

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Texas A&M vs Saint Mary's

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Paycom Center

Saint Mary's Gaels

Coach Randy Bennett

Media Conference



your team, your roster, how you play, et cetera. On this tournament run you're about to go on, what do you want your team to be known for?

RANDY BENNETT: I think we're pretty consistent. We've been consistent over the years. This year I think we're playing, I don't know, about six or seven possessions faster, and I think it has to do with we have more good shooters. I don't know, it's not been a huge point of emphasis, but what we need to do well, and this is where we're consistent; we need to take care of the ball, singles, don't turn it over. You hang on to the ball, these guys turn you over, and that leads to their transition, but for us, take care of the ball, keep them out of transition, keep them off the three, and then smash the boards.

So that's kind of what goes up on the dry erase board every night before we play.

Q. Following up on that, early in the season you guys were winning a lot of games, but in your post-game you would often say we've still got to be better taking care of the ball. Somewhere around mid-December you guys did start taking better care of the ball. How did that happen?

RANDY BENNETT: Just guys gained experience. Our guards got better. We quit getting sped up. It's that simple. Usually we're good there. Usually we're under ten turnovers a game. This year we're ten and a half, but it's about the same, because we have six more -- six or seven more possessions per game, so if you have six or seven more possessions, you're probably going to have one more turnover.

Q. Over the last several years the West Coast Conference has gotten a lot of respect from the selection committee. How tough was that to reach that point? With Gonzaga leaving, is that going to change anything? How can you keep the momentum up that the conference has built?

RANDY BENNETT: To reach what point? The first question.

Q. Of getting respect nationally, because you're one of the two or three leagues below the power structure

THE MODERATOR: We have St. Mary's Head Coach Randy Bennett joining us today. We will start with an opening statement from Coach Bennett and then get to questions.

RANDY BENNETT: Yes, thank you. We're excited to be here, as every team is. It's so hard to get in the NCAA Tournament. It's such a special event, and some of our guys' first time. Some of our guys have been here a couple of times, but it's awesome to be out at Oklahoma City.

This was the first NCAA Tournament that I coached in at St. Mary's, so it's pretty crazy that I'm back here. So excited to be back in Oklahoma City, a great, great place to have an NCAA Tournament game, so looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back, Coach. Questions.

Q. You've been through this many times. When you are playing a team that plays a much faster pace than you do, is there any thought of it's easier for a slower-paced team to impose its will on a faster-paced team or vice versa, or is there not necessarily any inherent advantage?

RANDY BENNETT: There's an advantage if you can get it on your terms. If they can get the game in the 90s, that's an advantage to them, because they're used to doing it. If we can get the game somewhere in between the two styles of play, then I think it works in our favor.

But at the end of the day, you are going to have to make more baskets than they make.

Q. Definitely local fans and probably fans in other parts of the country as well that will tune into tomorrow's game who are generally unfamiliar with



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that can usually count on getting multiple bids.

RANDY BENNETT: Yeah, I think we're only one of five that have three bids this year. It's pretty high up there. It's a great question, because once you do it doesn't mean you're there. You have to do it time and time and time again.

So I don't know what the actual number would be, but I can just go through our little lifecycle of winning, and we won in '05; we were here in '08, then '10. We went in '12 and '13. That was our first time we went two times in a row.

So we started getting, I would say, a respect in college basketball that was different than the first time we went. And then this is our fifth year in a row. There's only, I think, 15 or 16 teams in the country who can say that right now. So we're at a different level. We're the highest level we've been at.

That's just how it feels, so I think there's some expectations there that St. Mary's is going to be a pretty good team every year. And I think for our league as well, I think this is the fourth time our league has put three teams in the NCAA Tournament.

So, yeah, you want to string a couple of those together, too.

I could make the comparison to the Big East. The Big East got three teams this year. We have the same amount as the Big East.

So you have to keep doing that a number of times to be one of those, to be -- the Mountain West was there for a second. A-10 was there for a while. You have to keep doing it. And in the new climate of college basketball, which it's really changed the last five years, it's very difficult to do. You're seeing more and more leagues that are, whatever, mid-major/high-major, somewhere in that range, dropping down. So it's hard.

Q. Are you in favor of expansion in the NCAA Tournament? If so or if not, why?

RANDY BENNETT: I'm 100% in favor of expansion, and just because of some of the things I just talked about. It's really difficult to get in there. This thing is loaded pretty heavy one way. And I wouldn't say we're on that side of things.

And things have changed. With NIL, if you don't win right away, it's like a pro job; they get rid of you quick. That makes it hard to build a program and want to take your time getting players to develop and kind of what college

basketball was.

So I don't want to see that go away, but if you don't expand at all, there's not going to be many guys surviving through this whole thing. And I want to add to that, you want college to be for kids coming out of high school. That's getting eliminated a little bit, unless you are like a top 150 or 200 guy, to come in and be able to play, because these teams are getting so old and good. But I don't want to see all that disappear. I don't think that's what the NCAA wants.

Q. Josh said that you compared A&M to Santa Clara. If so, what do you learn, what do you take from the games you played against the Broncos this season into tomorrow night?

RANDY BENNETT: Yeah, they just -- both teams shoot a lot of threes. Both teams pick you up full court. Both teams want to play a lot of possessions. That's why -- their personnel is different, but they both have a lot of good shooters.

We know how to play that way. They're not the only ones. Gonzaga pushes the ball. They don't shoot as many threes. They push the ball hard. Washington State does it.

We played Vanderbilt. They do. I think there's more teams playing that way now, and they're one of them. These guys are on the far end of scoring and possessions and shooting threes.

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