

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

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

McNeese Cowboys
Coach Bill Armstrong
Javohn Garcia

DJ Richards, Jr.

Media Conference



Vanderbilt 78, McNeese 68

THE MODERATOR: We have head Coach Bill Armstrong and student-athletes Javohn Garcia and DJ Richards, Jr. We'll take an opening statement from Coach.

BILL ARMSTRONG: That was a hard-fought game, an entertaining game to watch. I thought we were able to get our game plan into the game for the most part. Turned them over 13 times, which they don't do much. Won the turnover margin by seven. That gave us a chance to win.

And we fought on the boards with an SEC team. Only getting outrebounded by three. We were right there. We shot 18 more shots than they did. We didn't finish as many plays down the stretch.

I thought Tyler Tanner made some hard ones off the end of the shot clock off the dribble, and the last four minutes it's a three-point game, and they made the plays, and we just weren't able to.

So proud of these guys and their effort all year long. They handled adversity all year long. For us to go to 28-6, came in here wanting to represent McNeese University and represent the Southland Conference, and I think we did that today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Coach and guys, did they do anything different in the four-minute stretch when you went 0 for 11 and didn't score? Did they do anything?

BILL ARMSTRONG: No, I mean, we tried to do what we've done all year, get downhill and get to the rim. They do a great job of shielding at the rim. I thought they did a good job of that, and just their physicality maybe threw us off a little bit. We just weren't able to finish there down the stretch.

I don't know that they did anything different. I thought we got the shots that we wanted. We just in the end, like I said, their physicality probably kept us from finishing some of those. We just weren't able to finish.

Q. DJ, three years here at McNeese. You've accomplished a lot. I wonder if you could just look back on your career and everything you've done at McNeese?

DJ RICHARDS JR.: Trying to get me emotional? I'm not an emotional guy. No, I'm playing.

I mean, we started a foundation. That's something to be proud of. I feel like a lot of guys in there deserve another chance out there, because they didn't show, like, really what they're made of, but they'll be here again.

As far as me -- I can't think about me without him, this guy next to me. I wouldn't probably have probably -- he made it so easy for me to come back. Everything that we've started, we wanted to go out with a bang and just bringing McNeese over here for three years in a row for the three years we've been here has been a lot for us.

It's not something that we could be sad about. We're probably going to cry when we get to the room, but really other than that, probably a week from now we'll just look back and be happy about all the things that we accomplished.

Q. Coach, you said you forced them into 13 turnovers, but only got 16 points off of those turnovers. What did you see from your defensive that was good to force those turnovers in how come you didn't capitalize on those?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I thought our guys came out, and we were aggressive. They got two really, really good guards, and I thought we went at them and we were



aggressive. We got our hands on a lot of balls. I think we had almost 40 deflections. That's our goal.

I think in the end when we were able to get out in transition their size, their physicality. Maybe we didn't finish like we normally do, but I thought our aggressiveness really bothered them.

I thought they came out in the second half and hit those big threes to go up by ten. Then we called timeout, and we came back out fighting and got the game all the way back to three just doing what we do, getting defensive stops.

I thought we just had that little lull there to end the half. They scored 18 points in the last eight minutes, and then to start the half and then that was too much to overcome.

Q. Javohn, I know told didn't end the way you wanted, but what did it mean to you to have the game in the Southland Championship to get McNeese back to this stage and to get to have one more game with your team?

JAVOHN GARCIA: Like DJ said, we've been here for three years. We just want to thank all the McNeese fans, the community just for the love and support for these last three years. That game was, like, the most important game, because we needed to win that game to go to March Madness. I feel like it was a good game, but we came up short today.

Q. JG, DJ mentioned what it meant for him to play these last years in the blue and gold. I wanted to ask that for you as well. You've had an outstanding career here as a Cowboy. Yesterday Coach had said you deserve a statue outside of Townsley Law Arena. What have the past two years meant to you as a Cowboy?

JAVOHN GARCIA: When Coach first got here, we talked all the time. Me coming back it was just a legacy. Me and DJ, the legacy. We wanted the legacy to continue.

Like I said before, McNeese is amazing. It's like a second home. I want to thank all the supporters, all the fans, everyone that's in McNeese.

So I know they're going to keep doing good things. You definitely going to see them in March Madness again. It's not going to be the first time.

Q. This is a question for Coach. First off, congrats on a stellar first season as head coach.

BILL ARMSTRONG: Thank you.

Q. What are you hoping to take from this group of guys as you start to build your legacy at McNeese?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, you know, I told them in the locker room after the game, I don't know if there's ever been a head coach as fortunate as I was to be able to coach a group of guys like this in my first year as being a head coach.

Then these two guys, they laid the foundation not only for McNeese basketball and what they did the first two years to get to the NCAA Tournament, but for me. They were the first two guys to come back. They trusted me and my staff to put together a team around them that could make the NCAA Tournament and win.

We fell short today, but we felt like we did put together a team that could do that.

Unfortunately, like I said, they just made more plays than us down the stretch, but for me, it was a dream come true to be given this opportunity by McNeese State University and be able to follow my brother Will Wade. That's like a storybook for me.

On top of that, to be able to coach this group of guys within that story, man, you know, I'll reflect back and remember these guys for the rest of my life and what they've done for me and, more importantly, for this program and for the city of Lake Charles and all the fans and the support that we've been given.

I've been saying it all year. We just wanted to make them proud, and I think we were able to do that this year.

Q. Coach, y'all have talked about laying down a foundation. Is it encouraging now to see how you've been performing against these Power 4 schools? Do you think that eventually McNeese can become not one of those Power 4 schools, but on the same level?

BILL ARMSTRONG: That's certainly the plan. We're not going to stop. We're not going to stop building. The foundation has been laid. Three straight 12 seeds, first time ever from a Southland Conference school.

It's been laid now to boost the Southland Conference. Not just us. All the teams in the Southland Conference have gotten better over the last three years, and that's the plan for the whole league. We want to be the leader of that to continue to build to where hopefully in the near future we get more than just one bid.

That was the way we want to lead that charge, and I



believe that we have. I believe that all the success that we've had along with our facilities and our support and the great city of Lake Charles.

When you come to Lake Charles, everybody here loves it. Everybody up here loves it. Everybody in that locker room loves it. I think we'll be able to use that in recruiting to be able to build something special here. We certainly have started that, and we're going to continue to build it.

Q. What can this team takeaway from this experience moving forward, Coach?

BILL ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I mean, these two guys, most importantly, to be able to experience the NCAA Tournament three straight years, that doesn't happen in a one-bid league. That doesn't happen a lot in Power 5 leagues.

I think that we may take it for granted a little bit because we've now done in three in a row. When you reflect back and see what they've accomplished, this historic run that they've been on, you know, we can just continue to build off that now.

Everybody knows who McNeese State is now over the last three years. After winning a game last year and then playing the way we played today. We played hard, man. We battled.

I think everybody knows that. We're only going to be able to use that to continue to recruit, to continue to build around the guys that we'll have back, and we look forward to going at it to get our fourth straight.

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