

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - VCU vs Illinois

Friday, March 20, 2026

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Keaton Wagler

Andrej Stojakovic

Tomislav Ivisic

Media Conference

Q. Tomi, you were in this position with the team last year entering the Tournament in the second round. Just wanted to get your thoughts on any messages you've given to this team heading into this game.

TOMISLAV IVISIC: Yeah, just to play like we played last game, play connected, help each other, know the fact that every game could be our last. There's just something that pushes us to give more and to prepare better and just execute what the coaches want us to do.

Q. I just wanted to get you guys' thoughts just on the first half execution there on offense and what was clicking better for you guys on the offensive side in the second half?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: I think coming out to the game with a certain intensity -- playing for each other, creating easy shots. We have so many versatile players on the team that we kind of spaced the floor, and we were able to pick the defense apart with our skill.

Q. I'm sure you all have seen tape on VCU at this point, but Terrence Hill, really big night last night. What have you all seen on him specifically?

KEATON WAGLER: He's a really great player. He plays with a lot of confidence. He can shoot the ball, drive the ball, pass the ball, does a lot of good things. Really good player.

So we know we have to be dialed in on him from the



scouting report. Make sure we can't let him get hot, can't let him get easy shots. We've got to make all his touches and shots hard.

Q. I know you guys have been focused on what you have to do here and with the VCU scout, but I'm just curious for all three of you, are any of you college basketball junkies? Do you watch the Tournament as entertainment as it goes along or just focus on what you guys have to do?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: I think it's a mixture of both. We're pretty aware of hearing the crowd before our game and them going to overtime last night. Yeah, throughout the day we have it playing in our team room.

As focused as we are on our game, it's nice to see basketball in general playing, yeah.

KEATON WAGLER: I mean, he said it really well. We're focused in on our game specifically, but when we're not doing anything, just resting, we'll turn the games on and see what's happening, see which teams are playing well, things like that.

Yeah, it's a mixture of both.

THE MODERATOR: Tomislav, anything?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I have nothing else to add.

Q. Dre, your first time playing in March Madness, wanted to get your thoughts on this experience and how it's been for you.

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: Obviously it's a place where I've wanted to get to for a long time now. I think the day before the game, getting to shoot on the court with the guys was pretty surreal. Then yesterday as soon as the tip went up, the nerves went away, and it was time to play. I'm just glad we got the win and move on.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll have an opening statement from you and then take questions.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Excited to be here. We've got our hands full against a very, very good VCU team. It was



very, very impressive watching their fight and their comeback yesterday. Obviously a team that's playing well, won their tournament and yesterday was outstanding.

Coach Martelli has done an incredible job this year. Very excited for our opportunity to get to play an outstanding team.

Felt good about last night. Did some positive things and need to carry that over to tomorrow. We'll be ready, and we'll tip it up and see where it goes.

Q. Kylan was speaking yesterday about some of the things he's been doing behind the scenes to kind of give that team a sense of urgency. What are some of those things that you've kind of seen from him?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: They called a players-only meeting. There's been a lot of going to dinners and locker room stuff that Kylan and Mirk got involved in some of those things. I think our veterans understand what this tournament is and how you have to approach it.

The great thing is that the Big Ten Tournament in the regular season becomes a blur. They just evaporate from your memories when you get here. Selection Sunday happens, and all is forgotten because everyone is 0-0. It's all about how you play and how you're playing.

Our veterans have done a good job of helping our guys in that moment.

Q. I know you're looking at scouts and teams that you could potentially play down the road. Do you enjoy watching it happen, or is it just business as usual?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: No, I enjoy watching. I think every coach has an eye on the games going on and seeing who's doing well, and you're pulling for your conference affiliation, your teams, and how they're doing.

Then there's always -- the fan in you is always curious about an upset and what that looks like. You're still pretty focused on just the job in front of you.

Q. I'm curious, you just talked about VCU being impressed with what they did. Is there a piece that you take more away from when you're looking at the film of this is how they got themselves in a hole and things that we can do versus when they're rolling and playing and coming back in a game, these are the things that scare you? Does one outweigh the other, I guess?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think the impressive thing is they never quit. It would have been very easy, down 18 or 19,

to just lay down and roll over, and they didn't do that. Then you start looking for tendencies. You don't make too much of it, okay. Did Carolina do this? Has anybody else throughout their conference done that? How have they handled this or that?

It becomes more about the tendencies, more than a single game. Anything can happen in a single game. It's more about tendencies. Very, very impressed with their tenacity and their ability to just keep fighting and not lay down.

Q. Coach, VCU not generally a school that you would have to scout coming out of the Atlantic 10, but does maybe not your process change, but how do you go about scouting a team that you might not have seen in a pretty long time?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think that, one, I think with our staff, we've got -- when the bracket comes out, we know that the first weekend games we're going to have people dialed in on and have some preinformation done, whether we play them or not. So we had some of our staff on it. Then it's about me catching up.

I don't get ahead. I don't work ahead. I stay pretty much in the moment with the team we're getting ready to play. So I'm relying on those guys doing a great job of scouting, and then it's just gathering as much information as you can, looking at, like you said, trends and tendencies, analytics. All of those things play into it.

Then you start putting those things with their physical talent, and you get a scouting report.

Q. A couple players mentioned before your game yesterday that they watched the ending of that VCU game. Any just impressions in that moment just from the locker room?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I wasn't in the locker room with them. I don't know what they were -- it gets harder for me to watch it because I'm writing up the board or I'm preparing. Obviously when it went to overtime, and we were sitting in the locker room and we can hear all the crowd noises both ways.

So it was a little challenging because we'd hear the crowd noise and we had a tape delay. So it wasn't showing on the TV what happened.

Yeah, just an exciting, exciting college basketball game. It was great for the fans and obviously great for VCU.

Q. I apologize for asking a question that I think I know the answer to, but a couple weeks ago I was listening

to a podcast with you. You were asked what the biggest win in your college basketball coaching career was. For those one or two of us in here that don't listen to the Jon Rothstein podcast, I wonder if you could give us that answer.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: What was the one I said?

Q. It was the one where you were at Stephen F. Austin.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I figured I was going to get that one. That one was a shock. They had a great team. They were a 5 seed, and we were a 12. We were fortunate enough to win that game in overtime, get it to overtime with really a four-point play with a few seconds left.

That was one of Shaka's great teams and obviously a team that Shaka had tremendous success with. Many coaches thereafter have had tremendous success at VCU.

But a big moment in my life. It was Stephen F. Austin's first NCAA Tournament win. So you have a tendency to remember those.

Q. Coach, I'm curious with David, there was times in November and December where you said practices were really bad. I think at one point you said couldn't play him, couldn't put him in the game. Was there ever a time where you were concerned it wouldn't work out for David, and what made him wired for this huge growth in the span of a few months?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think the best thing about Mirk and really freshmen is they continue to get better, especially those who work as hard as Mirk.

Those were probably head coach mistakes, not playing him through some of those times. I go back to a couple various games when we just didn't play him. We sat him because we thought he was a mismatch here or there or he wasn't playing very well.

Obviously he's become one of the most valuable players in not only our team but in the Big Ten. I just think it's a tribute to his coaching. I think it's a tribute to his work. And we've gotten much smarter as coaches in how to utilize him and put him in those scenarios to be successful.

Q. Coach, you saw Phil Martelli Sr. while he was at Michigan and now coaching against his son here at VCU. Do you have any thoughts on just that coaching family?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It's legendary. I mean, it is spectacular. I think of Philly basketball and the legendary

piece of that Phil was. All the successes he's had. It's no shock that Junior is having this same type of success. Winning is a hard thing to accomplish, and Phil did it at a very high level.

He became close acquaintances with us through Coaches Versus Cancer. He's a tremendous person. He works extremely hard at that now that he's retired, and now he gets to be a proud dad and watch his son achieve great, great things.

No shock there. I heard Junior at a clinic this summer, and I walked away very, very impressed with his knowledge, his understanding, especially of modern-day basketball, as I call it. But he's been taught very, very well what the game of basketball is about.

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