

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - High Point vs Wisconsin

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Moda Center

Wisconsin Badgers Coach Greg Gard Nick Boyd Austin Rapp John Blackwell

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Wisconsin student-athletes. If you have a question...

Q. Do you guys fill out brackets as a team for fun? I'm sure if you do, you have Wisconsin winning the national championship. Do you have any other upsets?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Me personally, no, I've never filled out a bracket since I've been in college. I did it once my junior year, but that's about it.

NICK BOYD: Likewise, I haven't really paid attention since I've been playing in the tournament.

AUSTIN RAPP: Ever since I was a little kid me and my family do a champion bracket. So I did one, and of course, I had us winning.

Upset-wise...

NICK BOYD: Don't jinx us.

AUSTIN RAPP: Correct. I think had South Florida beating Louisville. I think that was one of my upsets. I wouldn't even remember, to be honest.

Q. Does your family play for something?

AUSTIN RAPP: Within the family bragging rights. Pretty much privately, have fun with it.



Q. Austin, you played at the University of Portland. You get to be back here. What does it mean to you to come back and represent the University of Wisconsin in a town you know well?

AUSTIN RAPP: No, 100%. Once I heard the news we were coming back to Portland, I was so happy. Obviously I have family, friends here, as well. Not just my old teammates and my old coaches from last year.

I loved my time in Portland. To come back here and play on the big stage, kind of represent them a little bit, have my family come in town, too, is pretty cool.

We're actually practicing at the University of Portland later today. I think that would be pretty cool to go back, show the boys around a little bit. That will be kind of cool.

Q. I would like each of you guys to answer. A big topic throughout the season has been if we should expand the NCAA tournament and let in more teams. What do you think?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Me personally, I think it's fine where it's at. I think the 64 is great. Yeah, that's where I'm at.

The thing I would look at is the series, especially going into like the Sweet 16, three-game series, something like that. Honestly, I love the way it's structured now. I don't think any changes should be made.

NICK BOYD: I agree, yeah.

AUSTIN RAPP: I agree with J.B. I think the series would be cool. Once you get to the Sweet 16, yeah, Elite Eight or something like that, have a three-game series.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN BLACKWELL: Sure, make it more competitive. Get a better scout on a team.

Q. For any of you. Can you give me your scouting report on High Point?

NICK BOYD: Yeah, I know, like, they've been together for a while. I think they won a championship last year together



and made it to the tournament. Obviously they had their coach move on, but the assistant coach stepped up and took the job.

Yeah, they're an experienced team, 30 wins, 4 losses. It's not easy to do. They play fast. They're going to be aggressive. We're going to have to bring our hard hats and be ready to play.

Q. I'm sure over the last week you have basketball on all the time on your TV when you're home hanging out. There have been quite a few almost buzzer-beaters where a guy hit a game winner, a bunch of people ran on the floor because they thought it was over, then it wasn't. Have you experienced that throughout your career? Have you ever had a situation where someone got a technical for it?

NICK BOYD: Actually, it just happened against Michigan. Hit a big three, then guys ran on the court. I think the ref stopped it, to check the time.

No, I haven't really seen no techs off that, other than usually when it's fighting, stuff like that, people run off the bench. I wish that time they got a tech.

AUSTIN RAPP: I knew there's like a rule that if the other team calls a timeout, they're allowed a timeout, to run on the floor. That's what saved the Texas assistant coach yesterday, that he ran on the court and the other team called a timeout. That's a new rule that I learnt.

But I haven't experienced something like that, no.

NICK BOYD: That was great (smiling).

Q. Nick, I know at this point in your career you have your routine on game days. Does anything change or will it be different tomorrow with a very early tip-off time?

NICK BOYD: No, honestly. I think J.B. might join me, though, other than that. Try to get in, get quick, short, then just get ready. Just get the body moving and be ready to go.

Q. What does preparation look like when you have a condensed window like this? When do you start preparing for High Point? Scouting report, practice, et cetera?

JOHN BLACKWELL: As soon as you get the team, you selected on Sunday, as soon as we got High Point, there is film instantly uploaded on the huddle. I checked out the full game when they played Winthrop.

We start doing scout, start introducing the players, start introducing what they run on Monday. Fly out of here Tuesday, more intro. Then today film on them. Then much more film individually on your own as you're watching to get ready for 'em.

THE MODERATOR: All right, gentlemen. Thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

We are joined by Wisconsin head coach Greg Gard. Greg, welcome to Portland. Congratulations on making the tournament. We'll open with an opening statement.

GREG GARD: Obviously we're excited to be back in this again. It's been pretty commonplace in Madison for us to be in this tournament. My group this year has done a terrific job from really January on of growing and improving and continuing to get better to have an opportunity to play this week.

We're excited to be here. Obviously we got a really good opponent tomorrow morning in High Point. A 30-win team. As you watch them on film, you get more and more impressed with them.

Looking forward to using today to continue to prepare and get ready for tomorrow. Looking forward to a great game tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You and Lance Randall go back so far. How does that dynamic work now that you're his boss? Was that any sort of adjustment getting...

GREG GARD: Not really just because we had been apart for so long. Once we both graduated high school and his dad took a different job obviously in Oshkosh, he went to Beloit College, I went to Platteville. We stayed in touch, but we were apart. We were never back together.

He went through his coaching journey; I went through mine. I probably connected with him more consistently -- I was actually more connected with his dad just because I recruited Danny Weisse and Adrian Tigert from the Oshkosh West team at Milwaukee, then stayed in touch with Steve obviously. Then probably reconnected more with Lance when Steve passed away. Lance came back to Oshkosh West to coach that team.

He went back into the college route again. But we never really spent a ton of time together. We'd talk here and there. So I think just we had both carved own niches and gone our own ways and created our own journeys.



The opportunity to bring him back, I thought about it in times before, but I thought this past time it was the right time given the landscape and the dynamics of how everything was changing, lining that up with all his experiences, both domestically and internationally, felt it was the right time.

He calls me 'Coach.' I still call him 'Lance.' I think there's a great mutual, professional respect there, but at the same time we obviously know -- we grew up together. There was enough time apart that we walked down our professional lives that made it very, very compatible and very successful when we got back together last year.

Q. When you look at High Point, their turnover percentage numbers, they're elite in not doing it and elite in forcing it. Is that one of the things that really stands out about them?

GREG GARD: Yeah, their turnover rate, they force 16 a game, which is fifth in the country. You look at us, we're in the top 5 or 10 in not turning the ball over. You look at how they play. How do they get them?

Obviously they're very active. They'll play in passing lanes. They're active with their hands. You've got to do a good job and be fundamentally sound of not floating passes. Making sure you're passing and catching with two hands, playing off two feet. They're heavy in gaps. They'll really dig and commit. They'll flood to the ball when there is dribble penetration, they'll rake it loose.

Your spacing has to be good. Obviously your decisions have to be really good. You have to have some toughness, too. You're going to have to play through hands, you're going to have to play through reaching and slapping and those things, things that we've seen maybe from some other teams that try to create some turnovers in that regard, too.

So yeah, that's obviously one thing that jumps out on tape because you can just watch them, watch them how they flood to the ball. They're active. They're really in gaps and commit to stopping penetration as a group. We're watching more tape this morning. We have one clip where there were three jerseys coming at the ball in dribble penetration.

For us, I always tell our team, we're not preparing for anything different than what we've talked about all year. We talk about passing, catching, taking care of the ball the minute they walk on campus. We have to do, continue to do that, what we've been very good at, really, really well tomorrow.

Q. I asked your players if they think we should expand the NCAA tournament. I would like to hear your response. Then I'm going to tell you their suggestion.

GREG GARD: I would say I've been a proponent of saying yes, we should expand it. What does expansion look like? You have a lot of different roads you can run down with that.

I think the opportunity and experiences that our student-athletes get in a world that's changing so much in terms of what the NIL and the portal and all of the things that that has created, I think the experiences of these kids gets lost at times because it becomes so transactional in terms of how we formulate rosters, just the nature of our sport.

I also know we're in a business where making money and the bottom line is important, right? The balance of those two things is something I would like to see vetted.

I don't know, is it the 78, is it the 94? The numbers, you can mix them any way you want. I'm not a believer that it's going to dilute things, as I've seen some arguments.

I just feel the opportunities and experiences that you can create for the student-athletes, I know we lose sight of that at times, is still important and we should keep those things in mind.

Q. John Blackwell said he thinks it's fine at 64 teams, but that he would be into a three-game series starting in the Sweet 16. So you play a three-game series in the Sweet 16, Elite Eight, Final Four, maybe even a five-game series in the national championship. He assured us he's in shape for that. What is your reaction?

GREG GARD: That's well thought out. I've always said you get in this tournament, I've been a part of it for a long time, you can have a really, really good year and a bad 10 minutes and you go home. Everybody talks about the bad 10 minutes.

We're the only sport, correct me if I'm wrong, where we don't play a series, right? Major League Baseball plays a series. The NBA plays a series. The NFL doesn't, but they've expanded their Playoffs. That's the other thing going back to expansion, every other sport has expanded. Major League Baseball added the Wild Card. NFL has added more. The NBA I believe has expanded some of the Playoff components.

The theory behind the series in terms of if you have one



bad game, one bad 10 minutes, because the parity is pretty equal when you look across this field, or any field per se. So there's only really good teams left.

The series part of it, I've always felt... John has obviously put some thought to that. That might have some merit. That involves expansion. That's where expanding time and places and everything else.

Q. A really veteran roster on High Point throughout, both front court and back court. What have you seen from those guys that impresses you?

GREG GARD: Well, I mean, Martin is comparable to my point guard Nick Boyd in terms of how fast he plays, his ability to penetrate and create havoc from an offensive standpoint.

Anderson, athletic, powerful, left-handed, downhill wing. We've seen guys in our league like him. Coen Carr at Michigan State, Andrej Stojakovic at Illinois are two that come to mind that are multidimensional in terms of what he can do because he's so athletic and powerful and he goes to the glass really well.

He shoots the three respectably where you have to guard him out there. His motor, that's one thing that jumps out on film and people say about him, is how hard he plays. He's in constant pursuit when he's on the court.

I would say with Anderson and Martin, obviously two really good players that make them go.

Q. You have guys on this roster that grew up in different countries where March Madness wasn't that big of a deal. Anything you can say to them or prepare them for what they're going to experience or do you try to base it on they've seen a lot of big games this year?

GREG GARD: I think you try not to make it bigger than it needs to be. There's enough of that around that I don't need to add gas to that fire.

I think the Big Ten tournament helps. The big games we were in in the regular season help. I think the other thing, too, is all those international players have all played in some form of Euro Cup, World Cup, where it's a big stage internationally. That's their version of March Madness, so to speak.

You talk about pressure or anything that comes with that, representing your country in the Euro Cups, World Cups, the Olympics, that comes with some pretty serious pressure with it, too.

I think they understand. They're not living under a rock, right, whether they're from Lithuania or New Zealand or whatever. They understand what this is about. They follow it, watch it. Time zones may be different, but they understand what they're walking into.

I think part of why they choose to come to the U.S. is play in this environment, in this event. They watch it, albeit seven hours ahead, but one of the things that they talk about, and I've seen that across the board with our international recruiting, is the desire to play in March Madness, the desire to play in the NCAA tournament, have their own one shining moment, so to speak. It still resonates with them no matter how far away they are from Madison.

Q. Nolan seems to be hinting on social media that he is ready to go. Do you expect him to be available tomorrow? And can you give an update on Jack, as well?

GREG GARD: Nolan, yes, I do expect him to be available. He was full go yesterday in practice. I assume he'll be the same today. We'll practice here once we get done with the press conference.

And Jack, he did more yesterday, but it was all non-contact. I assume Jack is still questionable for tomorrow, if not out. He has not been in a full practice yet.

But Nolan is full go.

Q. The tournament in general, in a single-elimination tournament like this, how do you quantify success when you're entering this?

GREG GARD: Well, I think that's all to the individual team and the journey they've been on. That's why I talk a lot about I know the microscope gets put on, the spotlight gets put on this tournament.

For those that are just casual fans and are tuning in just now, they've missed four, five months, in our case, of watching this team grow to where they are right now. You've missed a lot.

I try to focus more on the journey of continuing to build and get better and be on an ascension to get to this point of time of the year. Then you have to play your best. They're all really good teams. You can't afford very many bad minutes. You have to be as solid as possible and continue to draw on the experiences that you've gotten during the regular season.

I think we're well-prepared for it, we're well-experienced.



That only guarantees you the opportunity to throw the ball up tomorrow at 10:50 a.m. Then we have to perform at a high level for 40 minutes or more in order to earn another opportunity to get another 40 minutes. Obviously 40 minutes is all you're guaranteed. We all understand that.

But I like the journey that we've been on. To get ready at this point to perform at a high level, now you have to go do it. That's what we're aiming to try to do tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: That is all the time we have. Thank you for your time and good luck tomorrow.

GREG GARD: Thank you.

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