

NCAA Media Conference

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Bubba Cunningham

Keith Gill

Press Conference



BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Good evening, everyone. Welcome. Really appreciate your time. Actually really appreciate the promotion of the tournament.

We've been in Carmel, Indiana, for the last five days working hard, and we concluded a lot of our work late this afternoon finishing up the last bracket following the Michigan championship against Wisconsin.

We're excited to get to Dayton for the Division I men's basketball championship, for the First Four, and we're excited for the rest of the tournament concluding all the way in San Antonio in a couple weeks.

It was a great year in college basketball, and this year we probably had fewer upsets in the conference tournaments than we've had in quite some time. I think you all remember last year we had five positions in the field that were lost due to upsets. This year we only had one. In fact, 25 of the 31 conference championships were won by either the first or second seeded team in those conferences. It was really an exciting year, and you could see the momentum building for the tournament that's coming up on Tuesday.

Joining me today, as Dave mentioned, is Keith Gill, vice chair of the basketball committee. He's the commissioner of the Sun Belt conference. The reason Keith is here today is because there's been a number of questions about Carolina's inclusion in the tournament, and that's likely to be some of the questions again right now.

But he can explain anything related to Carolina because as you all are pretty familiar, there are policies and procedures as well as our principles don't permit any one individual AD or any conference commissioner to be in the room when their schools are being discussed, and that's the case for the last five days relative to any discussion about Carolina.

The last thing I want to mention before I do turn this over and open it to you for questions is I want to recognize a very significant loss that we've had in the last week and

express my sorrow for the loss of a legend in the field of journalism in John Feinstein. He's a Hall-of-Fame writer, incredible person. He's been in the Carolinas a lot. I know he's a Duke fan.

But he's been a wonderful colleague to so many of you, and his passing was just something that I wanted to recognize, that he had a significant impact on me, on the entire industry, and I just wanted to make one recognition of John before we moved on. My condolences to his family and wish them all the best.

With that, I'll be happy it turn it open for any questions that you might have.

Q. Bubba, with Texas, can you sort of take us through the Texas of how they ultimately got in? 19-15, seven Quad 1 wins. Just curious how that process went along to actually get Texas into the field.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Well, you know, it's incredible when you get down toward the end. As we mentioned previously, San Diego State, Texas, Xavier, North Carolina, all of us got in right at the very, very end, and the committee looks at 12 different metrics, including this year the Torvik and the WAB, and I can't speak for everyone on the committee, but I do think that the seven wins in Quad 1 was significant, and I think that's probably one of the things that moved them in. They played in the hardest conference in the country.

That conference has just won 88 percent of their non-conference games, and they didn't have a single loss in Quad 3 or Quad 4. They had an outstanding year, and their competition was really mostly in their conference.

Q. The non-conference strength of schedule has sort of been a sticking point. How much of that was a factor, and how did you guys ultimately overlook what was a pretty bad strength of schedule non-conference?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, we had to look at the non-conference strength of schedule but we also looked at the conference. When you look at the overall strength of

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schedule for the entire year, we talk about a full body of work. Quite frankly, teams that don't schedule hard in the non-conference have to rely on an incredible conference season with great teams within their league, and this year for Texas it worked out.

Q. I wanted to get your thoughts on Louisville receiving a No. 8 seed. The second place team in the ACC has only been lower than a 4 seed one time since 2000 and you're familiar with that because it was the 2022 North Carolina team that was an 8 seed, finishing tied for second. I just wanted to get you to elaborate on how that came about.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I think Louisville had a great year, but I do think when you take a look at our league, we ended up getting four teams into the tournament this year, obviously Duke being the leader of teams out of the ACC, Clemson. Clemson beating Duke certainly raised their profile.

As the committee looked at and put Louisville into the field and then we scrubbed them up and down the board, that's where the committee felt that they should be ranked this year, and then obviously we came in at the very end -- in fact, we wouldn't have been in had Memphis lost in the American conference championship.

Q. Am I to take from your comments about contingency brackets that VCU would not have been an at-large selection had it lost to George Mason today?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, that is accurate. We considered them. They were under consideration the entire five days we were here, and ultimately they did not get into the field. That was a game that they needed to win to get into the field.

Q. Was there any particular reason or shortcoming on their resume that led you all to conclude -- I know you can't speak for the collective, but as you looked at their team sheet?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, again, they were considered. Yeah, you're right, I can't say anything in particular for the entire group. I just think when compared to some of the other teams that may have played a more competitive schedule throughout the entire year, the Quad 4 loss was something that was kind of a challenge for them. Four Quad 2 losses were a challenge, as well.

They had some very good predictive metrics. They were 7-3 on the road. But the non-conference schedule probably hurt them more than anything else. But again, I'm

just going off the top of my head that not everybody on the committee would have seen it the same way. But when you're voting with 12 different committee members voting, they came up a little short.

Q. I wanted to follow up with something that you had said with Matt Norlander about using Wins Above Bubble and Torvik. As somebody who's been on the committee for a number of years now as chairmen are, did adding those metrics make the process more significant than in past years? And I know you can't speak to UNC, but in the case of Xavier with the 9-1 quadrant record, did it mean that perhaps quadrants were less of a deciding factor when you started looking at how some of these votes were coming out?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, exactly, the WAB was something -- I'm going to have Keith address it, as well, because when we got down to those last three or four teams, frequently Carolina was in the discussion, and as soon as we were part of the discussion, I left the room.

The use of the WAB -- Keith actually may have more insight into that than I do. I thought personally it was a useful metric. It's the first time we've used it. It'll be interesting to see how the committee continues to use that as we go forward.

But Keith, why don't I turn that to you because that was a factor to try to determine the bubble teams.

KEITH GILL: Yeah, I think the use of WAB was helpful. I don't know that I would say it was such a difference maker in terms of the process change significantly, but it was another tool that we could use to try to evaluate things that sometimes aren't like, in terms of different schedules, in terms of people playing uneven conference schedules and not round-robins. So the Wins Above Bubble allows us to provide a look that can make look at that in a more consistent way, and I do think the committee used that, but I don't know that I would say the use of the quads was diminished in that regard. I would just say that this was additive and certainly didn't subtract from some of the other processes that we currently use.

Q. I understand all the recusal policies with regard to the North Carolina discussion, and certainly knowing you as long as I have, I know integrity is incredibly important to you. With that in mind, do you have any personal discomfort with being in this position, and given all the scrutiny on the committee's work, how would you describe the value of this process being led by ADs and commissioners, where there are going to be some inherent conflicts of interest that appear to the public?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, that's a great question, and yeah, it does. It weighed on me a lot.

I will say that it also weighs on commissioners and it weighs on other ADs when it comes to seeding. With a commissioner that would have multiple teams that are under consideration, they're hoping their teams get in. It does weigh on you. You have a personal, professional responsibility at your institution. You're part of a committee of 12 that represent the membership.

I think people recognize that and honor it. Quite honestly, I think you can sometimes say less in any setting because you want to make sure that you don't even get up to that line of integrity.

I think that's just part of what we have to work through, the way the committee is designed to represent the membership.

Q. I'm wondering about two things: Between Michigan and Michigan State, one, Michigan obviously getting the 5 seed rather than a 4 seed and winning the Big Ten Tournament, how much you guys as a committee can handle those late tournament games. Secondly, the placement of Michigan and Michigan State in the same bracket, I don't feel like that's ever happened in previous NCAA tournaments. What was the conversation about that?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Well, Michigan State obviously had a great year, winning the regular season, and Coach Izzo in for his 26th time is truly remarkable.

Michigan playing Wisconsin in the conference championship today, we did contingency brackets last night, and we actually moved Michigan up on the seed list on the contingency that they won. We also scrubbed Wisconsin. She they have won, we had them in a different position.

Ultimately what we've tried to do this year, and quite frankly with 14 teams from the SEC, is we generally bracket more based on geography. This year with 14, we had to make sure that we didn't have too many of the SEC teams playing each other early, and so we kept all of the teams on the same seed line, but we were paying a little bit more attention to that distribution and a little bit less on geography.

Q. I guess I'm curious about the two conference opponents. I know that deep into the tournament usually you see this, but it's rare you see the rivals themselves. Previously if you had one play during a

season you could meet another team usually but not necessarily a two play or three play.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, we really spend most of our time protecting the top 4 seeds. It can happen. Whether or not it's ever happened in the history of the tournament, I don't know the answer to that question, sorry.

Q. On IU, I know there was a lot of talk about those bubble teams, but what was the definitive factor of not putting the Hoosiers in over a team like UNC?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I'll tell you, it was tough. Indiana didn't have a single loss outside the first quadrant. But they didn't play that well in the challenging non-conference schedule. So the metrics were just slightly below the ones that ended up getting in.

Keith maybe would be able to speak to that even more fully than I have because those when you're getting right down to the end, and frequently I was out of the room on much of this discussion, but I think I've said a lot of the points that I've heard throughout the last couple of days.

Q. I'd love to hear Keith's perspective if he can.

KEITH GILL: No worries. I didn't want to just jump in.

No, I think to be honest with you, when you look at the opportunities that they had in the Quad 1 area, they didn't take advantage of those opportunities in a way, and then their metrics also were down relative to the teams that got into the field.

That's really kind of what it came down to, as it looks in terms of some of the metrics that we use that are really important, and then kind of the opportunities that they had and what some of those results were.

Q. Bubba, obviously you have to be out of the room when any North Carolina discussion takes place throughout this process, but could you speak to as the committee chair, the responsibility that you took on throughout the week and the care that you put into making sure that broader discussions did not impact potentially the way that your team or any other team was viewed as you talk about the areas that will matter to this committee, the different analytics that you're looking at, trying to make sure that you did not have an indirect influence into that process?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, great question. You know, any of us that have to chair the committee, and Keith will chair the committee next year, you come in with that knowledge. We've been doing this -- I've been on the



committee now for five years. I've watched four others lead the committee. We meet throughout the year.

I think it's been a great learning experience. You do have an opinion. You do have your own thoughts and your own ideas. But the responsibility of the chair is to have the committee work together to be fair, to find the best 37 to put in the field, and allow everyone to speak their mind, give their point of view, evaluate teams as they say.

We also assign a conference monitor to each of the conferences that talk on behalf of those leagues, and I think it's a really good system. I think our principles that the NCAA has adopted over time somewhat ensure that equity.

It's been a great process, and we follow those procedures that have been prescribed and have been used for a number of years.

Q. I have two questions. One is about University of Arizona. What went into the process of seeding them because I feel like they played really good in the Big 12 and also had a really tough schedule, so what was the thought process there? My second question is the SEC had 14 teams, which is a record to make March Madness. Normally they're known as a football conference, but lately basketball has kind of been catching up in that respect. What went into the thought process behind those two decisions?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, you're right. The SEC has really come on strong this year, this year in particular. They won 88 percent of their non-conference games. They were hard to play against. They beat almost every league they played against.

It was unique. It may not be unique, but it's certainly something that we're taking a look at.

The conferences are expanding. The bigger conferences are a bigger challenge for us now, as well. So hats off to the SEC for having such an outstanding year.

Back to Arizona, I think Arizona, as you said, Arizona did have a great year and --

Q. Just to reiterate, what went into the thought process of ranking them because they had a good Big 12 conference playoff run. They only lost to Houston and then had a tough schedule, as well. What went into the thought process of ranking them?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, again, we moved them into the tournament fairly early. We scrubbed them against

everyone else. They did have a great year. They were consistent most of the year. One of the better offenses in the country.

I think they're in a great spot, and I think they'll have a great tournament.

Q. I know you asked about Michigan earlier, but more specifically I guess many fans are feeling what they just did in the Big Ten Tournament against their peers didn't really show itself on the bracket as far as where they are relative to some of the other Big Ten teams. If you could speak to whether it did matter and how you landed with them two seeds below Wisconsin and I think one below Purdue.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, I think every game matters all year long, and I think Michigan was a little bit inconsistent in my mind this year as I was watching them play. They had a great year, not quite as consistent as we may have thought. They had some early losses in the non-conference.

As I mentioned, we moved them into the tournament, and then we got them -- they were in the championship game, so we had two contingency brackets. We did scrub them up if they won, and then we had done the same thing with Wisconsin.

But it's a tough field. When I looked at this tournament bracket, there are so many teams in the eight and nine that have won National Championships. We've got Hall-of-Fame coaches. This is a really, really competitive field, and we think we were very fair to Michigan's seeding.

Q. I'm wondering if you guys could expand a little bit. I heard something on the selection show about West Virginia and part of the reason they weren't included being -- having a little bit to do with Tucker DeVries' injury, which I think was in late November. They beat Iowa State and Kansas in the time that he was off the floor. Some of their metrics look pretty favorable relative to teams who got in. I'm wondering if you could expand a little bit about why they weren't included.

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, it's a great question. I think, again, we're down to splitting hairs there at the end. They had a really good year overall. Since he was hurt, they did go 13-11, and when they beat Iowa State, Iowa State was shorthanded, as well.

Again, it's tough when you're clear in Quads 3 and 4. They did have a good year, but without their best player, it just came up a little bit short when it came down to evaluating



them against some of the other teams that they were compared to at the end.

Again, Carolina is one of them, so I don't know if Keith wants to add anything to it or not.

KEITH GILL: No, I think Bubba said it well. At the end of the day, that was impactful, and that was part of our decision-making process as we were evaluating West Virginia, which is obviously when Tucker DeVries was there, that's when they beat Arizona, that's when they beat Gonzaga, and as Bubba said, since that time they were 13-11.

That's not taking anything away from their season. They had a great year. It's just that the committee felt like that wasn't enough to kind of earn that last spot.

Q. I wanted to follow up on Louisville. I was wondering how much did their early season non-conference losses to Tennessee, to Ole Miss that were by big margins, how much that may have factored into their eventual seeding today?

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, every game matters, and I do think those losses were tough losses for them, but they had a great year.

Louisville is an outstanding team, and hats off to what they've been able to do, Pat Kelsey coming in there and turning that thing around. They had an outstanding year. Only one loss in Quad 2.

But again, as I just mentioned just about five minutes ago, the quality of this field is really good, and when you're scrubbing teams up and down and trying to compare them, every last kind of blemish on your record might move you down a notch or a big win may move you up. I look forward to watching them in the tournament. I think they could have a great tournament.

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