

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - McNeese vs Vanderbilt

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McNeese Cowboys Coach Bill Armstrong

Media Conference



hours away. We already had DJ Richards on the team from Houston, and then I had coached Jacob Cole at Link Academy from Houston and then Jerrell Colbert at LSU from Houston. So those three kind of helped us work on Garwey and Tyshawn, and now hopefully we continue to recruit Houston for as long as we're here.

Q. Just talk about your success at a neutral site this season. What does that give you confidence of going into a neutral site tomorrow?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, we played really well in the Caymans. We're undefeated when we're not on somebody else's home floor, so I think that gives us confidence. We've continued to talk about that all week so that we come out and play with confidence, because when we come out and play with confidence offensively and move the ball and take the right shots, we're a pretty good team offensively.

We've been playing really, really well over the last 15 games defensively, so we're going to give that same effort and find a way to play. We're going to have some fun offensively and play with confidence, but that certainly helps us in what we were able to do in the Cayman Islands.

Q. Obviously a number of Poke Nation is here to support you guys and sort of the backbone of your crowd is the band. Having them here, does it sort of feel like home court in a way?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Certainly. I think we're going to have a home court advantage come tomorrow at 2:15. You see the Poke fans piling into OKC by the minute, and we're hoping to fill it up.

Having the band here, they've been instrumental in our home court advantage over the last three years. I think we're 47-1 in the last three years at home. Certainly a lot of that goes to the excitement that the band brings to Townsley Law Arena.

Q. You are able to get turnovers, but when you don't, you're able to speed them up. Are you afraid that because their guards are so experienced, that that's one thing they'll be able to handle is not getting too

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by McNeese Head Coach, Bill Armstrong. We'll open up with a statement from Coach Armstrong.

BILL ARMSTRONG: We're just excited to be here. Third straight year. We are excited to be here, but we came here to, you know, win games. So our guys have been preparing over this last week to get ready for Vanderbilt, who is a great team. You know, a little bit of a contrast in styles there. They don't turn the ball over. They got two really good guards, and we lead the nation in turnovers forced, so it should be an entertaining game in that sense.

Just excited about tipping it up here at 2:15.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. One thing about it is, you talked about your time in the SEC. Did you get a lot of scouting reports on them, especially one from a certain somebody?

BILL ARMSTRONG: I may or may not have gotten a few scouting reports from the SEC. I don't want to get anybody in trouble, but definitely talked to a lot of my friends in the SEC about Vanderbilt to try to get a feel for who they are and what they like to do best.

I think that come tomorrow, we'll be prepared.

Q. You have a number of Houston guys on your team. Was that by design? Is it coincidence? Either way, what does the basketball scene there -- how does it prepare them for this type of level of play?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I think they're as good of basketball in the country played in Houston, Texas. When we first got here, we wanted to make sure that we recruited Texas hard, Houston hard specifically. It's only a couple of



sped up and limiting them number of touches?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I mean, we're going to try to speed them up. That's what we do. I don't know about afraid, but we'll have some adjustments that if we can't, we'll figure out how.

We've won games in a lot of different ways. We've defended in a lot of different ways. If we have to get back and play mostly in the half court, we've been able to do that. We've shown we can do that.

We never get out of our press, but as you've seen over the 33 games, we can adjust it to where if somebody is giving us problems, we can do different match-ups within it to kind of slow them down.

Our press can speed people up, and we can work off playing off steals, but our press can also cause turnovers by slowing people down. I think we've had over 40 shot clock violations this year. So that could be, in turn, become a problem for the opposing teams as well.

Q. Bill, the power structure of college basketball seems like it's more and more going towards the power conference in terms of NCAA Tournament bids. It seems like we have fewer mid-majors getting at-larges. Does that put more pressure on a McNeese State when they come to the tournament? Do you feel like winning in the tournament is your best defense against what appears to be that trend?

BILL ARMSTRONG: We certainly want to represent the mid-major for sure, and we want to represent McNeese how we have over the last two years by winning a game last year. We came here for that reason, to win games.

Certainly -- I don't know about pressure, you know. When you play in a one-bid league, every game is pressure because you're playing for seeding, and then you got to win the games in the tournament to get to the NCAA Tournament itself.

All the one-bid league teams play under that pressure. So I don't know that we feel that pressure from the standpoint of that way. We just want to come out here and represent the mid-majors and show why more of us deserve to be in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Your two seniors, DJ and Javohn, this is a big moment for them to be on the national stage and be able to show out to get possibly get looks at the next level. How excited are you for them to have that opportunity?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Oh, I couldn't be more excited for them. They deserve it. You know, they're the staple of this program. They're going to have their jerseys retired, hopefully, one day. Maybe we'll get JG a statue. I got to talk to Heath about that. He certainly deserves it after what he's done over the last week or so.

To lead a team in a one-bid league to three consecutive tournaments, to have that on your résumé, certainly people will be looking at that, what winners they are. Winning is a talent as well, and JG and DJ are certainly talented when it comes to that.

Q. After such a big, historic win in the conference championship back-to-back-to-back, how long did that celebration last? How do you refocus the team to get ready for the tournament?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, we celebrated for a couple of days. We celebrated after the game. You know, that was an exciting time to be able to do that, continue our streak of three straight NCAA Tournament appearances, three straight conference tournament championships.

Then we did a team dinner Thursday night and kind of made it an official celebration for winning the conference tournament and going to the NCAA Tournament. Then Friday we turned the page and it was time to get ready.

You know, we didn't know who we were going to play, but start preparing for the NCAA Tournament. Then Sunday once we figured out who we were going to play, it was time to get ready for Vanderbilt.

So we had to turn the page pretty quick, but we had about 48 hours to celebrate it.

Q. In your first year with McNeese and the NCAA March Madness, what has that been like to continue that winning tradition at McNeese?

BILL ARMSTRONG: You know, when we got here, that was the standard. We knew that was the expectation. That's what we started working towards from day one. To be able to see that come full circle almost exactly a year since I was hired is a pretty cool thing to see.

Just to be able to do it for the people of Lake Charles, for our fans, you know, they put so much into it. We have such great support in Lake Charles, just to be able to give them this opportunity to come back to the NCAA Tournament and enjoy it for us, and now only being eight hours away, hopefully we'll have half the building full tomorrow.

Q. All season long you talked about not wanting to let people down, that they trusted you with the position. Now that you're here, how do you feel? More importantly, are they now on you to say, Hey, you got to win two?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Again, that's the expectation. That's the expectation that my staff and I have of each other, first and foremost. That's what we came here to do was win and continue the great tradition that has now been laid, the foundation, by Will Wade and continue to make the fans proud and continue to make the people, like my AD back there, he's sure proud of us for the opportunity that they gave us.

That's what drives us to do it every day, and we certainly are going to try to win two, three, four, five, Jim. We're going to try to win it every year.

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