

NCAA Media Conference

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Mitch Barnhart

Dan Gavitt

Press Conference



DAVE WORLOCK: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to this afternoon's conference call with Mitch Barnhart, the director of athletics at the University of Kentucky and the chair of the Division I Men's Basketball Committee, as well as Dan Gavitt, senior vice president for basketball for the NCAA.

At this time I'll turn it over to Mitch for an opening remark, then we'll take questions.

MITCH BARNHART: Thank you, Dave. Appreciate it.

Good afternoon, everyone, thank you for joining us today. Dan and I are in the selection room at the J.W. Marriott in downtown Indianapolis, where in a little while our colleagues and I will begin the selection, seeding and bracketing process.

In two days, on March 12th, we'll mark the one-year anniversary of which has to be one of the toughest days of our professional careers. It was that day that March Madness was canceled, bringing to an end the hopes and dreams of hundreds of student-athletes who dream of playing great tournament.

So much has happened in the year since then, many of which are of far greater importance than a basketball tournament. However, our charge to be stewards of this great game, provide oversight for one of the greatest sporting events in the world, that's what we plan to do and look forward to doing that.

To get it done, it's going to require commitment and sacrifice from everyone involved, first and foremost the 68 teams fortunate enough to have earned the right to come to Indiana to participate in this unique championship. That will seem pretty familiar to the teams that get to play in March Madness because of the efforts every student-athlete from All-Americans to walk-ons and every coach from the Hall of Fame head coaches to the graduates and student assistants. All of them should be thanked for making it this far under the most trying of circumstances.

It's been 106 days since we started the season back in November, on November 25th. Since then, more than four thousand games have been played, which is well more than 80% of what was scheduled. If you look at the top 100 teams in the net, only six of them played fewer than 20 games, at least two of them are scheduled to play their 20th game this week.

Under those circumstances, considering we started the season 15 days later, I'd say that must be considered success, it's all due to the commitment of players and coaches and staffs from across the country.

We've come this far, so now let's hope we get to the finish line three weeks from Monday and we get crowned a national champion.

With that I'll stop and take any questions.

Q. My question is, Virginia Tech, when they play the ACC quarterfinals tomorrow, they will have played only twice in the previous 32 days. How much do those kind of COVID layoffs, how much does that affect a team's seeding when you pass those out, or not?

MITCH BARNHART: Thanks for the question.

Obviously there have been many teams that have had to pause their schedules. The committee's foundational principles as we begin to evaluate teams in the selection process is always who did you play, where did you play them, and what was the result. That will continue to be the foundational pieces of what we do.

Literally there are many circumstances in this unique year that will be taken into effect. Player and coach availability is always taken into effect. Part of that is the pause process, how that plays into games that were lost and not able to be played, and games that were postponed and moved to a different spot.

So all of that will be in conversation in the committee room. We'll begin those deliberations this afternoon. But we're so thankful that so many teams had worked so hard to play



as many games as they did. We'll look at the résumés and sort of evaluate them as they lie and try to find some balance in all of that.

Q. You are accustomed to looking at a team's résumé and schedule based on player availability with injuries and those kind of things, newcomers, eligibility stuff. The roster being affected is so much greater this year. It's happened to every team. Is this something that you're physically able to even do in terms of trying to account for every coming and going of players this year?

MITCH BARNHART: We've got a really strong conference monitoring system. Every committee member is assigned conferences to work with. Each conference has two people assigned to them, and they work with those liaisons with the conference offices to continue to take a look at player availability and who has played games, missed games, all of those things. We actually put another component on our monitoring sheets to sort of take into account this unique circumstance.

Yes, I think we're tracking it as well as we can, I think at a pretty high level. To say that you're going to be able to factor in every one of those player availability issues is probably going to be difficult. But we will do the best we can.

We'll have quality information. That's the beauty of today's information and technology, is that we can gather information. Coaches have been very straightforward and very helpful in giving us the information through that process.

Q. Historically football and basketball committees have gone through this. Basically if somebody is missing a key player or two, you take that into account. How much do you take into account their opponents when they play a team with a key player or two out? Are you able to account for that, as well, this year?

MITCH BARNHART: Yeah, it's a body of work. We try and make sure that we're paying attention to both sides of every equation. I will tell you the conversations and, having been in this room for four years, I will tell you the conversations are in-depth, they're thorough. Lots of conversations about the résumés.

I would say that this year we've set aside a lot of the business part of what we're doing in terms of the preparations. We've gotten a lot of that work done before we came to Indianapolis, just to be able to have essentially more time to be able to have those really, really important

conversations.

Q. Dan, questions more about next week once bodies are on the ground in Indianapolis. You have mentioned that a team will be able to play in NCAA tournament games as long as it has five players available, kind of nodding to the invention of the game, James Naismith saying you need five. If disaster struck and the team had only one member of its coaching staff and five players, would they be eligible or do you need more support staff?

DAN GAVITT: We've not dealt specifically with that question. It's a good one. My sense is that we're focused on the playing rule, the playing rule being five eligible and healthy players to start a game. So I don't know that the committee would weigh in on availability of coaching staff.

Q. The logistics of the Kinexon technology. Clearly with contact tracing guidelines, what the health department will be overseeing, I'm curious if you have a situation where a team may have one positive spring up in the middle of a tournament, I believe the guidance with contact tracing is more than 15 minutes cumulative in close contact, right? If the players are going to be wearing the Kinexon device, these timeout huddles, eight to 12 over the course of the game, is that not a concern on behalf of health department officials or something that the committee and the NCAA has discussed how a scenario like that could lead to a potential issue where contact tracing would force a team to potentially be removed because they'd be wearing the devices while huddled round during game stoppages?

DAN GAVITT: Timeouts are a challenge. Coaches are going to have to be creative as they have been throughout the regular season to keep spacing, to not have players stand next to each other during every timeout and huddle.

The reality is it is what it is in terms of the close contact. So whether we use Kinexon or not, we'll have video that will show close contact just as much as Kinexon will potentially. I think Kinexon will help us in many ways to definitively determine really in most cases that there's not close contact among players.

But it is going to require some level of discipline and creativity to avoid those situations that you're talking about.

Q. Will all Tier I personnel, when a game is not happening, be asked to wear, with exception of maybe when they're in their own rooms, a lanyard with the Kinexon equipment? Will they be having that on their person at all times or right before, during and after

game competition?

DAN GAVITT: Only during team activities. So practices, competition, but not during the rest of the day.

Q. Dan, sort of a similar question. Who is going to be the arbitrator of inconclusive tests? Will it be the Marion County Health Department? How do you figure out if a player or coach tests positive but tests negative after the fact? What will be the ultimate decider of which test is okay?

DAN GAVITT: We have a false positive protocol in place that has been approved by the Marion County Health Department. If there's a positive test, it will be presumed to be positive, the individual will be isolated. But there will be a follow-up test, a PCR, that will be administered. If that second test comes back as positive, then it is positive definitively. If it comes back as negative, there will be a third PCR test given in which time if that third test overall, the second is a negative, then it would be presumed to be a false positive and would not impact that individual.

But in the meantime if there is a positive, it's presumed positive. They would have to isolate until such time as it could be determined if it was, indeed, false.

Q. Is the NCAA covering the cost of all the tests?

DAN GAVITT: Yes. Working with IU Health locally as our local testing provider and health provider.

Q. As the committee knows, Oregon became the conference regular-season champion despite winning less games than the second team in UCLA. Now with the conference tournament starting today, how will this tournament's Pac-12 tournament help iron out those irregularities, such as the Oregon and UCLA situation?

MITCH BARNHART: Those championships, the way those championships are determined, are local decisions. So whether that's a regular season championship or a conference tournament championship, those are local decisions made by the conferences.

We're looking at a body of work as it relates to the résumé of games, so how they play each other, where they played each other, whether that was in regular season or post-season, or their opponents along the way. Those will be evaluated in total and looked at for things on the team sheets, head-to-heads, common opponents, metrics, all of things that are in the toolbox we use as a committee.

The decisions as it relates to how someone awards a

conference championship or runs their conference tournaments, those are local decisions made by the commissioners, athletic directors and presidents in those leagues.

Q. For you personally, has there been any sort of added unusualness to this role, given the way that Kentucky's season has gone? Obviously not the way you or players or Cal hoped. How eager are you for them to add a little extra work for the committee if they can make a run to the SEC tournament title?

MITCH BARNHART: I appreciate the question. Let me be really clear. When we walk in the room, you take your Kentucky hat off and you put the chair hat on. That is an honor I treasure greatly. It's been a great opportunity to be a part of this committee for five years and work with some incredible professionals.

Albeit I'm still the athletic director at Kentucky, I want our team to do well, but when I walk in this room, it is about making sure we're putting on the greatest tournament in the world, giving the student-athletes that prepare the opportunity to compete at the highest level on the grandest of stages.

I hope our team fares well. Looking forward obviously to watching them play. Certainly my hopes are with our student-athletes and our coaches that we can make a run in Nashville. But as the committee chair, my total focus is on the tournament, making sure we can get to April 5th and crown a champion.

Q. With non-conference strength of schedule part of a team's résumé, can the committee delve into non-conference games that were lost because of COVID and essentially try to calibrate a team's intention in non-conference schedule?

MITCH BARNHART: Clearly we appreciate everybody's trying to schedule. We know that there was many non-conference games lost. But we'll continue to look at the body of work and see where that lands as it does on the team sheets as best we possibly can.

We certainly understand this was a unique year. Fewer number of games in the regular season, fewer number of opportunities. We know that there were games lost. That's not lost on anyone.

But at the end of the day we can only evaluate objectively what's in front of us. So we'll do that as best we possibly can.

Q. How will the committee determine which games are



at which venue?

DAN GAVITT: That's done in conjunction with CBS and Turner. It is a function of our scheduling with our broadcast partners for programming, as well.

One note, of course, should any team make the field that's hosting a game, i.e., Purdue, Indiana, Butler, they would not be able to play obviously at their home facility.

Q. When you have a team like Arizona that's self-sanctioned itself out, does that make any difference at all in what you guys are thinking or if it's pretty easy just to kind of overlook their case? If so, I realize this also is probably not something you're even thinking about, but it looks like their profile suggests they may be a kind of bubble team if they were in the field. Where would you have them, if it was even a thought?

MITCH BARNHART: I assume you're talking about how that would impact their opponents? Are you asking how it impacts them?

Q. I meant as far as you looking at the field as a whole. If they were coming in as an 11 or 10, without them, is it just a simple process to overlook their case and look at the next team on the lines? How does that affect things, especially when they announced I think late December, I don't know if you already had them on your boards and all that, if that was a process at all?

MITCH BARNHART: We would not be talking about teams that have self-sanctioned themselves and taken themselves out of the tournament. We'll only talk about those teams that are eligible for the tournament and have played the appropriate games and all of those foundational pieces that we have to go forward. We would not have a conversation about Arizona from the beginning.

Q. I didn't know if anything predated that into December, before they made the announcement, if anything had to be changed?

MITCH BARNHART: No.

Q. Dan, just in general, is there any guidance from the NCAA, I know there's a couple teams in the Pac-12 footprint that have had to go back to locations because a game was canceled. In one case the referee tested positive, UCLA had to go back. Is there any guidance who pays when a team has to go back for a COVID issue that wasn't necessarily on their team? Is that something you expect conferences will deal with?

DAN GAVITT: I would assume they're either managed by the institution or the conference. It's not something the NCAA would be a party to at all during the regular season.

Q. Dan, a bit farther out than this season's tournament, what is the timeline for bidding out the next group of Final Four sites? I believe that would be 2027 and beyond. Will Atlanta, having lost the chance to host last year, be a consideration when you get to that?

DAN GAVITT: I believe it's October of '22 that the next bid cycle for the Final Four will take place.

And absolutely, Atlanta will be given significant consideration after last year's disappointment. To be honest with you, I'm actually wearing the 2020 Atlanta Final Four shirt today in honor of Atlanta and the loss that we all suffered by not being there last year.

They are still very much in our hearts and minds, even today. They will be given every significant consideration for the next Final Four selection process.

Q. What years will that be? 2027 through what?

DAN GAVITT: I don't know if we determined. At least through '31, possibly '32. Normally we do it in a four-year cycle. We've awarded five years out. Sometimes, especially as it relates to our relationship in Indianapolis, which requires us coming through here, as long as they meet all the obligations of the bid specifications.

But normally it's a four-year process, so it would be '27 through '31, potentially '32.

Q. When you said October '22 is that the timeline for decision and announcement of the next group of sites or is it the date for the start of the bid process?

DAN GAVITT: That would be normally be when we would announce. But that is still tentative. We're still kind of working through the details of that. That would be around the time period that we would finish up the process hopefully.

Q. When would that process begin? Would that be this year at some point?

DAN GAVITT: Potentially. I mean, I hesitate a little bit just because we've been so focused on pulling off this year's tournament, we are going to have to reassess all this post pandemic.

Normally it's a six- to nine-month bid process.



Q. I wanted to talk about the Big Ten a little bit. It has four teams in the top 10 right now, another one in the top 15. I'm sure you're not thinking about the AP poll. Those teams have had to go through each other the last couple weeks, cannibalize each other, especially Ohio State has been the brunt of a lot of those losses. How much are you considering that stretch of games against that many quality teams versus maybe what their entire résumé is, especially in January when they beat a lot of those same teams?

MITCH BARNHART: Great question. The Big Ten has had an outstanding year, a lot of quality teams in there.

Much like we said earlier, it will be a body of work. We'll look at that. Clearly we have a lot of different tools. Again, I'll go back to the things we have to look at, whether it's head-to-heads, obviously that is to your point, a lot of really high-quality basketball games. You have common opponents. Again, in the Big Ten, they played a lot of common opponents. We've had a chance to watch them closely.

There's a lot of metrics, how they play into all of that. Their team sheets. We'll look at all of that. Again, we've been on the phone with the conference office extensively. We will continue to watch the tournament, which is being played here in Indianapolis as we speak. So we'll have an opportunity, we'll see it firsthand from the TV like everyone else in the committee room, watch it closely.

Everyone will take their résumés and put them on the computer, on the screens in front of us, and evaluate, then try to find a way to be fair and equitable in the selection, seeding and bracketing process.

Q. With the tournament being centrally located, how much simpler is it for you to seed these teams this year not having to deal with the geographic advantages and disadvantages of where a team comes from? What are some of the hidden factors that we may be not aware of when you consider team location, fan support, things of that nature?

MITCH BARNHART: Well, we have some fan limitations in the venues that we have up here from the beginning. That is no different than every other venue in the country has had during the regular season.

In terms of dealing with fans, that is a different component. Once we get all teams here, the lack of travel is a benefit, clearly a benefit to the teams. With that comes challenges as it relates to the testing and the protocols that are in place, staying with the controlled environment, making sure

they're socially distant, wearing masks, making sure they're paying attention to the protocols that allow us to move game to game, round to round, week to week, so to speak.

To be able to have all the staff and committee, all hands on deck so to speak, in one geographic area is very helpful. That will be very helpful. With that comes extreme challenges in terms of scheduling and making sure that everyone can get where they need to go within this environment. Practices, court time, making sure we have the opportunity to sanitize all the facilities in between games, there's those challenges that come into play.

Clearly getting everyone here in this environment of the pandemic is probably the only way this could have been pulled off and probably the best chance for us to crown a champion on April 5th.

Q. This year is so unique, a year like no other. So many mental health issues have been brought to the forefront. Have you and the committee made any additional concessions and steps taken to ensure the mental health of everybody involved is top-notch?

MITCH BARNHART: I think the staff has done an amazing job. We went through a lot of those protocols this morning, a lot of those pieces this morning as it relates to the ability to move within the controlled environment, to be able to get some fresh air, to be able to stretch your legs, do some of those things. There's pieces to all of that.

We've created academic environments. A lot of our young people are in virtual or hybrid classes. That will be not a lot different, but we'll provide opportunities for all of that.

I think trying to work our way through this tournament and find a cadence and a rhythm to that to give those student-athletes and coaches a cadence and rhythm to how this will proceed, we'll be okay.

Keep in mind, in a normal tournament setting they would literally be traveling and coming home and jumping on a plane within a day or two to go back out to another venue, to another site. On one hand really a little more difficult in terms of the controlled environment.

The second piece, there's some pieces to it, having lived it as an athletic director with my team, it is difficult to sometimes get home late on a Sunday night, be home one day, jump on a plane and go to another venue on Tuesday, be there for another week, do the same thing the following week. There's pluses and minuses to all of it.

I will tell you the staff has done an amazing job of trying to create opportunities for entertainment, for social time, as

best you can in these kind of environments. Really done an amazing job, but without getting into all the details of the schedule.

Q. Dan, pertaining to the window between when the brackets are announced Sunday till Tuesday when I guess you could kind of say they're being locked. If a team comes down with positive cases in that 48-hour span, what is the threshold? Particularly for at-large teams, is it just having five players and a coach? Is there some other rubric for how many they would need to keep going rather than dropping out for somebody that is a more competitive team?

DAN GAVITT: It is five players eligible and healthy, which is the NCAA playing rule for basketball. The committee talked about this weeks ago, wrestled with contingencies, and thought it was fairest for a team that had a great season, earned their way to play in this tournament, that even if they were to be compromised in some way, if they have those five players, they still should have the opportunity to compete rather than be replaced. If they fall below the threshold of five, of course they would not be able to play by playing rule, nor by tournament protocols.

Even if compromised, the alternative of having them wash out the tournament and be replaced when they could still compete, even in a reduced capacity, was where the committee thought they should land.

Q. Why are the Kinexon devices only being worn during team activities?

DAN GAVITT: We talked a lot about that, as well. These ultimately are college students. We need to do everything we can to keep them safe and healthy and be ready to compete. Yet the committee and staff didn't think it was appropriate to be monitoring young men and women 24 hours a day. They're responsible adults that can make decisions on their own.

You always look at what the unintended consequences are of a decision. The criticism that could come, the discomfort from student-athletes of being essentially monitored 24 hours a day when they're in their hotel rooms by themselves studying or sleeping or resting, was not something the committee or staff were comfortable with.

Q. Does there need to even be any coach available; if an entire coaching staff is wiped out, the players just play on their own?

DAN GAVITT: That's a good question. Honestly, it's probably something we should talk about with the committee.

Mitch can answer this question as an athletic director. I can't imagine an athletic director not having some supervision or coach available in some capacity. But these are extreme times. If something like that were to happen...

One thing I think we can acknowledge is we can't imagine every potential scenario. That's part of the reason we have this committee. If we're presented with something like that in real-time, we'll have to address it and try to help the institutions to be prepared.

It's a really good question, probably one we'll actually talk about here in the next couple of days. It was not something we imagined with the entirety of the coaching staff being compromised.

Q. How much, if any, do the conference championships that take place on Sunday have an impact on the seeding or the bracket? Do you have multiple scenarios to take into account games that happen on Sunday afternoon?

MITCH BARNHART: Clearly we're watching games and the results right up until the time that we reveal the bracket. So, yes, we're paying attention. We will have multiple scenarios based on the weekend's results leading into Sunday.

We will continue to monitor those at a very close level and the results of that will be a bracket that I think will be reflective of all the games up until that moment.

Q. I asked because I think the American championship starts at 3 central time. That's really close to the announcements of the bracket. Do you already have a scenario like if team A wins, go to this bracket, team B to this bracket?

DAN GAVITT: That's a really good question. In the past there have been times when the committee has had contingency brackets based on the outcome of one or more games on Sunday. There are other times when the committee has made an assessment that regardless of the outcome of games, seeding and bracketing wouldn't change.

It's hard to predict that. It's really dependent on who is playing in the game, what the results might lead to. But it is not uncommon to have more than one bracket based on outcomes of games on Sunday afternoon.

DAVE WORLOCK: We want to thank everyone for their attention today in joining us. We will have a conference call with Mitch on Sunday night at 9 p.m. eastern after the

bracket is announced, which takes place at 6 p.m. eastern on CBS. Enjoy the remainder of the week with the conference tournaments and March Madness, and we will talk to you soon. Thank you, everyone.

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