

NCAA Media Conference

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Tom Burnett

Dan Gavitt

Press Conference



DAVE WORLOCK: Hello, everyone. Welcome to today's media teleconference with Tom Burnett, the commissioner of the Southland Conference and chair of the Division I Men's Basketball Committee. Just to note, Tom will be also be available at 9 p.m. eastern on Sunday for his post selection teleconference. Please see the email I previously sent for instructions on how to participate in that call.

At this point, I'd like to turn it over to Tom for some brief opening remarks.

TOM BURNETT: Thank you, David. Good afternoon, everyone. It's great to speak to you today from the selection room where the committee has convened in suburban Indianapolis to select, seed and bracket the 2022 Division I men's basketball championship this week.

Throughout the year and certain as we head down the stretch here, I would note the committee has had a deliberate focus of getting March Madness back on track, specifically returning the event to what we knew it to be prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, reclaiming the administrative normalcy of a national tournament played at the traditional 14 sites, beginning next week with the First Four in Dayton, continuing with the first and second rounds, the regionals and ending at the Final Four in New Orleans.

There were a number of us in the selection room on March 12, 2020, that fateful afternoon when the NCAA tournament was canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. That was devastating for all of us involved with college athletics and this wonderful enterprise we've been a part of.

However, I would say all of us were absolutely heartened by the wonderful efforts of the NCAA staff and the outstanding community-wide work of everyone in Indianapolis to conduct a successful 2021 tournament in that controlled environment.

Now on the eve of the '22 tournament, while not completely clear of the pandemic, the committee is very encouraged

by mitigating factors such as decreasing severity or a waning of the virus and increased vaccination and booster rates.

We are certainly hopeful to play the tournament without disruption, but also realize that many communities may have differing medical guidance that will have to be followed by our participants.

As we look back on this season that will inform the decisions we ultimately make this week, the committee acknowledges that COVID pauses have impacted numerous teams, individual student-athletes and coaches. In the end we have been very pleased to see teams return from pauses to remake if not all of their games, a significant majority of them for a full representing schedule. So when it comes to what's happened on the courts this year, the committee has plenty of results to work with.

There has been outstanding, high-level competition throughout the season that began November 9th and continues through the conference tournament games this week.

Also the basketball committee has expanded from 10 to 12 members this year, allowing improved monitoring of all 32 conferences.

Later today our committee members will submit their initial ballots, establishing the first at-large and under-consider pool of teams. As we know, there are also 11 automatic qualifiers already in the field.

Through the week, the committee will continue to review and bring under consideration teams into the field. We will also begin seeding and start the scrubbing process, which is the direct comparison of teams on the seed lines. And we all will be viewing all of the action from the conference tournaments this week.

The committee expects to work late into Saturday night to establish and scrub the tournament seed list, No. 1 through No. 68. Then Sunday's focus becoming bracketing with a few contingencies built in to accommodate the five conference tournament finals that day. Then of course the



selection show will be broadcast on CBS Sunday evening at 6:00 eastern time.

Again, we are anticipating a full tournament experience for all involved. Games will be played this year in four arenas, Buffalo, San Diego, Portland to Greenville, all the other locations across the country.

I know I speak for the other 11 committee members when I say how excited we are to be less than a week away from the start of the greatest three weeks in sports.

Before that happens we have a lot of work to do here in the committee room. We're just minutes away from starting that process. The committee will have some challenges this week largely because there are a number of high-quality teams at the top battling for the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds. It's also likely that numerous teams will contend for the final at-large bids. Then there's the seeding and scrubbing procedures that will consume much of our time this week. There are a lot of detailed conversations ahead.

It certainly promises to be a busy, challenging and interesting five days ahead, and I know we are anxious to get started.

Before doing so, David, I'll be happy to take any questions on the line.

DAVE WORLOCK: We have, as well, Dan Gavitt, our senior vice president for basketball for the NCAA. We'll take questions at this time.

Q. Tom, I know the team sheets are what the team sheets are. I know the ACC had a down non-conference. Does that change the way you evaluate those teams at all or given sort of the history of it?

TOM BURNETT: Thanks for the question. I think as you know the committee really doesn't look collectively at the conferences. We look at each individual team. Certainly you referenced the team sheet. Certainly it clearly spells out where a team stands, whether it's during the season or certainly during selection week.

I would say again, not spending a lot of time on the collective of any one conference, but when we dig into the team sheets we certainly are looking into what a team has done specifically in the quads, broken down into quad one, quad two and of course three and four. Certainly that is something that has our attention. It's something that the committee spends a lot of time on.

Q. This may be a question for Dan, but regarding

gender equity between the men's and women's tournaments, I know the Men's Basketball Committee worked with the Women's Basketball Committee maybe in a way it hadn't before. I was wondering if either of you could give us a little bit more about what that process was like, just some detail on that.

DAN GAVITT: I can start.

The two committees have most definitely collaborated very frequently throughout this year in planning the '22 championships, much more regularly than had been done historically. For whatever reason that had not been part of the process previously. The committees acted relatively independently planning and putting on these two incredible championships.

This year the committees met on a monthly basis. Indeed, met for the last time here about two hours ago virtually. The women's committee is 30 minutes from here in downtown Indianapolis, the men's committee in Carmel, Indiana.

So just comparing notes, making sure that equity is considered in any phase of planning for the championships. I think it has produced very favorable results and confidence going into March Madness for men and women.

TOM BURNETT: I would add to that all of us here in the men's committee room, as Division I athletic directors or conference commissioners, we're very much stakeholders in women's basketball as well. We have been very engaged with our colleagues on the women's committee and certainly have enjoyed the opportunity to share discussions with them since last summer. Of course, very supportive of what the women's committee has decided that they want to do here for the foreseeable future with their event.

We've been very engaged and have appreciated that opportunity.

Q. In terms of seeding, could it be as simple as comparing two teams, which team has more quad one wins than the other?

TOM BURNETT: I would say not by itself. I think certainly it's one of many factors we look at. We're looking at quite a bit. Who were the quad one teams, the quad two teams that they played? What is their road record? What is their head-to-head record? What could be their record against teams that are in the field as a comparison as well?

That one isolated example is just that. But the committee



is looking at all sorts of factors.

Further, as you may be aware, the committee members are very engaged with the 32 conferences, the monitoring program. We're hearing directly on a regular basis from our conference contacts on their thoughts about their conference and what's going on in their leagues.

Q. Team sheets, over the past years you've added other metrics, KenPom, strength of record. As a member of this committee, how is your approach to using the other items on the team sheet or your awareness of them, education in them, has changed during your time on the committee and how you might see that evolve going forward after you're no longer on it?

TOM BURNETT: Certainly I was on the committee when we were still in the RPI area, so to speak, I think the final year of the RPI before we moved to the new NET.

Certainly as a committee member I want to see everything. I'm interested in everything. I think what we would kind of fall back on is that ultimately this is still a results-based exercise.

However, really at the encouragement of the coach's community and others out there a few years ago, we have brought the predictive measures onboard. Certainly results probably go a long way in the selection of teams. The predictives are a little bit more related to possible seeding and help us in that regard.

Ultimately it's still all about three things: who you played, where you played them and what the result was. That really has not changed whether you go back to the RPI era or the new NET era.

We're squeezing a lot of information on these team pages. I think any one item on a team page, speaking for me only as a committee member, it really kind of encourages me to dig a little bit deeper and see what else there can be about this team that's worthy of possible selection into this tournament.

Q. How does the committee handle teams who lose players to season-ending injuries?

TOM BURNETT: The committee has had a long-standing policy to certainly be as informed as we possibly can be about injuries. I would say certainly over the past two years we've also added COVID disruptions to that, as well. On occasion we have to address the possibility that a student-athlete or even a coach at times can be suspended from play. Certainly the committee wants to know what

was the impact of that, how did the team perform with or without certain players, whether it's COVID or an injury, possible suspension. It certainly factors in.

I think ultimately knowing that a team coming back to full strength may be very different than it was during a COVID pause or coming right out of that, same with injury. Committee takes that into account.

Ultimately we certainly have to go to the results. We can't presume anything because of a COVID issue or an injury that would have impacted a final result. We do have to kind of live with the results that we've spoken of before. It allows us to move forward with the process.

Q. We've seen some pretty interesting résumés this year with some teams that have a lot of high-end wins but their metrics aren't great. On the opposite side, a lot of teams that don't have high-level wins have good metrics. How do you balance those two things when you're talking about especially seeding?

TOM BURNETT: It's exactly that, it's a balance. Again, as a committee member, you're not going to get too caught up in a spectacular number anywhere on the page. You're certainly going to pay attention when there's consistency across numbers.

Again, anything on the team sheets or anything that we observe as we watch games, attend games, we're going to look at everything and anything.

I think as we noted in the bracket reveal a few weeks ago, there were teams that may not have had the best metrics, but they were on the top 16 reveal. Then certainly there was just the opposite: teams out there with fantastic metrics, great numbers, but overall the 12 committee members did not quite have them in the reveal.

I think what it demonstrates is you really can't rely on one single resource at our disposal. We've got a lot of tools in the toolbox. NET certainly, all of the predictive and results-based metrics, then certainly looking at the quad one, quad two results. On occasion you cannot ignore the quad three and four results, as well.

Q. When a team has a lot of good wins in quad one but a couple losses in quad four, do these cancel each other out or do you put more weight into the wins?

TOM BURNETT: Certainly I would say overall teams winning games is a predominant factor in selection to the tournament. You certainly can't ignore what happens maybe in quad three and quad four.

Again, like anything else on a team sheet perhaps, if someone has a quad four loss, we're going to investigate why they had that loss. Was it a COVID issue? Was it injuries? Was it something else? Then how did they respond after that? It's all kind of in the mix of things that we're looking at.

There are teams with, on the surface, some puzzling losses. Also I think we would acknowledge that conference play is very hard. Going on the road to play is a challenge for our schools. Lots of quality wins, quality teams you got to play against. It can be hard to win, as I mentioned, on the road.

That being said, teams are probably going to have a bad day now and then. We can't let that kind of dictate what we do. We just have to acknowledge it as part of the full body of work that we reference often in a season and understand that very few teams are going to be perfect, they're probably going to have a blemish here or there.

DAVE WORLOCK: We have taken all the questions. We appreciate everyone participating today. We'll talk to you Sunday night. Thank you.

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