

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Coach Grant McCasland

Christian Anderson

Donovan Atwell

Jaylen Petty

Media Conference



Q. Just for all the guys, you guys are battle tested, tough nonconference, always tough in the Big 12. Just talk about how prepared you are to make a run in the NCAA Tournament.

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: Like you said, tough conference. I think it's the best conference in the country. Just playing against the best teams every single night, I think it's going to prepare us well.

DONOVAN ATWELL: Like we've been saying all season, we learn from our mistakes and learn from our wins as well. We're always getting better, which is going to help make us better for the tournament and to prepare us.

JAYLEN PETTY: We preach competitiveness and toughness. We all want each other to be better. We're going to be prepared.

Q. Donovan, your experiences at UNC Greensboro, what did you take away from that to make you successful here?

DONOVAN ATWELL: That's a good question. I'd probably say just the mindset on the defensive side. Being under Mike Jones for three years, he really helped teach me the principles of just the defensive side of college basketball and how to be aggressive with it and really take on that responsibility of kind of guarding one of the primary scorers on the other team. So kind of just taking that mindset and trying to bring it here.

It started in practice, just playing against these guys every day just made me better on the defensive side, and translating that onto actual games kind of helped. So I would say definitely defensive mindset, how to be a leader, and how to play the right way.

Q. Christian, how are you feeling? Have you been limited at all the last couple days? How's the health?

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: I'm feeling good. I'm feeling close to 100 percent. So I'm good.

Q. Jaylen, how has it helped you to get to this point to have two parents who were Division I athletes?

JAYLEN PETTY: They definitely preach a lot of consistency and taking care of your body, and just with the faith of God and how much you're willing to put into what you love to do. They just support me, and I just love them because they always want to help me get better regardless.

Q. Can we get your thoughts on taking on the Akron Zips?

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: They're a great shooting team. Yeah, we've been going over them in practice the past few days. Yeah, we just know we've got to bring our best punch and stick to the scouting report.

DONOVAN ATWELL: Great team, play fast on offense, and they're really explosive. I think we've been preparing pretty well these past couple days on just trying to guard their schemes and plays and just getting ready for that. We have to be ready for everybody's biggest punch. Tomorrow is going to be a battle, so we've got to be ready for it.

JAYLEN PETTY: Every team who gets here kind of deserves praise, you know what I mean? I just feel like through preparing these past couple days and locking in as a team and communicating on what we've got to do, we're going to be prepared.

Q. Just talk about first coming to Tampa. You got to practice at the University of Tampa last night. Just how locked in the guys are knowing you have to win to



advance on as you jump into this tournament.

GRANT McCASLAND: It feels unique to have a team that I feel like can improve as much as any team I've had in March. I mean, to be playing in the first round of the NCAA Tournament and feel like you can still grow so much more. I'm usually trying to manage just the game.

I can tell you -- even our practice yesterday and we'll practice today, we've got to keep getting better. That's the exciting part of this group. People ask me what's your dream for this team? People want to talk about advancing, and I want to get better today in practice and see how much better we can get.

We've got great guard play. We've got a great group of guys, and we've continued to play well in some games. But we've got some areas that I think, man, we're not even close to what we could be.

It's fun to be a part of a team that's still practicing hard and still getting better.

Q. 88 points a game, just talk about the concerns you have facing the Zips and how important your defensive play is going to be.

GRANT McCASLAND: Watching Akron play, winning 19 of the last 20 games, they're as aggressive offensively, fast in transition, get to the next action, as well as any team we've played. I mean, so much respect for the depth on their roster. A lot of teams will have some guys you've got to key on. I feel like they bring as good of players off the bench as they start. When they make runs, there's so many guys involved in the action.

Coach Groce and Akron feel like they have an identity in how they want to play. They have great continuity in how they play and have great expectation. A lot of their roster played in the NCAA Tournament last year, played an Arizona team that we're obviously familiar with. So just a tremendous amount of respect for the way they compete.

They're fun to watch. They'll give each other high fives on the possessions during the possession. They've got a connected group, you can tell, and they're playing great basketball.

Q. Follow up to what you were saying a minute ago, there's a lot of room for growth. What do you think are the biggest one or two areas that you have the most left on the ceiling?

GRANT McCASLAND: If you look at our team in the games we played without JT, offensively we played

different because you're losing one of the best frontcourt players in all of basketball, scoring around the rim. And the leverage points have had to be different. But actually our effectiveness has been solid on the offensive end. Starting with Christian Anderson, Donovan Atwell, Jaylen Petty, those guys can really leverage teams. How do we take advantage of our forwards' length and athleticism at the rim?

But defensively is where we have to make the biggest strides. JT was so nuanced in ball screens, so good at making up for people's mistakes, and how he communicated coverage and then how he rebounded. Our team has got to be great at rebounding if we're going to be successful. Our practices have been extremely important for us just to create the physicality needed to do what we need to do.

Just the experience of playing in games and how you play and cover for each other. Josiah Moseley started practice January the 28th, so it just feels like we're getting him going in regards to what we want and dealing with the lack of success.

And Luke Bamgboye missed a majority of the season. So to see him grow in confidence and communicating what we want defensively. Our biggest area of improvement has to be defensive rebounding.

Q. This is the third year in a row you've been at Texas Tech and you've made March Madness. Wouldn't you know it, this is the fifth year to the day you beat Purdue in the first round of the 2021 NCAA Tournament. What is the culture you build in your teams that allows you to succeed in March?

GRANT McCASLAND: One thing about being at Texas Tech, there's a belief, and everybody has it. We're building to play in March. And I love being a part of a university that just loves basketball and will support it in a way that feels like you can play for the whole thing.

For us to be in the NCAA Tournament three years in a row, I think the expectation is that we put ourselves in position to keep winning. Our guys come to Texas Tech and are a part of this in the same belief. No matter what difficulty comes our way, you've got to believe that you can win and you can win games in March.

Obviously playing a tremendous Akron team, we don't take anything for granted, and we know that this is extremely difficult. We'll have to play our best basketball to give ourselves a chance to beat them.

But when it comes to March and our program, I think, first



and foremost, there's a belief in our university and a belief in our locker room that this is where we're supposed to be every year. And giving ourselves a chance to compete for a championship is important.

Q. I'm going to ask you an Iowa question because you scrimmaged them the last two years. They're down here at the same event here. What are your thoughts on Iowa and your relationship with Ben McCollum, and did you get mad at him when Luke got stolen away?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, I'm mad at him every day pretty much. No, we probably talk to the Iowa staff more than anybody in the country. I walk into Coach Linder's office, and he's basically on FaceTime with Ben every day. We've talked several times since we've been here. Thankfully I haven't seen his face because I don't care to do that.

No, we love them. Obviously you choose who you scrimmage, and you have to respect them. And you have to know that you're going to get something out of it and you can share and trust them when you scrimmage somebody. So scrimmaging Iowa was a big deal for us at Iowa. It made us a ton better. Then we can help each other over the course of the season through different scenarios.

We were sad to lose Luke, but Luke's awesome. Luke is where he's supposed to be. Iowa, in my experience of watching them over the course of the season, they've got a chance to be a super problem in March. Why? Because they play a difficult style. Unless you've prepared or seen it, their defense -- everyone likes to talk about Bennett and their offense and how they play in Stirtz. But I think it's their defense and how disruptive they are that separates them.

If they can find a rhythm offensively, I think they can really win games in March and cause people problems. Ben McCollum probably has the best win percentage of any college basketball coach in March, so that's a good place to start.

I told their people that were around at the time I do think he's one of the best coaches in the country at any level. Ben McCollum is a great friend, and more importantly, I think he's a great husband and a great father. So our boys are close. I love watching his sons and his daughter. She's a little hooper too, but she loves dance and all kinds of other things.

Just a tremendous coach, and their staff's awesome, and I have a lot of respect for their program.

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