

NCAA Media Conference

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Bubba Cunningham

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this morning's videoconference with Bubba Cunningham, the director of athletics at North Carolina and the chair of the NCAA Division I women's basketball committee. We are coming to you from Carmel, Indiana, where the selection seeding and bracketing process will unfold over the next five days, culminating with the selection show at 6:00 p.m. eastern on CBS on Sunday night.

Before we take questions, I want to turn it over to Mr. Cunningham for some opening remarks.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Thanks, Dave. I too want to welcome everybody and appreciate you hopping on. I really want to thank our committee. We have everybody here at the Carmichael Hotel in Carmel, Indiana. We've got an incredibly well-educated, thoughtful and really smart group on this committee, and I thank them for all the work that they've done up until this point.

The conference monitoring takes an awful lot of time. They've watched an awful lot of games. They've done a lot of research, and I'm really excited about the next few days and gathering everyone's input into what should be an incredible tournament.

We all believe it's one of the greatest events in sport, not just college sports. We've taken our job very, very seriously, look forward to working together the next five days and getting this thing tipped off next Tuesday in Dayton.

I will say before we get started on the Q & A as just kind of a reminder that today, March 12, is the five-year anniversary of the date that the tournament was canceled. That was a real tough day for college athletics, a really difficult day for the NCAA staff, as well as the committee at that time, and a lot of us. There was an awful lot of anxiety and concern about what was happening to the country, and we were fortunate enough that in the very next year, thanks to Indianapolis and the great work of this staff, that they hosted the entire tournament in Indianapolis, and it was a great success.

As you know, the tournament is the lifeblood of the NCAA, and a lot of the money that flows back to the institutions is very helpful to all of us. We owe a debt of gratitude to the staff, to the NCAA, and I thought today as the five-year anniversary, it's a good reminder of how important this event is to all of us, both personally and professionally.

Again, my appreciation and thanks to the committee. Look forward to working with you. Just a couple of thoughts before I open it up for questions relative to where we are.

I thought a couple of weeks ago when we did the bracket preview show that we had incredible consensus on a No. 1 seeds. I think we have a little bit more discussion and debate because we've had some games in the last month that have really had an impact.

We listed our top 16, and we had two that just fell outside the top 16, and I think as we look at the top 16 today, again, because of the work that those teams have done in the last month, I think we'll have a lot of discussion on who is going to be in the top 16 for us, and then obviously we'll have much more discussion about who's actually in the tournament, which will be incredibly rewarding for some and very disappointing for others that don't make the field of 68.

Again, I'll stop there and open it up to questions to the media.

Q. Bubba, with the addition of WAB and the T-rank from Bart Torvik, we have a nice balance of the two sides of metrics, and of course you have the quad records and the individual achievements of each team. I wondered if you could explain, you've been on the committee for a while, how -- every committee member can do how they do it. I wanted to get from you, what do you emphasize? What are the things that matter most to you as you go about ranking the teams for selection and bracketing?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Well, all of those metrics, as you said, those are all really important. Ultimately it's cliché to say it, but I'll go ahead and say it again: Who did you play, where did you play, how did you do, and then ultimately, I



think really good advice that I received from some of the other committee members over the years is when you get down toward the end of those last couple of teams, kind of take a step back from the metrics and say, who's the better team and who do we think should be in the tournament.

They've all earned the right to be considered, and all of the metrics have put them in that position to be considered, but ultimately we're trying to get to the 37 best at-large to put in.

As you mentioned, all 12 of us have a little bit different perspective, but ultimately I'm going to go back to who do I think is the best team and why do they deserve to be in. There may be a metric or two that we discuss, but ultimately it's going to be who I think is going to be the best team to represent the group.

Q. I know we've had years where going into conference tournaments the committee has essentially said that any of the top seeds are maybe established. You mentioned that there's obviously some questions about what those top seeds may be. What impact could the SEC tournament have on the final top seeds that are revealed on Selection Sunday?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, great question, and we've talked about it. Every game does matter. We'll be watching the tournaments.

The top seeds in most of these leagues are obviously in the tournament, and where I think the biggest distinction will come from us is when we actually do the scrubbing and how does one team compare to a team that would be above them, and maybe there's a modification, maybe there's not based on the last week of the season, the last week of the regular season and now that we're in championship week, as well.

Every game does matter. We do pay very close attention to that. It may or may not move somebody up or down on the seed line, but we'll certainly consider what happens this week.

Q. Bubba, thanks for that note on this being the five-year anniversary. Obviously among the most surreal days ever in this sport.

I want to ask you something I couldn't get to you with on HQ over the weekend. Specifically Gonzaga, which is done, Memphis, which is interesting. They have diametrically opposed resume situations. Gonzaga, as you well know, is a team with predictive metrics across the board on team sheets. It's either eighth or ninth. Resume-wise this is not a team that would correspond with

that as a 3 seed, 4 seed level team. It's resume metrics are 39, 34, 36, right now in that range, KPI maybe in the high 20s. When you look at a team like that, what's your personal view on how you go about seeding it? And in the spirit of competitive balance for the bracket, how to put a team like Gonzaga -- conversely, as you well know, Memphis is the other way around, where Memphis loaded up in the non-conference schedule. It was able to get a resume right now that rates easily, easily ahead of Gonzaga, but from a predictive metric standpoint it's in the low 40s. It's 59 at Torvik this morning. They seem to be two interesting test cases. How do you think you and the committee will go about trying to seed these teams knowing Memphis' story isn't written yet and they've still got to play in their league tourney?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, that's a great question. We actually talked about it as a group. I can't speak for the entire group on how they're going to vote or what their thoughts are relative to one team or the other, but I do think both of those examples you used demonstrate some of the parts of the metrics that we do use.

When I looked at it, and this is my opinion, not of the committee, when you look at it, I see that Gonzaga had played and beaten a lot of teams by a lot, and so that's going to mean their efficiency is going to be really, really good.

When I look at Memphis, as you indicated, they played a really hard schedule, and they won a lot of their games but not by a strong margin, and even when they played kind of the weaker parts of their schedule, they didn't win by a lot. So their efficiencies weren't that good.

So I think that's why you see the divergence of the metrics. As a committee we're going to have to try and balance that and say, okay, how do we evaluate close wins against good teams or close wins against teams that we think you should be a little bit better than. That's the work of the committee and there's 12 of us that will have 12 different opinions.

I think you picked two teams that really demonstrate some of the challenges that the committee has in trying to make sense of metrics that look significantly different.

Q. It looks like you've got about a third of the field is going to come from two conferences, and if you add the Big 12 then you've got about half your field coming from three. Can you explain sort of the guidelines that the committee has about trying to avoid conference versus conference matchups and how much manipulating you think you might have to do on Sunday when you're setting the bracket, given the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

large number of teams you're having from a couple of conferences?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: You're right. If we get more than eight teams out of a league, it's impossible to put -- you're going to have three in a certain region. What we try to do is avoid the conference matchups in the early rounds. So depending on how often they've played will determine where we put them.

We hope we don't have to move them around a lot, but again, the first thing we'll do is get the teams in the tournament, we'll scrub it, we'll bracket it, and then we'll have to make some adjustments at that point.

But that's a ways off. It's kind of just speculative right now where these different teams are going to fall.

We will move it if we have to to try to ensure that they don't play each other too frequently, but it is a reality of where we are today.

Q. Bubba, when comparing two teams on a seed line and regarding placement on that seed line, could the difference between them be as simple as who has more Quad 1 or Quad 2 wins?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Sure. I mean, that's another metric that we use. There's any number of factors that might sway the committee to move somebody to a different position in the seed list. I also kind of want to go back to the previous question. You mentioned seeding there, which is a good idea. We really try to keep everybody on the same seed line. Even if we have to move them across the line, we don't want to move them to a different seed line because that really does impact the tournament. But it'll be a little trickier this year with the number of teams out of specific leagues.

Q. I'm going to go hypothetical here, but we might have an intriguing thing developing between Duke and Auburn. Auburn has been from a resume standpoint pretty clearly the No. 1 overall team, from a resume, for months now. But Duke is comfortably No. 1 in all of the predictives. When you are trying to determine the No. 1 overall seed, and I'm sorry to make you talk about that four-letter word here, but if you're trying to truly put the team at No. 1 overall, are you trying to -- I've got to make it pick it one way or the other. Are you trying to pick the team with the best resume or are you trying to pick the team that is the best, because it looks like we are headed to a situation where that will not be the same team; it will either be Duke and Column A or Auburn and Column B.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: That's a great question. All of it matters. This is a stupid story, but one time I asked my grandmother, what's your favorite color, and she said, plaid. So both of those things matter.

I can't distinguish one over the other, but it's a tough thing, and ironically or fortunately or whatever, I have been able to see both those teams play in person myself. I've seen them up close more than I want to.

Q. Bubba, just curious how you and the committee balance when you're looking at the quadrant system and the teams that line up throughout the bracket, how do you weigh when one team might have less wins in the higher quadrant, say Quad 1, but perhaps less in, say, Quad 2, less losses in Quad 2 or Quad 3? How do you weigh the importance of wins in the higher quadrant versus losses in the lower quadrant?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Again, it's a committee decision, so everyone is going to evaluate those differently.

But there's a distinction between even within the quadrants of a high Quad 1 or low quad or any of those things. All of the games matter. All of the metrics matter.

We're trying to define something that we really can't put our finger on and say, okay, if this, then that.

It's going to be a consensus of our group and all of the factors that we've talked about, whether it's a quad win or the NET or the Torvik or the WAB. Any of those are metrics we're going to talk about, and one of those might be the point of emphasis by an individual member on this committee.

I think getting too locked in on one specific metric I don't think is the right thing to do.

Q. When you look at a team like Texas, we've talked about metrics on this call, the predictive metrics are not good, they're off the bubble. It's a matter of opinion how far off the cut line they are. Can the SEC tournament, if they can get a couple of these games, is there enough time, enough opportunity where they can at least get closer to the cut line and for them it gets more interesting as we get to Sunday?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I don't really want to maybe talk about any specific team, but I will say any team that wins their tournament is going to be in, so they do have a chance to win their way in.

But we'll look at every game. Every tournament game matters. Every game matters, and we're going to continue

to look at them.

I hate to have a non-answer, but that is the reality of where we are. These all matter, and we'll consider them as we go. We're starting at 11:30 this morning. I think we've got the first one of our tournament games this morning.

Q. I want to go back to Auburn and Duke. This is in general, probably affecting other teams, as well. When you have a head-to-head matchup but it's a head-to-head matchup that happened three plus months ago, how will that factor into the seeding if you have two teams that are vying for maybe a spot on the same seed line the way you may have that with Auburn and Duke?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: It's one of the metrics. I know I'm giving you coach-speak here, but if we play good offense, play good defense, rebound, don't turn the ball over, we have a chance to win. It's the same thing; all the metrics matter. It's 12 people trying to make a decision on who is the best team and how do we decide that. Head-to-head is probably going to be really important to some folks in the room, and the overall body of work is what is going to be considered.

But something within that overall body of work is going to tilt somebody one way or the other. I hate to be that kind of generic about it, but that's the reality of working with a committee that's really spent a lot of time doing this. Everyone has a different opinion.

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