could do this a second year in a row.

Q. You're talking about Cameron Johnson, and obviously there was a question of whether he was going to be able to be eligible right away. Would you prefer there was some sort of clarity in that process, that it's not up to the team and it's black and white one way or the other?

COACH WILLIAMS: I've never been involved in making NCAA rules. I don't think there's any rule that's perfect, because depends on which side of the draw you're on.

I think it would probably be better if we had more clarity. The fifth-year rule, we had that with Justin Knox and we benefited. Cam was only in school three years, he graduated in three years. He did a great job in the classroom.

But transferring in itself is a problem. We have so many transfers. And people, five or six years, go blame coaches. Now they realize the player is going to transfer. The coaches don't really have a heck of a lot to do about it.

You've got the people outside. You've got your own family that are always talking to you about other things. But there does need to be some clarity in those rules, particularly that one itself.

Q. What are you going to need from Seventh Woods and Jalek Felton with Joel out, and do you feel they're ready to step up?

COACH WILLIAMS: Remains to be seen if they're ready. Yesterday in practice we gave Seventh a chance and Jalek a chance and Theo a chance. Don't be surprised if Theo doesn't run out there as a point guard a little bit. He's the best playmaker on our team.

And whether or not he can do that with the ball in his hands as often as a point guard remains to be seen but it doesn't make a difference whether or not they can or not; they have to. That's who we have.

Q. I've asked a couple of coaches this already, but I'll ask you, how strange is it going to be playing Louisville this year and not seeing Rick Pitino there on the sidelines?

COACH WILLIAMS: It will be really strange. What, he's been there 17 years? That's a long time at any place as a coach. Rick did such a magnificent job. And you watch Louisville play. It would fit his personality and the great things he did.

So it will be very much different. And David Padgett, I recruited David when I was coaching at Kansas. He's such a great young man. He's got some big shoes to fill and a big job to do. But Rick left a foundation there that I think David will benefit from and taught him some things that I think David will benefit from.

Q. Two years ago you borrowed this chair to sit up at the podium. How are you feeling these days? Are you good to go?

COACH WILLIAMS: Two years ago was the worst year I've ever had in coaching.

We made to it the National Championship game, but this is my 45th year as a coach. The first 42 years I guess it was I never sat down on a basketball court a single time my entire life. The 43rd year I had sit down about every 10 or 15 minutes because my knees were hurting quite a bit. Last year I didn't have to sit down a single time. It's a lot more fun that way.

And needless to say I'm glad I don't have to have a chair every time I turn around.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.