

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - UNC Wilmington vs Texas Tech

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Grant McCasland

Elijah Hawkins

Kerwin Walton

Media Conference



I told him a couple of days ago, he's the only player that's played in every game this year for us. Just his availability, consistency, and will to win is just tremendous. So I'm so thankful for these guys.

We did feel like we would have to win this thing on the glass and playing 50/50 basketball and winning those, and we were able to do enough of that to give us a chance to win, but credit to them, man, because they have a resilient program and a great group.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Kerwin, you guys hit 13 threes tonight. You had eight. Just talk about your night.

KERWIN WALTON: Most of the credit can go to Elijah Hawkins. He's a pure point guard. He knows where to find me. He knows how quick my release can be. He makes sure he hits me in the right spots, and honestly that's all I can really say. I have great teammates that can help me have a game like this.

Q. You guys have been in the Tournament before to varying degrees of success. How much did that experience help you and kind of help the other guys who haven't had that kind of experience close this one out?

ELIJAH HAWKINS: It helped us out a lot having a lot experience on our team, but most importantly we just had the same approach for every game. You know, just trying to grind it out and play for each other. That's really what we use, and that's what we stick with the whole season. That's what got us here. We just have the same approach every game.

KERWIN WALTON: Yeah, I second that. I think that the fact that we've grinded all summer, all fall, and all the whole season for this moment. I think that everybody has bought in. Everybody has the same goal, and that's to win it all.

Q. Coach McCasland, you've said over the course of the year that the team gelling or how they gel is what's going to take this team to the next level. How do you feel that the team is gelling right now?

Texas Tech 82, UNC Wilmington 72

THE MODERATOR: The Texas Tech Red Raiders are with us. Head Coach Grant McCasland, Elijah Hawkins, Kerwin Walton are with us. First we'll have a statement from Coach.

GRANT McCASLAND: First and foremost, UNC Wilmington has such a terrific team. We went into it knowing that they would compete on every possession, and they outrebounded us. They got 11 offensive rebounds. We thought that was going to be a huge one.

Newby, Hodge, Ross, and McGriff, those guys came back from last year's team, and in this day and age not a lot of guys return. McGriff being a four-year guy, I just have so much respect for that. I really do. Not a lot of people hang in there in programs, but those guys did.

And I told those guys in the line I felt like the reason why they were in the NCAA Tournament was because of their belief. They're obviously the ones on the floor at the end of the game, and they have so much grit and toughness.

Man, thanks to these guys today. I did feel like our fight when the game got close was awesome. Just the collective grit, all the Red Raiders in Wichita, it felt like a home game at times just with the belief behind us and the energy in the building. E with 10 assists, we only had seven turnovers, Kerwin making eight threes and his consistency and approach every day is unbelievable. It's to his credit that he has a game like this because he never takes a day off.



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GRANT McCASLAND: Well, the one part I love about this, and this is a credit to JT Toppin too. He attracted so much attention today. He was so unselfish. He just kept making the open pass. He really never forced it once. He ended the game with a turnover, and I don't know if that was off an offensive rebound that got taken from him or I don't know where that happened, but man, I just think that's the heart of this group is whatever you got to do to figure out a way to win, that's what these guys will do.

It did get close. We got in that time-out, and there was some -- we were talking. It wasn't like it was all pretty every possession. We had some defensive miscues that we had to communicate, but, man, how quickly these guys bind together in those tough moments is the best part of these games.

Q. Coach, it seemed like when the game kind of turned in Tech's favor after a couple of aggressive drives, a couple by Darrion and Christian as well. Was that a concerted effort where you told them to drive more or did the game just unfold that way?

GRANT McCASLAND: We had a couple more drawn out coming out of time-out to try to create advantages that way. We shot a million threes. Didn't make all of them, but I thought we got great looks. If that's what teams are going to give us, then we're going to take those.

But you also know when you shoot enough of them and they don't go in, you have to create another advantage. I thought Christian Anderson did a great job out of those timeouts of driving to the basketball. Darrion Williams attracted a lot of attention getting to the rim. I thought those two guys specifically really came up with huge plays getting to the basket and getting fouled.

Q. Your friendship with Ben McCollum has been talked about before. I know you guys scrimmaged them and all of that. First of all, talk about kind of how that friendship came to be and what it's going to be like facing a good friend in the round of 32.

GRANT McCASLAND: It's a long story, and I'm going to be brief. I was an assistant at Northeastern Junior College in Colorado living in the dorms, and I met a guy named Jeff Linder who was an assistant coach at Emporia State. Jeff was recruiting a couple of our guys who is obviously on our staff now. He signed them and ended up recruiting them and coaching them.

The next season I was blessed to get an opportunity to be the head coach at Midland, and the first phone call I made was to Jeff Linder to come work with me and try to do that

together.

Our first year we went to the national tournament, and the guy that took his position at Emporia State was Ben McCollum. I mean, we've all been connected for -- since 1999, so whatever that number is. We were young, and we didn't make any money, and we all loved ball, and we loved being around each other.

Then I became the head coach at North Texas and we had a great season. We had a pretty good offense. We were number one out of time-outs. We ran some good stuff. Ben watched film of our team and straight up told me our offense sucked.

You know, that's kind of the friendship we have. We all went fishing a couple of summers ago in Wyoming. Big trout fishing. You know, I love him, but you know, when you play him, it's different. So we'll look forward to the opportunity to compete. We'll always be friends, but tomorrow -- or Saturday, I guess, it will be on.

Q. For everyone, what are your thoughts with one more game with this team?

GRANT McCASLAND: We don't plan on playing one, but I respect the question.

ELIJAH HAWKINS: You know, it's always great to go out and play with my brothers every day. You know, we're just excited to keep playing. We're just going to give it our all and just go however far we take ourselves, so yeah.

KERWIN WALTON: This is the best basketball of the year. We've prepared all year for this, dreaming about this moment, envisioning us in this tournament, surviving and advancing, taking it one game at a time. We ain't going to be done with just one, so we're going to keep on going.

Q. Kerwin, you started hot from beyond the arc, nine quick points, and then you called time-out. What was the stuff you saw tonight that had you feeling good beyond the arc shooting-wise?

KERWIN WALTON: Every single day, every practice my teammates, the coaches they just tell me to shoot it if I got space. If I felt like it was green, it was green, and that's all I thought about. Just getting it up. If I miss, I'm going to hit the next one.

Q. Elijah was the smallest guy on the floor tonight, 5'11", but he is only one rebound away from missing a triple-double. Can you talk about his night?

GRANT McCASLAND: You can ask him what I said at



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halftime. I just said the reason why we're winning is because of him, and it didn't have anything to do with offense. I told him it was because of his rebounding. He was in the middle of traffic grabbing two-handed rebounds all game long. Got a few offensive rebounds early which isn't normally what we do, but because of the way the spacing was, he went and got them, but we don't win this game if it isn't for his rebounding.

People can talk about a lot of different things, but to me that's what makes him elite. He does whatever the team needs to win, and tonight we needed him to rebound.

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