

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Ryan Odom

Thijs De Ridder

Malik Thomas

Dallin Hall

Devin Tillis

Media Conference



these games are going to be like and how we're going to battle through them. Duke is a great team, credit to them. I definitely feel like we can play with anybody in the country, so we have confidence going into the tournament from that game.

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I will double down on what's been said but that physicality and desperation, I think it was important that we had that and experienced it beforehand. We utilized that going forward, and now we're more prepared and better for it.

THIJS DE RIDDER: Yeah, just like these guys said. Some good things happened, some bad things happened and just have to build on the good moments.

Q. For Dallin, you have the most tournament experience among the cavaliers. What have you shared with your teammates for what this is going to be like?

DALLIN HALL: I'm fortunate to be around some really high-character teammates and guys who have played a lot of basketball in their career. If you look at the guys next to me, they've played at some of the biggest stages in basketball, whether that be here or across the world in Europe.

Ultimately, I try to tell them the intensity level, the focus level, the physicality level is very similar to what we just experienced in the conference tournament, every game, and you have to come out and dominate every possession from the start.

And these guys have responded all year, like, that's what we've done. We answered when things haven't gone our way or we lost a tough one. We're excited to get out there and put our best foot forward and I know our guys are ready for it.

Q. Question for Thijs. Being from Belgium, did you know anything about March Madness over there? If you have, you can talk about it, but if not, what's it like playing in this style of tournament?

THIJS DE RIDDER: Yeah, I have been playing with American guys when I was 17, 18 in Belgium. And every

THE MODERATOR: All right, we have student athletes from the University of Virginia. They are the third seed in the Midwest region. This is the 27th appearance for the Cavs in the NCAA Tournament. They're in the at-large bid. They are 35-25 all-time in the NCAA Tournament, winning the 2019 National Championship. They reached a Final Four in 1981 here in Philadelphia and also in 1984. This is also the first time since 2018 that both the men's and women's teams at Virginia have advanced to the NCAA Tournament. We will take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. This is for pretty much all you guys, but after getting Duke the first time with the result in the last game being a little bit closer, do you guys walk into this tournament with a lot more confidence from that performance despite the loss or does that sting still hit harder than the actual, you know, growth that you guys have.

MALIK THOMAS: Yeah, I think it still stings. We don't want to lose to a team twice, but I think we learned from that game, especially from the first game to the second game, I think that us as a team, we grew together as a program. We're just going to continue to use that as momentum and carry that into the tournament.

DEVIN TILLIS: I think we definitely built some confidence from that game. I have never been to March Madness before. This is my first time, but we got a feel for what



time there's an American guy on my team, they're always talked about March Madness. And now that I'm here, it's such an organization, and it just made me really excited to play here, so now I'm finally here. So hopefully, we can do some great stuff.

Q. Devin and Thijs for you. Your coach is about to coach in his fourth NCAA Tournament with a different team. For you guys who haven't done this before, what has he shared with you in getting prepared for tomorrow?

DEVIN TILLIS: I think he shared really cool stories and great things. The biggest thing for us is just to be us. No game is bigger than the next one. Kind of just giving us that mentality to take one game at a time. I played in the NIT the last four years, so I know a little bit about tournament basketball. Obviously, not to this extent, but just sharing that we need to be us and just continuing to do the things that got us here, continue to thrive in our roles, so, yeah.

THIJS DE RIDDER: Yeah, and also the biggest part is just having fun and, like Devin said, just live in the moment and just enjoy every game.

Q. This is for all four of you, but at UMBC, he pulled off an all-time upset. What do you remember from that if you were watching? Has he shared any of that with you now that he's in Virginia now?

DEVIN TILLIS: Well, at Virginia, we don't talk about UMBC too much. (Laughter) That's a touchy subject, but taking his experience being at a mid-major school and being one of the only 16 seeds to win a game, he knows that every team in this tournament is capable of doing anything, and sharing his experience from his time at a mid-major school, he knows that it means a lot to every school that's in this tournament. He knows that taking stuff away from that game that we need to continue to be on one and not take any game too lightly.

Q. Malik, what do you guys know about Wright State and the match-up tomorrow?

MALIK THOMAS: We did a lot of personnel. We know that they're a great team that moves the ball, likes to play through their bigs, an organized team that likes to cut. So we're just going to continue to learn more and more about them, and just like Dallin and everybody has said, just come in with that intensity knowing that this team is going to be on the court with us, just wanting to compete, wanting their chance and wanting to bring the energy from their program and their school, so we're just going to continue to do what we do best and stick to our process.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student-athletes? All right. Thanks, guys. Appreciate it. Good luck.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Coach. We are joined right now by first-year head coach of Virginia, Ryan Odom. Coach, give us a quick statement, please.

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, excited to be here, really proud of the guys for the season that they had. Made a lot of Virginia fans proud and worked very hard to get where we are now, and I know they're just looking forward to the moment.

We have several guys who have experienced the NCAA Tournament and some that haven't. I'm excited for them to have the opportunity to play in the big dance.

Q. Ryan, everybody knows you have been on the side that Wright State's coming into a game like this a number of times and now you're on the other side. How does it feel to be on the other side and how do you handle it?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, it just feels good to be in the NCAA Tournament, number one. When we first took the job here, we weren't sure how it would go. We have an entirely new roster that we put together and couldn't have landed in a better spot. We have great guys on the team, and we certainly understand what it means to play in the NCAA Tournament, and for this particular group, to where you their own story and to add to the legacy that is Virginia basketball has been really satisfying.

Having said that, this group wants to advance. We want to be part of the NCAA Tournament and continue to be part of it, and we realize we're going to be playing great teams throughout, and certainly, Wright State has earned the right to be here and is confident in their ability to advance as well.

Ultimately, it comes down to the 40 minutes or whatever, 40 minutes plus, if it takes that on the court. You have to play well on that day. We're going to prepare just like we always have, and I know that Wright State will as well. They're extremely well-coached. They know how to win.

When you get in this tournament and play other teams, the majority of the teams have won a lot of games. Wright State is no different in that category.

Q. Ryan, your fourth team to take to the NCAA Tournament. You have a lot of tournament experience. Your players do not. What is the key part of the

message that you shared with them to get them ready for what to expect?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think they didn't have a lot of experience with the ACC Tournament either, and they did well with that. Ultimately, it comes down to match-ups. You have to relax and play, but also go for it. You have one shot at it or you're done pretty quickly. Momentum is always a factor in these games.

And I think, ultimately, we have to follow our process, follow the way that we have done things all year, rely on our training, trust our training. The guys will be fine if they do that. That doesn't guarantee you a win by any stretch, but it does guarantee that you will be comfortable out there on the court and you have a chance to go for it.

Q. Coach, I asked Devin given that he's never played in the tournament about the UMBC upset, what you told him about just making sure that -- like, every team here can play, you know better. You having that experience, how beneficial has that been for you to pass on to your players that haven't been?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, quite honestly, we haven't talked a ton about it. It's not a topic that we bring up all the time. The reality is the tournament's already started now. You had the first four, so our guys were able to watch that, and the energy and the enthusiasm with which those teams were playing with, the NC State and Texas game comes down to the wire. You watch the UMBC and Howard game. I didn't get a chance to see the Prairie View and Lehigh game. Our guys know SMU and understand how good they are. You can learn from those games initially. The momentum, the discipline that you have to play with in order to win. I think our guys understand that.

But they're going to be excited and there's going to be jitters. The reality is, it wouldn't be natural if you didn't have those jitters heading into that tournament. Everybody has them. It means you care about what you're doing, but ultimately, you have to settle into the game. I'm confident that our guys will.

Q. You've proven an ability to get this team going pretty much from the jump. What would you attribute to your success being able to lay down a winning foundation with a relatively new group that you have?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think first off, it's the character in our locker room. We sign guys that wanted to be part of something bigger than themselves, that chose Virginia for all the right reasons and wanted to experience Virginia and all that it could offer them, even outside of basketball, of course.

They've been eager learners. They've been eager listeners, not only to our coaching staff, but to people outside, former players, former coaches. That's helped connect them to the university and to our basketball program in a big way. When you're tied to the place, you have a desire to do well for that place. We tried to accelerate that process all season, and it's landed in a really good spot, but ultimately, they have to play for one another. That's the most important thing. They certainly have excelled in that area in terms of playing for one another.

Q. You've seen this tournament from both sides as a mid-major, as a power conference team. Is there any way that we can satisfy everybody in this tournament and create a situation where a lot of these mid-majors just don't go away.

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think expansion can help with that. There's no question about it, regardless of where you sit, for or against, I don't think anybody wants to see the mid-majors go away from our tournament. It provides opportunities for young people to play at the highest level and compete at the highest level. Why wouldn't with want that?

Certainly, I think if you find a way to do the expansion, and it doesn't mess with the integrity of the game and competitiveness of the games, I'm all for it. I know a lot of people aren't. I'm not mad at them for it, but I do agree. I'm all for giving more opportunities to the student-athletes to play in this great tournament.

Q. Now that you have had a few days to look at Wright State on tape, what are some of the challenges you see in them for tomorrow?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, a lot of challenges. They're extremely well-coached. They know how they need to play on offense and defense in order to be successful. They put pressure on you at the rim, whether by the drive or the post-up. They're a really good passing team and cutting team. They cut behind the defense a ton to get easy baskets, and they defend really, really well. When you have that balance on both sides of the ball, you have a chance to advance in this tournament.

They have our full attention, and we know that we're going to have to play well in order to win.

Q. How do you regard where the ACC is in basketball right now at this time when is SEC and Big Ten just sort of eat everything alive at times if they want to?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think for us going into the season, we felt like the ACC was poised for a resurgence. I think it's definitely happened, you know, for us to have eight teams in the tournament and have seven that were right on the bubble, that it just didn't fall right for them down the stretch. Obviously, it did for SMU, but we had a couple more, Stanford, Cal, even Virginia Tech right in there in the conversation.

I think that bodes well for the conference. The investment has been there. The Commissioner has done a great job. The athletic directors have done an awesome job of refocusing on basketball, and I think overall, the coaches have done an excellent job. So we feel like we're right there with these other conferences.

We have the number one team in the country right now in Duke, the number one overall seed. They're playing without two of their best players, and so Coach Scheyer has done an awesome job throughout. We're looking forward to seeing how we fare in the NCAA Tournament here.

Q. I wanted to ask you this for a couple of weeks now, a little bit off the wall, but all your former teams made the NCAA Tournament. Do you ever afford yourself a chance to look around and be satisfied with what's happening with them? Or are you so locked in that you can't afford the distraction?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, there's no question about it. I watched UMBC the other night. My wife and I watched were watching and we cheered for them. I know the coach of Howard as well. You know, Utah State, I want them to win. Coach Calhoun has done a great job, Coach Sprinkle as well. I'm friends with both of them. Craig Smith, who is my predecessor at Utah state, our sons are best friends. They traveled overseas with us this past summer. VCU, Coach Martelli and I texted the other day. Really happy for him.

Those schools were so good to me and my family, I always want them to do well. There's one other one where I got my start, which is Lenoir-Rhyne. They're in the Sweet 16. And so really, really happy for all the programs that I was fortunate enough to coach, which led me here to a place that I called home as a youngster and fortunate enough to call home now.

Q. Coach, with all the fanfare around coming here, you fly to a different city, you have this, you shoot around and stuff like that, you've been part of the upsets and doing all the TV, all the distractions that can come with this week, is it a little bit channeling to potentially keep everybody focused when there's so much going on?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think you just have to control it. We try to limit what we do from a media standpoint. And just in terms of staying on social media, we encourage them before the season ever started to get off of social media and just lock in to the season. All that will be there once the season is over. They can return to their normal lives.

Without being too guarded with it, we make sure what they need to know we let them know. I think you focus on it that way, and you just lock in to what the process is, and you're not having these peaks and valleys in terms of your emotions. I think you have a better chance to win. These guys have been locked in all year, and they understand how we prepare now. Initially, we didn't because there was a first time doing it as a group. Now we have all these shared experiences through however many games we played at this point, and so they can lean on those experiences that happen throughout the season.

Even in the championship game the other day, one of the time-outs, Dallin Hall was just making sure that the guys were present. There was some frustration at times that we weren't playing a little bit better than we had hoped to play. He just said, Hey, boys, we're in the championship right now against the number one team in the country. Like, let's go. This is fun. Let's just attack it, and do the best that we can.

And so if you have that mindset and you have that type of leadership in your huddles and in the locker rooms, you have a fighting chance.

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