

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Maryland Terrapins

Men's Head Coach

Kevin Willard



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THE MODERATOR: Coach Willard will tip off his second season in College Park after becoming the first head coach in program history to achieve 20 wins, a national ranking, and an NCAA tournament berth in his first season. Coach Willard, we'll start with your opening statement.

KEVIN WILLARD: Thank you. It's exciting to be back in Minneapolis again. I want to thank the Big Ten for doing this.

Excited about this year's team. Had a really good offseason. Got to go to Italy. We really were able to make some good strides with our roster in the portal. Really good group of freshmen.

So really excited about this team and this year. I think we have a good challenge. So, yeah, that's all I got. Anybody have any questions?

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor now for questions for Coach Willard.

Q. When you took the job and looked at your roster, what kind of jump did you expect to see from a player like Julian and then how did that play out last season?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah. I mean, I think when you get a job nowadays, it's really difficult because of the transfer portal, so guys can leave, you can get guys. Julian is one of those special young men that loves Maryland. Obviously, grew up in Baltimore.

I knew he had great potential. I didn't know what his work ethic was like, and Julian has an unbelievable work ethic. I think he just kept working all year, all year, all year, and I think everyone saw the great strides that he took to really become one of the best big men in the league.

Q. Is that work ethic what enables maybe a freshman who had a role to step into a significant role as a sophomore?

KEVIN WILLARD: I also think opportunity. I think opportunity had a lot to do with it. We weren't an overly big team last year. I wanted to play him some at power forward, which we're going to do this year. We're going to play him a little bit at power forward at times this year. So I think the opportunity was there, and he took it.

Again, he is just one of those -- he is a very smart basketball player, but he is an extremely hard worker, and he just saw the opportunity. He wanted it, and he really never got down and frustrated.

The league last year, he went a three-day stretch against Wisconsin, Purdue, Michigan against those three big guys. He came out of those three games, and he outplayed just about all three of those guys, and I think he got a lot of confidence out of that. That just kind of fueled his fire to keep on working.

Q. What have your impressions been so far about Jordan Geronimo?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I think the thing we talked about as a staff that was really important after we lost to Alabama in the NCAA Tournament was we really needed to change our athleticism. Again, I had a great team last year. They were so fun to coach, but there was some limits on what we could do physically and athletically.

When Jordan went into the portal, I had known Jordan from being at Seton Hall and him being from Newark. I know his mom. It was just one of those things. He was one of those guys that just was going to be a game-changer for us. Jordan so far has -- our practices, we haven't practiced longer than an hour and 26 minutes because our practices are so athletic and so physical.

He has changed -- I have a lineup with Donta Scott, Jordan Geronimo, Julian, and Mady Traore. We are big and physical. Jordan has changed the way we play. He is that good of a player.

He is shooting the basketball great. He is skilled. More than anything he has just changed our roster just by adding



him.

Q. One of the things that was immediately noticeable about when you started was how the toughness that you traditionally have had in your program has got instilled into the Terps. How has that gone with the newcomers? You mentioned Jordan, you're really happy with him. DeShawn, I know you are excited about him as a talent. Has he embraced that culture as well?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, our freshman class is the best freshman class I've ever had. DeShawn Harris-Smith is by far the most talented player, probably the most physically gifted basketball player I've ever been able to coach so far.

Jamie Kaiser was a former quarterback and played football. So they've been able to come in with Jordan and really kind of embrace how we want to play at the level we want to play at.

It's been, like I said, practices have been unbelievable. We can't go that long because they're so competitive, they're so physical. We look like a Big Ten team, where last year we had to really fight to be a Big Ten team. This year we look like a Big Ten team, and I think we can compete a little bit higher level because of that.

Q. Last year you said that Jahmir Young had come to Maryland to make the NCAA Tournament. What's the mindset between you and your point guard heading into this season on building on that?

KEVIN WILLARD: I think our mindset for Jahmir is a little bit more individual. We're looking for him to take the next step for him to become an NBA player.

We all have team goals. We all say the same BS. You want to win a championship and the Big Ten stuff. I think everyone has that goal. But for me with Jahmir, Donta, Julian, some of the freshmen it's a little bit more individual this year. I'm looking for them to take the next step in their game, so they can get to the NBA and have a professional career.

For me it's a little bit more selfish. I'm looking at it a little bit differently. When you have kids that have come into your program, guys like Donta Scott, who I think no one is even talking about Donta, and he is playing at a level that he is in the best shape of his career.

Guys like Jahmir, you want them to be very successful after they leave you. Yes, we have team goals. Yes, we have what we want to do, but for Jahmir, Donta, Julian, we're looking for them to take the next step so they can

become NBA players or pros. That's the way I look at it for those guys.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Willard, thank you for your time.

KEVIN WILLARD: Thank you very much.

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