

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Tennessee vs Virginia

Saturday, March 21, 2026  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA  
Xfinity Mobile Arena

**Virginia Cavaliers**  
**Coach Ryan Odom**  
**Dallin Hall**  
**Jacari White**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: I have student-athletes here. We'll go straight to questions for the student-athletes. We'll start in the back over here.

**Q. Jacari, yesterday your first five three-pointers flipped the lead, either tied the game or put Virginia this front. Do you notice time and score and when your team really needs a bucket? Or is it just all organic and it happens in the flow of a game?**

JACARI WHITE: I feel like, yeah, there's a little bit of an awareness to it, but I feel like it happens organically. It just comes in the flow of the game and the flow of the offense.

**Q. For both of you, with the portal and the first-year head coach, it can kind of be tough to have a culture and identity. What has Coach Odom and that staff done to help you have that this season?**

JACARI WHITE: Yeah, the beginning of the season in the summer, when he brought us here, he emphasized the importance of what it is we're actually playing for and not just ourselves and playing for the university and trying to continue the legacy that was left behind by the players before.

And so we honor that and take pride in that, and I feel like that shows in our play.

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, just echo what Cari said. We had two main goals for the summer, really connect with each other and really connect with the program. We spent a lot of time together on and off the court. We have a lot of fun together on and off the court. I think you start to see that



translate to the court especially, but just high character individuals.

The coaches have done a great job of creating this family culture where we hold each other accountable, and then we have pillars of excellence that we stick to and try to hold each other accountable to as well.

**Q. This is for both you guys, but when you make it past the first round, all of a sudden, you have a team that you're not as super, super prepared for. How important is it to you guys to stick to the principles that you guys have at Virginia to find some success going forward here?**

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, it's critical for us to be us. That's a phrase we use a lot. Obviously, Tennessee is a great opponent. We respect them, but ultimately, we believe when we execute on our principles that you're talking about, that's always going to give us the best chance to win.

We're going to give them the proper respect, really game plan to take some things away from them and ultimately try to execute our principles on the offensive and defensive end.

JACARI WHITE: Yeah, and like he said, short preparation, it goes both ways. Like Dallin said, just sticking, doing us and we should be fine.

**Q. Jacari, you had a big game yesterday, and so did Ja'Kobi Gillespie of Tennessee, another big guard. Do you let yourself relish? It's a business trip. You guys won a game. Do you let yourself think about having a little fun with a guard duel like that?**

JACARI WHITE: Not really. He's a great player. We have a bunch of great players on our team. At any given moment, one of us could take over a game. So it's just a matter of if and when it's going to be a great match-up.

**Q. For both you guys, you talked about Ja'Kobi Gillespie a little bit. Can you talk about some specific things that you see in that Tennessee Volunteers team that you'll be going up against?**

DALLIN HALL: Obviously, they're very well-coached. They play tremendously hard. They're physical, especially in the forward positions. So we got to make sure we're up for the fight, bringing the fight to them on the glass, and then finding ways to neutralize Gillespie getting downhill and getting his shots. But like Cari said, scout preparation goes both ways. They have a game plan for us, and we feel like we're a lot to handle, so we're excited for the match-up.

JACARI WHITE: Yeah, they're great on the offensive glass and rebounding is something we struggle with a little bit, but coming into this game, we got to be up for the fight, limiting Gillespie's ability to get their bigs, layups and dunks. Preparation shouldn't be too much, any different from any teams we have played already.

**Q. Yesterday was the program's first tournament win since the national championship. Coach mentioned after the game that wasn't really a talking point. Was that something that came up after it all or did you guys sense a release in the locker room or with the fan base?**

JACARI WHITE: Yeah, it wouldn't brought up in the locker room or anything, but just kind of seeing on social media, people posting about it. That's just, I guess, something we didn't want to happen. We want to win every game we play. I guess it's just a coincidence it happened that way, but, yeah.

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think it's a new era of UVA basketball, Coach Odom has instructed us and educated us on UVA history, and there's not a lot of schools that can say they even have a national championship, so that's amazing. UVA has a great history, a long history of winning in March, so we're excited to get them back in the winning column. We fully anticipate Coach Odom winning a lot more in March moving forward.

**Q. For Dallin, today you talked about bringing the fight to Tennessee. In the second half, you got going, you boosted the energy. You do what Captain America does, I heard your teammates gave you that nickname. How important is it to do that from the jump against Tennessee?**

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think it's critical that we set the zone early, that we're here and up for the fight. We've played similar teams and our coaches have told us about that, but when we're up for the fight and we're the aggressors, we feel like we're ready for any team in the country.

We're excited for the opportunity, and we want to step on

the court with that mindset, ready to go from the jump.

**Q. Such a hard-fought game yesterday and it's a quick turnaround, just two days to prepare for a new opponent. Emotionally, how do you relish in that yesterday and immediately flip the script this morning? How does this process go for UVA?**

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think you want to celebrate the win, obviously. That's a big achievement, so we celebrated in the locker room, and then we got back to the hotel, quickly turned the page, and we watched some film on Tennessee, and then our coaches are big on family culture, so they allow us to spend some time with our family and loved ones, which is awesome.

Next day, we're up, breakfast, film again and then we're here. It's a similar routine to some of the games we have had in the past. We have experienced quick turnarounds before, the ACC tournament, and I can't speak for Cari, but I'm sure he feels similarly. It's our last go-round at it, so we really, as seniors especially, are trying to embrace it, enjoy it and make sure we're very present throughout it.

JACARI WHITE: Yeah, I think it's not always easy and finding joy in the struggle is a big part of that, Like quick turnaround like games we had in the ACC Tournament, back-to-back games. Like I said, it's not much different. Yes, we won, we got the victory, but expectation for us is to keep winning, and we want to make a win in tournament. We got to forget the past and be where our feet are at, so.

**Q. Just a followup, you said you played similar teams to Tennessee. Who are those teams? In what ways are they a comp?**

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think Miami's a good comp in terms of their offensive rebounding prowess, just rebounding in general, their physicality. Duke's very physical on the offensive glass. So you want to make sure that you give each opponent their proper respect. We know we've never played Tennessee before, so we give them that respect, but we understand that we've played physical teams before.

We have been able to find success before, so we're going to lean onto that experience and really lean onto each other, to be out there and up for the fight.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thanks, fellas.

Okay, we have Virginia head coach Ryan Odom. Let's start with an opening statement from Coach.

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, again, excited about the opportunity



for our guys to advance and play a really tough Tennessee team. We know it's going to be a battle, and we're going to have to play really well to advance from here, but I know the guys are fired up to play.

**Q. Ryan, you worked at Coach Barnes' alma mater at Lenoir-Rhyne. I'm wondering over the years what your interaction has been with him and what you learned, if anything, from him over the years.**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, they have always been tremendous. Coach Barnes has meant so much to the game of basketball, and he and my father are close and good friends. Our families are close, and it's just really neat to see the sustained success that he's had and, he's done it the right way at every spot. He's won at every spot.

The cool thing is that it all started for him right there in Hickory, North Carolina at Lenoire-Rhyne. He's never forgotten about that place. I was fortunate enough to be hired there after his best friend and teammate, John Lance, retired. And I went in there and he was very helpful in that first year. And that was at a time that was really important in my development as a coach. He was always there for me at times when I needed it, and certainly he had his own seasons going, but he was always willing to chat from time to time and followed from afar.

But to have that connection has been really cool, and I know he's been happy, certainly, for my family as well.

**Q. The last few years, especially in the tournament, the gap between the top four seeds in the other teams is growing two years in a row now, 16-0, 14 games decided by 20-plus points. Why do you feel that is? Why do you think the upper echelon has really separated themselves early from the other --**

RYAN ODOM: It didn't feel like it the other day. (Laughter) We had the spotlight on us. We had to figure it out.

Yeah, I think this tournament has always been about match-ups. Certainly, you have more kids, more players staying in college longer. Naturally, they're going to play at the highest level. It just is what it is. You have players that start at the lowest level and move up, and then there's another group that comes into those levels, and eventually, they're probably going to move up. That's just the way it is nowadays.

Coaches at that level, and I have coached at every level, are more understanding of that now. Even at our level, you're going to lose guys from time to time because it's so easy for these youngsters to move from school to school. Certainly, doesn't mean it's right for these kids.

I think we all know that finding a way to get it done where you're at and leaving a legacy is important, certainly, it is to me with the people that we bring in. Winning is important.

At the highest level, you're going to have the best players and the coaches are really good at the highest level, but they're really good at the lowest level. When I was coaching at Lenoire-Rhyne University, great coaches in that league. One is coaching right at St. Louis right now at -- Josh Shertz. I think we'll know more in the next four or five years where things are at.

Is there going to be a change, drastic change in separation and talent ability? For right now, we have a couple upsets, which I'm sure everybody enjoyed and a couple of near upsets as well, which made things really interesting.

**Q. Ryan, Rick's teams over the past couple of years have been able to allow a ton of three point attempts, yet keep three point percentage allowed low. As someone who builds their offense around the rim and three, what makes it challenging against a Rick Barnes defense to get quality three point looks. What do they do? And then how can you guys attack that and try to get to your spots that they take away? They give up very little in the corner the last couple of weeks. That's something you have tried to emphasize.**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, his teams have always been well-coached on defense. They're tough. They're physical. They take on his personality. He's fiery. They have the size to do it. When you have the size around the rims to protect the twos, but also the athleticism to get out there and contest shots, sometimes you can settle.

We have to make sure we're not settling for shots that are contested. We have to make sure that we try to find our shots as best we can and feel the game. We won't know until we get in there, but at this time of year, you're not drastically changing things. You have to trust that your way is going to be the best way and tweak things within games. We had to do it the other night just to get through it. It is what it is.

**Q. Can you speak to two players for Tennessee, specifically in Ja'Kobi Gillespie and Nate Ament. I know Ament has been a little bit slow, but what do you see in them in terms of what they bring to the table?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I'll start with Nate because I've watch Nate a ton, and it's so cool to see his development, I remember watching him at AU the first time, and then him going into his scene year year, it was just like, oh my gosh, this guy could be spectacular and is heading to having a

spectacular NBA career. I know he's had some injuries, but what a player he is, what a kid he is, just a really, really good player to have in college, and I know Tennessee and Coach Barnes are excited they have been able to coach him this year.

He's just a generational talent. He's 6'10". He can dribble. He can pass. He can shoot. He can make hard twos. He rebounds. He plays hard. He's just really good.

You can tell that Coach Barnes really trusts Gillespie. He's dynamite. Just when you think you have him cornered, he gets around you and finds a way to get to the basket. He banks big shots. He's really good on defense in terms of stealing the ball. He's got great hands. He's a tremendous floor general. He's been doing it at every spot, Belmont to Maryland to now at Tennessee. He's just a winner.

So when you're playing against their team, you have to focus on him, but also they're just a well-balanced team. They have other guys and physicality up front. They all kind of know their role, and they're going to play their role, and so we know it's going to be a stiff challenge.

**Q. Is it tough to prepare for Nate not knowing if it's going to be 15 minutes or 30-plus minutes and how he's changing his game to accommodate for the injuries and to the being 100% healthy?**

RYAN ODOM: We're going to make sure our guys understand how good he is, and we've already done that. He can come in tomorrow or any game and get 25 to 30 points. That's the type of talent he is. So you have to pay attention to him, and you have to do your best to stay in front and force him to have hard shots and not allow him to beat you on the glass, and then, ultimately, keep him off the free-throw line. That's where he can really make life miserable for you. He gets fouled a ton, so we have to make sure we keep him off the line.

**Q. Jacari told us that after playing so little in the Duke game, the coaching staff talked to him and said, Hey, we still need you. Were you in that? What was the message? Why is Jacari able to handle things like that and still have his head in the game?**

RYAN ODOM: I think just because he's been through so much in his life. You think about the trajectory of his life and how things have gone. He's always been a fighter. He's always figured things out. He has supreme confidence in his ability to play. Sometimes as coaches -- we have a deep team. I have to make decisions on game day sometimes that are best or what I think is best or who is playing their best in that particular game.

The guys have to be okay with that. That's part of sacrificing and part of having a winning team. That particular night, could he have played more? Sure, he could have played a little bit more, but we were in a good position and felt like we had a chance to win it with the guys that played the lion's share of the minutes.

Last night was obvious. He was playing extremely well, so I wanted to keep him out there and keep it going as much as we could.

**Q. I know you said on Thursday that you try to lock it in a lot of the time with your players, keep them off social media, keep them not doing too much media and stuff like that. When it gets like this, you have today, you have tomorrow, you have some time until a night game, do you just stay in the hotel all day tomorrow or do you try to go out and see some of the historical sights in the city or culture and stuff like that?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, we talked about going to do the steps and going to see the Stallone deal over there. I'm not sure we're going to be able to do that. Game day, we're not typically doing that. It's more we're just we're locking in at that point. We have these routines, all coaches and players have these -- teams have these routines on game day. So that would be foreign to them to deviate from that.

But we certainly appreciate all that Philadelphia has to offer, and it's been great being here in the city. Philly is a place that loves basketball, and so to be in an arena here amongst people that understand the game and love the game, it's really cool. We're staying right over near the Palestra. We have Drexel right there, and Penn right there. We'll try to go over there to the gym tomorrow and walk through some things to get ready for the game.

**Q. Coach, your players talked about the value you place on being connected to the program and the University. What does that look like, and how much is influenced by your own history and childhood there?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think the lion's share of it is influenced by me growing up in Charlottesville with my father and just being part of it. Honestly, I try to do it at every place I've coached. I'm a little bit different than most. I've coached at quite a few places, and even at Lenoire-Rhyne. Coach Lance has been there for 27 years, Coach Barnes' teammate and won a ton of games during his tenure there.

I just wanted to make sure that all of our players -- you know, Utah State was the same thing. UMBC, a little bit

less just because they didn't have the history as much, but we've always tried to do that. Virginia was pretty easy for me because I was involved with it, you know? I didn't make a basket or call a play or anything like that, but I was around to witness highly successful people interacting with one another on a daily basis, and then witness them go on to do great things after UVA.

I wanted to make sure that all of our guys understand the influence and impact that being part of UVA can have on them long-term. There's no better place, in my opinion, to play basketball and get a degree and make connections that can help you the rest of your life. We have had some greats come through there.

Coach Bennett and the way that he did it, and Coach Holland certainly, so we all want to -- our coaching tough wants to do our best to honor them because we know how hard it is to do these jobs and how hard it is to be a player as well, Especially nowadays.

**Q. Back to Jacari, yesterday his first five threes all erased a deficit, tied a game or put you ahead. Does your experience tell you that some players just have that knack for when to score and when it's needed to score? Or is that just a random in the flow game thing?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think when he's open, we want him to shoot it. I think that's the first thing. He's one of the best shooters in the country when he's locked and loaded there and feeling it. You have to see that first one go in on game day, and he did, and then he was kind of on from there. But to make the big shots, yeah, absolutely. It takes a will and a confidence to take it. Think about the Miami shot he took. A lot of coaches would say, oh my gosh, that's terrible. Why on Earth is he shooting the ball there? He was in a moment there, and on a heater that's, like, you have to trust your players.

Our guys have all seen it throughout the year. We lost him for a little bit with the injury and it took some time to get back, but, again, it goes back to he's been through a lot in his life and he's willing to fight.

**Q. You talked a little bit earlier about Ja'Kobi Gillespie being able to get in passing lanes and impact the ball and perimeter via steals. You just got through the TJ Burch experience. How do you keep stressing the ball experience after that game without making the players timid in this match-up?**

RYAN ODOM: I think spacing is the first thing. We have to make sure our guys have the proper space to work and get downhill. If you're driving into crowds all the time, that's

where players who have those types of instincts can really make you way. We've got to make sure that our guys have the space to work.

I thought our guys did a nice job in the second half. Even Thijs did a nice job of quick passing it instead of over dribbling. We get in trouble when we over dribble. We want to take it and attack it when we can, but when the ball is constantly down, that's just not how we play. We have to make sure we're organized as we come over half court and ready to attack.

**Q. Sam Lewis was pegged as a really good shooter coming in. How much growth did you see for his game as far as what he can do off the dribble now and in the perimeter?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, when we first started working with Sam, it was pretty evident, this guy works on his game. He was not a high-volume three-point shooter in Toledo. He shot a lot of twos, but you could see the pull ups and his ability to maneuvered ball and handle the ball, and his ability to, you know, one foot Euro, the balance that he has attacking the rim. We want him to do it more. He's really good in open court. He's made some good plays over the year for us without a doubt.

**Q. You mentioned the depth of this team. As you get to this point in the season and the guys have played a lot of games, are you seeing a different level of freshness? I know you got some guys dinged up, but healthiness because of the depth?**

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, we want it to be a factor in every game that we play. Some games it is, and some games it isn't. I think for us, it's trying to make sure we stay out of foul trouble. We had Dallin in foul trouble the other day. So we're having to manage that in the first half so everyone could play their normal minutes. Still played him with the two fouls, but we only had five fouls at that point going into halftime. He had two of them.

But I think it's an important factor in the game, but ultimately, it's going to come down to if it's a tight one, are you getting the stop or are you scoring the bucket when you need it? There's no time to be tired at this point. I have had many a time and time-outs, where I have told my guys you're not tired. Even though I'm looking at them and they're dragging, you're not tired right now. Look where we are. Look around you.

**Q. You mentioned Utah State. That program has had good head coaches, yourself included --**

RYAN ODOM: I get this question every year.



**Q. What is it?**

RYAN ODOM: It's a place that they love their basketball and they love their basketball program, and Utah is a basketball state, and so the kids that grow up in that state want to play at one of those schools. It's probably BYU first, and then you have Utah and Utah State second there, and they're just really good players coming up through the ranks there. And then Utah State's shown an ability to go outside, be it international, be it other guys domestically that want to play in that type of environment. It's one of the best environments in all of college basketball in terms of their home court. Their students are tremendous.

I would encourage -- anybody that loves basketball, I would encourage you to just make a trip out there and experience it for yourself because the fans know exactly -- if the game starts at 7:00, you'll look around and go, man, there's not many people here right now and it's 6:55. By 7:00, they know exactly how long it takes from their car, all right? To get to their seat that they've sat in for 25 to 30 years, How long it takes to get there, and they're going to be sitting there waiting at 7:00. The students are there before. They're waiting in line to get in, much like Cameron Indoor and some of great venues around the country. I think it starts there, but the players and former players and former coaches really care about the program. They want to win.

**Q. I just have a question about Griff Aldrich. I know you guys have known each other a long time. How did you guys reunite at Virginia? How did that come together? What's it like having him on your staff?**

RYAN ODOM: Griff and I were college teammates, so we talk every day. We never thought we would have the opportunity to work together again. Griff was in the private sector for a long, long time after we graduated from college. He had a brief stint coaching with our coach, Coach Schafer and then he went into the private sector, raised a family, married his wife, Julie.

He began coaching AU out in the Houston area. At this particular time, I was coaching at Lenoir-Rhyne and I had just taken that job. Griff had never followed our seasons intently over the course of our time, but when I started coaching at Lenoir-Rhyne, he would call me after games. Billy Bales, you need to play him more. That was a great win over Wingate. It's like, well, Griff, nobody is watching these games. Why are you texting me? What's up?

I accepted the UMBC job and became a parent. I asked him, what's up? And he said, well, I think I'm being called to coach again. I said, all right, come on the UMBC. We'll get your feet wet and see if this is something you want to

do and take on. Obviously, you wife have has to be okay with it, and it's a big leap to do it, but I would love it if you would come join me.

So obviously, that happened, and then he gets the Longwood job and he did such a good job at Longwood. Two NCAA Tournaments, he took over a program similar at UMBC, had very little hope and just rejuvenated and built a program that's lasting, and the community is really proud of it now, and it's really cool to see where that's gone.

Then it became a situation, the Virginia job, I accepted the job here and I needed someone with his experience and I needed a right-hand man at this level to do it. Especially in this climate, his background is really helpful for Virginia as we enter the transfer portal, as we enter contracts and notions around all the different things that we go there. He's just done a phenomenal job as has our staff. Our staff has been together for a long time. It was pretty seamless adding him back in the fold. He knew all of our folks anyway that worked with us. I'm really proud of the staff that we put together and they've just done a phenomenal job all year.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, coach. We'll see you tomorrow.

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