

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Wright State vs Virginia

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

Wright State Raiders

Coach Clint Sargent

Kellen Pickett

Solomon Callaghan

Michael Imariagbe

TJ Burch

Michael Cooper

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, welcome to Xfinity Mobile Arena in Philadelphia for the first and second rounds of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championships. I will be your moderator for today's press conferences.

This is the 29th time that Philadelphia has hosted NCAA tournament games dating back to 1939 at the Polestra. Polestra which is about to celebrate its 100th anniversary on the Penn campus, has hosted 48 tournament games. The last time the tournament was here was in 2022. We hosted the regionals when North Carolina defeated St. Peters.

This is also the 50th anniversary of the '76 Final Four which is played at the Spectrum, which the Spectrum was where the stateside live is right now when Indiana competed in its undefeated season. Spectrum also hosted the '81 Final Four, and this building has hosted the 2000 Women's Final Four, a Frozen Four, and the Division I wrestling championships.

Our first press conference today is with Wright State. They are the 14th seed in the Midwest region. This is their fifth appearance in the NCAA Division I tournament. They won their fifth Horizon Championship with a 66/63 win over Detroit Mercy, and they won the regular season and tournament title for the first time in program history.



They do have an NCAA Tournament victory over Bryant in the 2022 First Four.

We are joined by five student-athletes. I ask, if you're going to direct your question, try to pick a student-athlete to direct it to or we will go down the line and ask them all to answer questions.

Thanks for being here.

Congratulations. Hope you enjoy the experience. Who has questions?

Q. TJ, your ability to drive, it helped you guys in the Horizon League Tournament. How does Virginia's size, particularly on the interior, change the way you guys may have to attack the rim with Onyenso and Grunloh, their 7-footers, in the paint.

TJ BURCH: It definitely changes a little bit because they've got really big size. We're used to size a little bit because of our conference. ACC is a whole 'nother level. We made the adjustments. We'll be ready.

Q. Question for Michael. Wright State hasn't been in the NCAA Men's Tournament -- I heard your pronunciation of your last name, I'm going to butcher it and I'm going to be embarrassed because ASAP transcribes all of these meetings, and I will be in infamy forever.

Wright State hasn't been in the NCAA men's tournament since 2022, so for four years. For you as a senior on the podium, what's it like to be here in the NCAA Tournament.

MICHAEL IMARIAGBE: It's all surreal. I haven't been on winning teams. This is the first year I have been on a winning team with these new group of guys. When I decided to stay, I didn't know what was going to happen this year, but it's been a journey. It's been fun.

Q. You are capable of running up a lot of points on the board. Virginia is a team that will play at lower scores a lot of the time. How do you handle the Temple?

KELLEN PICKETT: Virginia, their possessions are a little



lower, but for us, it's about taking smart shots on offense and then knowing they'll fall.

Q. Michael, take it to the other Michael.

MICHAEL COOPER: It's going to come down to still playing our game, make them play at our pace instead of settling for what they want to do. We're going to come in and try to do what we're going to do. Then we have to make those adjustments to a slower pace game and making plays. That's what we'll do.

Q. Since the announcement came out, what's the last four days been like for you guys, building up to this, starting with Solomon and some of the others, just the anticipation and what it will be like tomorrow.

SOLOMON CALLAGHAN: Yeah, there's a lot of excitement and anticipation, but we have been locked in. We're a dialed-in group. We're very connected. We have been spending a lot of time together the last four days. Definitely a lot of time in the film room, on the court. A lot of guys are getting the extra work. That's where we have been trying to get prepared for tomorrow, so.

Q: TJ?

TJ BURCH: I feel like we have been looked in. The last week of practice has been really competitive, really tough. We've been going at it every day. So I feel like we're ready going in.

Q. For Kellen or Michael. As you have been watching the film on Virginia, what stands out about their big, Rhij's De Ridder, and how do you stop him around the paint and get your guys to have that presence that you guys are going to need around them?

KELLEN PICKETT: He's a great player, played overseas, but play around him and try to take him out.

MICHAEL COOPER: He's a great player, we come scared, and they're going to run us off the court. So just like any other players, just play hard, as hard as you can, so.

Q. For any of the players who want to jump in, when you're watching the Selection Show, what was your reaction when you saw who you drew and where you were headed? What was your initial thought?

SOLOMON CALLAGHAN: It's a super surreal moment. You have been waiting for that your entire career. It was initially just extreme excitement. We were all just being together. And after that, you got to lock in and game plan.

The coaches went back to the pavilion, which is our practice facility, and they immediately got to the film. It went from excitement very quickly to just being dialed in and ready to go. You would say that's where we were at immediately.

MICHAEL COOPER: To piggyback off Solo, we were excited, and then we got right to work, getting to it in the film room and getting extra work. It was a quick switch to being locked in so we can try to get this upset tomorrow.

Q. For any of the players, you saw Miami of Ohio earlier in the season. The two campuses are an hour or whatever it is apart. They're such the big story, and they're here also, playing.

What's it like to see a school like that get so much of the spotlight and be a school that you guys know a little bit, and for you guys then to be able to dream tomorrow to pull off and upset and get shine for yourselves.

KELLEN PICKETT: Congrats to them for a good season. They got us earlier, but we could see them. For us, it's not -- we're not necessarily star struck by them because we saw them earlier in the year, and we have the potential to see them later in the year. They're a good squad and congrats that they're having a good season.

TJ BURCH: Yeah, congrats to them, we watched the game last night. They played pretty good. One of the coaches on the coaching staff coached me last year, Coach Bot, so congrats to him. He texted me this morning, which was crazy.

Q. Solomon, you guys were 15-18 last year and now you're in the NCAA Tournament. What's the big difference as you look at the improvement from last year to this season?

SOLOMON CALLAGHAN: Yeah, as you will hear from all the guys on the squad, the connectivity is incredibly high. Last year, we had a great group of dudes, but we don't have this level of connectivity. That all translates. We have done a really good job, easy specially the staff, that are really big on being brothers for real. I feel like we embody that when we play. I feel like that's the biggest difference going from 5-18 to the NCAA Tournament.

It's just crazy for me to sit up here and say that because the journey's been so long, but I'm super proud of the staff for making the culture what it is and bringing it back Wright State.

Q. What do you have to do in your mind to play your game? What is it you're going to have to do to sit their

sides and have a shot against them.

MICHAEL IMARIAGBE: Not get too ahead of ourselves. We play hard in practice, and we come out and we play how we play, And not let the other team take the game. We like to play low-scoring games. It can be fast or slow, but as long as we're dictating the game.

MICHAEL COOPER: Yeah, can't be scared to go down there, but we have to be smart, play off two. They're really good at crashing the offensive glass. We have to block them out and limit them to one shot per possession. They're really good at crashing the offensive glass so it's going to be a big key for us to block out and limit them to one shot per possession.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, student-athletes, we appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we have Wright State head coach, Clint Sargent. Let's start with an opening statement.

CLINT SARGENT: Yeah, it's a real honor to be here. It's an honor to represent Wright State, our league, all our players, family, fan base. We're excited to be here, excited for you guys to get to know about our players and who we are as a program and looking forward to all questions.

Q. Clint, on that note, I guess, for those of us, some of us who haven't seen your team play game after game, what do you want people to know about your team? What are interesting stories about your team and what do you think makes you guys special?

CLINT SARGENT: I would say for me, you would have to go back to, again, this is my second year at Wright State as the head coach, but I have been here ten years.

Last year, we were 15-18 and it was brutal. A lot of suffering, a lot of when you're leading for the first time at this magnitude, a lot of lonely, hard moments. I think you got to start there, and then with the retention of our staff, six guys that stayed with me, from that conviction point, we knew we had to go put together a team that I felt like, man, we can suffer together well and grow and learn from that. That's exactly what happened.

Our locker room, I would say they're very connected in Christ. Very connected, very real. They've been absolutely, right from day one in the summer, very honest and open with what they struggle with, what they -- so for me coming off 15-18 and feeling like walking through that as a head coach and how hard that was, I could tell from day one I had a group of young men that wanted to be real

with one another.

From there, you have a chance to be very good on the basketball floor. You can grow together, chemistry and for any coach in the country, the buzz word is "connectivity." This group is very open in their struggle and openness and that allows us to handle adversity. We have been down many times throughout this post-season, and the resiliency of our team is the best part of the journey.

Q. It's been exactly four years since Wright State was last in the tournament so these guys wouldn't know, not just the game, but all the other things that come with it. You've been there. What do you tell them about how to manage all the showcase stuff that comes with being here?

CLINT SARGENT: Yeah, there's a fine line between absolutely enjoying every part of this, because you want them to, but then also understanding our responsibility to put our best foot forward and to perform and compete, and for us, it's just been gratitude and humility. You think about the amount of miles we have traveled, the diving, punching, all the things. Just to wake up and have another day. When you're rooted in humility and gratitude, it gives you your best chance to be present. We just tell them from that lead foot of gratitude, just focus on your teammates. Focus on the people who got you here. Let that be your compass for how you handle all this new attention and be thankful in it.

When you can have that be your lead foot, all the performance all the pressure of it, starts to fade away, and that's what we're hoping for and that's what they've done.

Q. Virginia has few mid-major transfers on their roster, four or five of them. I'm curious at the mid-major level, how do you find the right nucleus of players? The power conferences can come in and take some of the best mid-major players. How do you do it and how did you do it with your team this year?

CLINT SARGENT: It's the most important part of the job in this era, how do you construct your roster? How do you pick your people? For us, it starts with us, again, the heart posture. Why, why would we be a good fit? So much of that is relational, sitting down and understanding how do you see life? How do you see this game? How do you see the opportunity to be a Division I basketball player because there's so much transactional with all the money, and it's a great thing to lead, but I view as my number one job is to lead it well so we can keep the locker room sacred and keep it as a place where our guys feel like they can come and fail and be better for it.

We prioritize great families, great character, guys who have won, whether that would be in college or in high school and then within the basketball detail, we knew we had to get better defensively. We prioritized very good hands and feet, and we felt like we could grow to become a better defensive team.

Q. As a coach, how do you look at what Ryan Odom has done at Virginia bringing in 12 new faces. You said you had six return. He completely redoes his roster in his first year there. How impressive is that to you as a fellow coach? And what does Virginia pose as an obstacle for you to win tomorrow?

CLINT SARGENT: He's done a great job. I've been a big fan really from his time at UMBC and Utah State, he's won everywhere. I do think they've done, him and his staff have done an awesome job with this roster. I think with the portal additions, many of those guys won at their previous stops. They're big kids. They're freshmen. They fit in and blend well together.

I think when you're dealing with a first-year head coach, new environment, I know he has experience at Virginia, but if you look at just their -- they've clicked really from the start. They've lost to Duke twice, Carolina, Butler on a neutral site, and then I think a double or triple over-time loss. They've been pretty flawless. I think that's where for me, yeah, you have all these new guys, but from start to finish, they have been pretty consistent, and it looks like they really understand their role and they play hard, and within the basketball, their rim protection. Nine blocks against Duke, we don't see that every day in the Horizon League. We're not going to tiptoe around with that. We have to make aggressive decisions, but also intelligently understand where we can get great shots. We have to get our defense set. A lot of that is going to be with how we play offense.

Q. As you've looked over film and prepared for Virginia, what stands out about their big man, Thijs De Ridder and what kind of challenges do you think he's going to bring to your staff and to your team tomorrow?

CLINT SARGENT: Yeah, he's incredibly composed. I think he's versatile offensively. I think his physicality and his body size, again, I think he's a 23-year-old freshman. All those reasons, again, where they play him at the four spot, and the people they have around him with their three-point shooting, play making. He's the focal point, but I do think their balance is very impressive.

How they shoot the ball is very impressive and with how they rebound the ball, all those lead for them to have very

good consistency.

Q. You saw Sam Lewis last year when he was at Toledo. He's at Virginia now, what did you think of him then and in evaluation for tomorrow challenge? Did he pose to you guys?

CLINT SARGENT: He's done a great job just getting better. You don't typically -- sometimes guys move up a level and their efficiency drops, but I think Sam's efficiency, especially the last five, he's playing at a high level. I think it's a credit to Coach Odom and their staff of putting him in the right spot. He's playing with great confidence, and he's coming from Toledo. That's a good program, but his consistency at this level has been impressive.

Again, with Ridder and their bigs, his shooting ability is something we have to account for.

Q. You guys play a little bit of a faster tempo than Virginia. You certainly don't mind putting up some big scores on the board as we have seen throughout the season. They don't seem to mind the way they play. How do you prepare your guys for that difference?

CLINT SARGENT: I think some of that we have to feel out in the game. We played -- we won a conference semifinal game and we put up 100, and then the next championship game, we won the 60s. I think some of that we want to be wide open in terms of how we view our opportunities to score. We obviously know in these games, possessions are very valuable. And with their talent, a high-possession game is probably not something we just want to dive into, but also, I don't want our guys, if they have natural advantages, we're not going to slow up. And again, I'm just trying to create the right amount of aggression for our guys to go out there and cut it loose, but we know we need to get five back and make this a half-court game defensively.

Mainly, we need to be great on the glass. Transition defense, our defensive rebounding, all the unexciting things of this game are where we need to be excellence.

Q. You were saying going from 15-18. When did you sense, yeah, we've got it going the right way and this could happen, that you could wind up being here today? And now that you're here, what is it in your mind you have to do?

CLINT SARGENT: For me, it was very early. Again, we just got everybody in the room. I could sense and feel the relational aspect of this group, of young men. Their honesty, again, with all parts of life, that's important to me with how we run our program at Wright State. We feel like

we're helping prepare them for when basketball is over, so when they're husbands and fathers.

I feel like for these guys, with how they were sharing their stories with their teammates, this can be very special. And then we get on the basketball floor, I think it's, to me, ten years I played, played in Germany a few years, it's been one of the best practice teams I have been around. We are deep and that allows us to have great day where is our guys are feeling uncomfortable because they're getting pushed in practice. I think for all those reasons, we have had very, very healthy days of growth.

It was just a matter of time for me that we could win some close games. You look at our end of December, early January. We got on a winning streak, and it was just a matter of time before we started to win. And then for our league, we were in first place for over 70 days. I keep reminding these guys have made school history with winning an outright regular season title, winning your conference tournament title.

You should step into Friday's game with complete authority because you have done something where most are still looking to accomplish; these guys have done that. I'm very proud to, yes, be their coach, but just get to spend more time with them for the impact they have had on me as a man.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much. We appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

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