

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship

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San Antonio, Texas, USA

Nina King

Tournament Selection Media Conference

RICK NIXON: Good evening. We released the 2021 Division I Women's Basketball bracket tonight. Exciting to get to the end of the selection weekend to announce our 64-team field. With us tonight is Nina King, senior deputy director of athletics at Duke University and chair of the Division I Women's Basketball Committee. I'm Rick Nixon with the NCAA. We appreciate you joining us.

NINA KING: Great to see everybody. It is absolutely thrilling to get to this point after the year we've had. We are just so thrilled to be able to announce a bracket and welcome teams to San Antonio starting tomorrow morning.

So appreciate you all and your interest, and happy to take any questions you have.

Q. My question I guess is how tough was it for those last couple spots for you guys to figure out who was in, who was not in, who was the four for the alternates if necessary?

NINA KING: It was extremely tough. When you kind of get down to, we only have a few more spots left, are these the right teams, and we certainly talked about a lot of teams, and then seeding them, where should we put them in.

We had a lot on the bubble and trying to figure out who the last four were. Now the first four out are the replacement teams and the first four out is something that we do every year, so that wasn't different for us. Just ranking those four was different for us in terms of who do we go to first if a team pulls out.

RICK NIXON: Talk about the process this weekend, kind of what the committee went through, the planning and everything that went into the weekend.

NINA KING: Process: The committee got to San Antonio on Wednesday. We tested and then got to work on Thursday morning. We are also going through daily testing and as the student athletes and programs will once they get here tomorrow. But got locked into that committee



room Thursday through today, and really had great work with my committee colleagues. The ten of us really spent a lot of time talking through teams, making sure we had everything right for five days.

Q. Going back to selecting those last couple of teams, did the situation with the Missouri Valley Conference have any affect on that, given that situation with Missouri State pulling out, and just your thoughts on that.

NINA KING: Sure. It was something we watched very closely once we received word that the Missouri State game was not going to be played. But then we looked at Missouri State and their resumé and total body of work, and felt they were deserving of an at-large seed.

So once we put them in and then once we received the Missouri Valley Conference Champion, we knew that we would have two teams in from the Missouri Valley.

Q. To quickly follow-up, given all the teams are at one location; the regions aren't geographically dispersed was there a thought of mixing it up a little bit more geographically having teams spread out or play teams that they would never ever play before, just kind of mix it up even more?

NINA KING: It wasn't mixed up enough for you.

Q. Just a little bit more.

NINA KING: We had the 64, and then we followed the S-Curve and placed teams into the bracket using the S-Curve. Then there were bracketing principles that we had to follow, things like attempting to avoid a conference matchup until a regional final game.

One of the principles is we do attempt to avoid repeat matchups so that teams don't continually play the same teams in the first round of the tournament every year. So we did go back several years to make sure we were able to avoid some of those matchups.

So I am confident it is mixed up a little bit and not same



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bracket that we've had in the past.

Q. Just my question about the American Conference, a conference that lost to UCONN, I see you have got UCF as the last one in and Houston as the first one out with USF, as well, being an 8-seed. How much did you -- what was your, I guess, process in seeding those teams without a team like UCONN that kind of skewed those programs net a little bit towards a higher direction. If you can talk about your decision making and the seeding within the American Conference.

NINA KING: Sure. Well we look at to get into the tournament, total body of work and then how they are playing right now for seeding. So obviously we had South Florida as an automatic qualifier from the American, and then we looked at UCF very closely. They won 16 games. They had a Top-25 net win, the win over South Florida, and they played all the way through into the Conference Championship game. And so we really felt that UCF, what they have done this year, was deserving of a bid.

And then Houston, obviously first four out was right there. Just not enough compared to some of the teams in the tournament to get them in. But what Houston has done this year is also impressive.

Q. For USF specifically, in previous years they have been dinged for playing UCONN three times and losing three times. Seems likes this year they got dinged for not playing UCONN. How did the committee decide on an 8-seed for the AAC regular season and conference tournament champions?

NINA KING: This year we certainly didn't say, well, USF doesn't have UCONN on their resumé. So that didn't come into effect.

But what did USF did have on their resumé we were impressed with. Again, just kind of looking at how they are playing now is where the seeding comes into play for us.

We looked at teams all around them, teams on 7-line, teams on 9-line. After we see the line we go back and check our work to make sure we're comfortable with, with, the teams that we've placed, and really felt that USF on the 8-line was the appropriate place.

RICK NIXON: Touch upon how it is from a committee standpoint,, you've been in San Antonio for a while, you're going to be in this controlled environment until the first part of April. How difficult is that for you as a committee member and just getting your mindset around selections, obviously, but then also leading to the next three weeks coming up.

NINA KING: Well, sure, the committee, all of us are just excited to be here. The length is a long time but it's okay because we are asking our student athletes and coaches to sacrifice a lot to come and be here and play the games, and so we're just thrilled to be able to be a part of this unique and historic championship.

While it's long, it's okay, because it is for the great game of women's basketball, and it's exciting. A controlled environment is interesting. There isn't much that -- well, there's nothing we can do outside of the controlled environment.

But the NCAA staff has worked so incredibly hard to make this a great experience for our student athletes.

You know, obviously they are going to have games to play, practice, and team meetings and all of that, but then there's going to be ancillary things, unique things that we could think of to do in the hotels for the student athletes to ensure that they still have a really great experience while they are here in San Antonio.

Q. How tightly packed were the No. 1 and 2 seeds? Was it difficult to differentiate four No. 1 teams out of that or was it a pretty clear-cut decision at the end?

NINA KING: No, I would say it was pretty tightly packed. We had a lot of discussion around 1 and 2. You probably have noticed since our last Top-16 reveal we have made a change on the 1- and 2-lines. We had to have a lot of conversation around that to make sure that we were comfortable, and that's where we felt that those eight teams on the 1- and 2-lines deserve to be.

It really was a lot of our conversations early on in the deliberation process.

Q. And how did you guys weigh the impact of COVID-19, whether it was teams who had to miss games or teams that had to play short-handed. Where did that play into the process?

NINA KING: That was a discussion point. This was such a unique year: Scheduling circumstances; teams making up games; playing back-to-back nights playing the same team; the Patriot League had a very interesting scheduling model this year.

So I think teams across the board all over the country were impacted by COVID in some form or fashion. And so we certainly took into account COVID pauses, how teams were playing post-pause, if players were missing due to COVID. It was one of the discussion points.

But we have 14 criteria that we look to when we are selecting and seeding teams in terms of availability of players. Sometimes that could have been COVID impact and that's where that would really come up.

RICK NIXON: Any other questions for Nina?

NINA KING: You guys just love the bracket so much; we don't have much.

RICK NIXON: Thanks so much for being with us, and thanks to all the media for being with us, as well.

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