

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Monday, March 16, 2026

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

North Carolina State Wolfpack

Coach Will Wade

Darrion Williams

Ven-Allen Lubin

Quadir Copeland

Media Conference



Q. For any of you, you were all last year in March Madness, you all won at least a game. Does having that extra experience kind of help coming into this year, like, nerves back a little?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I think with our experience, I think it really helps with this team, just knowing the intensity and the purpose that we need to have for these games, especially for Texas.

I think obviously for Darrion, he's been on the highest competitive stage and us too. I think with his experience knowing what it takes for us to win, I think it will really help us.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think for me it's gotten easier every year I've went to the tournament. I played in the First Four my freshman year at Nevada. Similar to with how packed it's going to be tomorrow even though neither of us are from here. But yeah, I've just been trying to let them know how tough it's going to be every game.

QUADIR COPELAND: I think it's a great opportunity for all of us just to get some give-back in the build-up of something that can make the season more memorable. I think this will be a good opportunity for us and the guys, a good experience for the freshmen. I feel like a great last experience for us to make something happen.

Q. You mentioned your time at Nevada. What separates the First Four and what do you take from that experience to use tomorrow night?

DARRION WILLIAMS: Shoot, it's like a regular tournament

game. It's not anything different. You play a pretty good team. That year we lost to Arizona State by a lot, so trying to right that wrong and hopefully get a win here.

Q. Quadir, when the Wolfpack are at their best, what are they doing in finding success?

QUADIR COPELAND: Just staying together, playing together, just everybody in. I feel like that's our best basketball when we've got multiple players in double digits and everything just clicking.

But I feel like that's our best basketball, feel like that's Wolfpack at its best.

Q. Ven-Allen, what's the best trait of this basketball team?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: I think just our personalities. I think it really helps us just coming together, staying connected, and knowing that we all bring different things to the table and we can put together the puzzle pieces to make something beautiful. And I think that's something we've learned about each other, things we can continue to build off of, and continue to just make great things happen.

Q. For Quadir, as a Jersey guy, can you talk about who you looked up to in Philly as far as modeling your game growing up, if anybody? It can be an NBA player or college player.

QUADIR COPELAND: To be completely honest with you I modeled my game after my older brother Daiquan Copeland, but it's easier when you have somebody in house with you. He led the path for me with the basketball thing. I didn't grow up playing basketball. I played because of him. I always followed his every move, and it's always been like that. So I always had somebody in my household that I was able to look up to and model my game after.

Q. Ven-Allen, does it help getting ready for this game with an opponent that you've already played this year, or do you sort of just throw that out?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I think it's a good thing that we have matched with them earlier on in the season just to



know what they're capable of doing. And then just help us out on how we can stop them and how we can also capitalize on the things we didn't capitalize on in the first match.

I think Texas is a really good team. They've got bigger guys, skilled players, but I think the matchup really works in our favor, as well. I think just with the coaches doing the right things and scouting and putting us in a good position to beat them tomorrow, I think it's really good for us.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah, obviously I think when we played them, that wasn't our best trip in Maui. We let a few games slip away. I think we were excited when we seen them on the schedule that we got to play them get. Like Q said earlier, we get to get some give-back from earlier in the season, and everything is personal for all of us.

QUADIR COPELAND: Of course, just to see the good and the bad, to fix mistakes that we had against them. I think it'll be a good opportunity to play against an opponent that we played, that we studied. And we can, like I said, learn from our mistakes and get better.

Q. What were the emotions like on Sunday seeing your name called? Then transitioning to do a quick turnaround knowing you're going to be playing on Tuesday and changing that mindset?

QUADIR COPELAND: The reaction, it was just a blessing being able to be picked in the tournament. Knowing the situation that we put ourselves in at the end of the season, still being able to get a chance and stuff, we was blessed. Now we're just going to make the most out of it, really. That's all we can do.

But I feel like the reaction was not surprise because we knew what we done, but still appreciative for being here.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I believe everybody was blessed and grateful to have this opportunity, to not have our college journey end in a way like that. I think all our reactions were pretty valid just knowing the situation we put ourselves in. But we know that it isn't the end for us. We can make a run. We can make things turn out the way we want to, so that's our mindset now. We have no doubt what we can do this run.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah, I'm just happy to make the tournament. We know what we did at the end of the season to kind of put ourselves in more of a scarce spot. But we're just happy to get in no matter where we went. We knew we had to be ready to play. I mean with First Four, we got to go somewhere else, but we are where we are and we have to be where our feet are. And we still can

make a run at everything that we want.

Q. Darrion, favorite March Madness moment as a player and then as a fan?

DARRION WILLIAMS: As a player, probably when we beat Arkansas last year in the Sweet 16. That was a surreal moment for me.

Then as a fan, watching Ven win in the First Four last year against San Diego State.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, as a player winning the First Four last year, that was my first NCAA Tournament win since I got into college. I think as a fan, I'd probably have to say last year's National Championship with Houston and Florida.

QUADIR COPELAND: Well, of course the best experience is winning last year with McNeese, being the first in program history and things like that. That was an amazing feeling for me and the guys. I would say history, I don't know.

Really there's a lot of moments in March. Let's just hope that we make them. That's my hope, that one of our guys make a moment that will be my favorite moment forever in March. That's what I'm looking forward to.

Q. You guys mentioned that you didn't end the season the way you wanted to. Do you put that behind you and forget about it or use the mistakes you made then to learn going into the tournament?

QUADIR COPELAND: Both really. You've got to move on. It's like, it's do or die now. It's like us trying to stick and let the losses or whatever we done -- like, we know what we done. Now we've got to move on from it and grow, and if we don't, we'll be home.

I think we know that. I think we understand the situation that we're in. We've got our back against the wall, but we've been in these situations before, and now we've just got to prevail.

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I think we just had to move on. I think it's best for us not to carry on the baggage from the things that we made mistakes on and the games that we let slip away and allow it to carry on to the next games. Because it's not going to help us out, not going to do anything for us.

I guess for us, it's really just learning from it, though. Just being mindful of the mistakes that we made, the things we have to learn and get better at so we don't have to make

the same mistakes again. Like Q said, it's win or go home, and now this is an important game to win.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah, just understanding why we let some of those games slip away that we should have won. But it's a brand-new season. Anything can happen in March, especially in the tournament. Still try and make a run at it.

Q. For Quadir, Coach Miller said that you were the engine of this offense, complimenting your passing all year, leading the ACC in assists. When you go into a game knowing that a team is focusing their attention on stopping you, how do you keep a clear mind going into a matchup like that?

QUADIR COPELAND: Just follow my teammates, trust my teammates, follow them. That's all I really can do in situations like that.

I know they've got my back out there, and I know I can't double myself, so I just fall on my teammates. That's it. I put the load that I feel like I can't do, just put it on them and they always usually take care of it. Just fall back on the guys, trust the guys, trust the scheme, trust the coaches. Coach has a plan so it's not like you can just stop me and then we lose.

Trust the scheme, trust the plan, trust the team, and whatever we've got to do to win, that's what I'm willing to do.

Q. Darrion, as far as the ACC is concerned, in preparation for your game tomorrow, how well do you guys anticipate them coming at you with a certain amount of defensive prowess?

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think they're going to be a very physical -- I think it was very physical the first time we played them. We know that's kind of been where we lacked in some of the games that we've lost control in, teams have been more out, more physical than us. We know we're ready for the fight, and shoot, we will be.

Q. Ven-Allen, do you take something from last year being in the First Four game?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I did. I think that what Darrion said, anything can happen. It's a new season. You've got a clean slate. Whatever you did in the past in the postseason doesn't really matter now because anything can happen.

For us to be in this position, like I said, we appreciate it, we're grateful. And I think that once we come with the right

edge and the right purpose and approach in every game, we know we can make good runs and make great things happen.

Q. Just a statement on your squad being here for March Madness.

WILL WADE: Yeah, we're happy to be here. Look, we didn't finish the season as strongly as we would like. We put ourselves in this position. We're excited to be in the tournament. We're excited to be in Dayton. It's a great basketball city, great basketball fans, great basketball arena, everything.

We're very excited to be here, and it doesn't matter how we finish the season, everybody is 0-0. See if we can get a little momentum and play better here in the tournament.

Q. You began talking about it right there. What was the initial reaction like once you guys saw your name pop up that you were coming to Dayton?

WILL WADE: Well, if I'm being truthful, we were pretty surprised, but we're happy to be in it. I think we thought there was a slight chance we'd be in Dayton, but Dayton is the NCAA Tournament, so we're excited to be in it. Everybody was pretty quiet when it popped up, but we got a job to do, and we need to start playing our best basketball.

It's a great experience to be here. This can propel us forward if we use this the right way.

Q. Quick turnaround, but does it help playing a team for a second time?

WILL WADE: Yeah, it'll help. Look, we played them on a quick turnaround in Maui, too. It was the third day of a three-day tournament, so we played them on a quick turnaround there, as well.

Certainly helps a little bit. We have some familiarity with Texas. They have some familiarity with us. I'm sure it helps them some, as well.

Q. Coach, what do you like about the qualities that this team has to be able to make a deep run in March?

WILL WADE: Well, the number one thing we do is we can shoot the ball really well. We're one of the top 10 teams in the country in three-point shooting. That's our calling card for better or worse. Some nights we don't shoot it well and we get pounded, and some nights we shoot it well and we look really good. Hopefully tomorrow night is one of those nights where we shoot it well.



Q. Is there something you'll take from that game in Maui into this game you think will help your team?

WILL WADE: Well, hopefully we guard them better. We gave up 102 to them in Maui. Maybe the fans would like that, if everybody scores 100 or something like that. We need to be better defensively. We gave up 16 threes. We gave up a ton of stuff at the rim. We fouled them quite a bit. They do a great job drawing fouls. We need to do a better job cleaning that up.

Q. I believe this is the second time now in a couple years -- your first year in a program you've been able to lead into the NCAA Tournament. With this different era of roster building and the way you go about things, especially with NIL, is there any kind of challenges you encountered during that time compared to your first year in other programs?

WILL WADE: Yeah, it's a lot more challenging the higher level you go to because there's less and less players that get through the filter that can play for you and make an impact and help you initially.

I think we put this roster together the best we could, but as you'll see tomorrow, we're small. Ven was up here, he's our starting center. A lot of the A-10 teams have bigger starting centers than we have. But Ven has been an absolute warrior for us, reliable, dependable. He's been awesome for us all year.

When you're putting together a roster on the fly, you're going to have some limitations. We have some limitations but we've got some great stuff too, which is that we really shoot the ball. Ven is really efficient around the basket. There's some good things, as well.

It's certainly a challenge when you have to go get bulk players. I think it's a lot better when you've only got to get three or four. You can hone in on those main guys. But we went and got 11 or 12 out of the portal, and it certainly makes it challenging. You can't do as much research and you can't do as much intel as you would like to do on every kid.

Q. Having a guy like Quadir or Darrion who had some great games in the tournament, how nice is it to have players that are proven to play better once they get to March Madness time?

WILL WADE: Well, we'll find out tomorrow. We're hopeful. We have a lot of NCAA Tournament experience. Ven-Allen Lubin was here last year with North Carolina. Darrion was in the Elite 8 with Texas Tech. Paul McNeil

was at NC State last year, but this is his first NCAA Tournament, Tre Holloman went to the Elite 8 with Michigan State. And Quadir was with me at McNeese where we won a game. That's our starting lineup.

We've got a freshman who comes off the bench, Matt Able, this will be his first tournament. We've got Terrance Arceneaux who comes off the bench, who was at University of Houston. I told him he's seen the full spectrum now, Final Four and First Four. So he's seen the whole deal.

Of our seven guys, five of our seven have extensive and deep NCAA Tournament experience, and hopefully that will show tomorrow. That was the idea in putting the roster together and getting some of these guys with tournament experience. Hopefully that will shine through tomorrow.

Q. How has the transition been personally for you from one school to the other?

WILL WADE: Well, all of them are different. This one at NC State has been pretty smooth. For better or worse, I've done this five times now, so you get a little bit used to it. I'm tired of doing it, so we don't want to do it anymore.

But you get a little bit used to it, and every time it gets a little bit easier. But it takes a minute to get into the rhythm of every school you go to and every place you go to. There's a different rhythm.

So it takes some time to get used to that. We've gotten in rhythm here at NC State.

Q. When is NC State at its best?

WILL WADE: At its best when we're making shots. Hopefully the rims are soft and we can make a few shots here at UD Arena.

Q. Favorite memory in the arena?

WILL WADE: Well, came here and got beat five times when I was at VCU. The last time I was here in the First Four was the first year of the First Four. I was an assistant at VCU when we beat Southern Cal and went all the way to the Final Four, so that would by far be the best memory here.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.