

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

## Cincinnati Bearcats Coach Wes Miller Dan Skillings, Jr. John Newman, III

Postgame Press Conference



Baylor - 68, Cincinnati - 56

THE MODERATOR: Coach Wes Miller is here with his players, Dan Skillings, Jr. and John Newman. Coach?

WES MILLER: Congrats to Baylor and Scott's group. They've had a terrific year. Thought that our guys came out really ready to play. I was incredibly impressed with our defensive effort in the first half after playing three games in three days. I thought we were really, really locked in. I thought we did a really nice job of preparing in a one-day situation.

John Newman tonight defensively, that's about as good as a guy can play defensively in a game. He was -- I hate that we didn't win, because I'll think about the way he played tonight for the rest of my coaching career, and I just wish we would have won the game, because he was an absolute warrior.

I'm proud of my team this week. They've been a resilient group all year, and they were really resilient this week and we just weren't quite good enough in the second half. Couldn't sustain it. The zone obviously gave us problems and we spent a lot of time preparing for that going into the tournament. We did as much as we could this morning, but we just weren't as good as we needed to be. That's why you only get 56. Obviously you look down and they get 44 in the second half. We couldn't sustain our defense, I mentioned that. I thought 19 for 22 from the foul line was a big differentiator in the game. They're 19 for 22, we're 7 for 9. And I thought the rebounding was the most frustrating to me because we pride ourselves on being a rebounding team and we get kicked on the board 39-27. And their 14 offensive rebounds were pretty significant. If you want my real thoughts.

I'm really proud of my group. I love my group. We just went through the best basketball league for the first time in the country. We had some great, great moments. We had some great moments here this week. I'm just really disappointed we couldn't come out with a win.

**Q. Coach, you've talked about your team's ability to fight all year long and an ability to respond. Say, down the road you reach the goals that you want to reach as the coach of Cincinnati, how much will you look back on this group and the first season in the Big 12 as setting the table for all that.**

WES MILLER: I told them in the locker room about the joy that I had coaching them every day. It's because of that. There's a lot of reasons, honestly, but the way this group fights, the way they respond, they're incredibly selfless. They just want to win. Of course they all have individual aspirations, but they've all made sacrifices to try to win. Those are foundational things moving forward in our program that this group has really done.

I'm proud of the way our group has approached it and fought all year, even if we had stretches and moments when we didn't play well.

**Q. Dan, you came on to the scene the last two days for people that maybe didn't know your name. How can you use these past three performances to kinda springboard you into the off-season as well as next season?**

DAN SKILLINGS, JR.: Not really looking at the off-season right now. The season is not over yet. Cincinnati basketball plays basketball in March, so I'm going to just keep going with my team and keep working every day and keep getting better with my skill set every day and keep trying to get better as a team and go from there.

**Q. Coach, what is so difficult about shifting gears from playing teams that play hardcore man-to-man and going to a team like Baylor that plays that kind of zone, in one day?**



WES MILLER: You just don't have any time to prepare. That's what's difficult in conference tournament play or those preseason tournaments where you are playing day-after-day, you have no time to prepare. And Baylor's zone is unique. The way we play a 2-3 zone when we play it or practice it against ourselves -- West Virginia, for example, plays some 2-3. So we prepared for that the day before we played West Virginia. It's a different type of 2-3 zone than Baylor's, which is so extended in the tandem and they protect the middle so well and they make it hard to get to the corners. It's a different kind of zone and we spent 45 minutes this morning showing film and walking some things in our ballroom, but, you know, our guys had played heavy minutes and this is three games in three days. There is only so much we can do and that does make it difficult.

**Q. Coach, picking up the tail end of your answer, when you talk about the issues of the second half, how much of it was attributable to being on the floor for the third time in three days?**

WES MILLER: Yeah, I don't know. I think when you get into that, you take something away from the other team. And Baylor played well in the second half, they did. They gave us a hard time defensively in the zone especially. And then they scored the basketball. So for me to sit here and make an excuse about three games in three days, I don't want to take away from Scott and his group. They played well. The fact of the matter is we were really damn good defensively in the first half and we couldn't sustain it. Give Baylor some credit for that, but we couldn't sustain it and that hurt us and it also hurt that we're not doing it down there and it felt like there was a lid on it to start the second half. I actually thought our movement against the zone and the quality of the shot was better the second half than it was in the first half. We just couldn't make a basket. I'll say it again, the offensive rebounding or lack of it, because we pride ourselves in that, we only get 7 tonight. There were so many times I look down, we shoot the ball and we got guys leaking back instead of pursuing offensive rebounds. So tip one and keeping it alive. Those are ones that when we are playing well we get. We didn't get those. And then they get 14. That's what we do and when somebody does it better than us, it's going to be hard for us.

**Q. Until late in the game three of your starters had three points. I know you don't -- might not want to talk about the three games in three days but was it the fatigue or a combination of what Baylor was doing? Are you surprised they were able to shut Simas down two games in a row?**

WES MILLER: I'm not here to make excuses for our team,

for our players. I think everybody in our locker room would say we put ourselves in position to go win a second half and we didn't play well enough. Guys, everybody here knows playing three games in three days is difficult physically, but we're not the type to make excuses and we put ourselves in a position to play three games in three days to get to the quarterfinals by how we did in the regular season. I have players that want to be held accountable, they want the truth. We tell them the truth. We don't point fingers and make excuses, so we're not going to start doing that now, but heck yeah guys are tired after three games in three days but we're responsible for that, and Baylor gets the double bye because of the year that they had.

**Q. John, obviously your career is coming to a close here at Cincinnati, seen a lot of highlights. Coach talked about the joy that this group has brought him. How much of a highlight has this season been to you on your long basketball career?**

JOHN NEWMAN III: It's been a lot of joy, man. You know, just coming from, like, last year in the place that I was in, just being with this team has been super refreshing for me. It's been the most fun I had playing basketball in my whole career. We're not done yet. It is coming to an end, but we're not done yet. So we still have more moments to create. But it's been an hell of a ride. I'm looking forward to making more moments over these next couple weeks.

**Q. Coach, I know the season is not over yet, but you guys would have had to win five games in five days to win the Big 12 Tournament this year. Do you think in future years you will emphasize finishing higher in the standings to avoid having to play so many games in so many days to win this Big 12 Championship?**

WES MILLER: Our guys can't want to win more. During the regular season. I don't think it's a lack of emphasis to try to -- our guys have -- and I think the people that support our program and are around our program, you can't have a group of kids that want to win night in and night out more than this group of guys.

So emphasis, yeah, they played their hearts out every night the entire regular season. Every night in conference play. We had some nights that we didn't play great but their will and want to win is as high as a team can have. If we continue to do that, and continue to develop our program, we're going to have years we finish higher in the Big 12. That's happening, I promise that.

**Q. Wes, Cincinnati's first visit to the Big 12 Tournament. I just wanted to get your impressions of the event itself.**

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WES MILLER: First class. Everything in the time that I've been associated with the Big 12 has been first class. I've been blown away. I told Brett that when I ran into him a couple days ago. This league does it first class and this tournament has been no different. I grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina going to the ACC Tournament, kind of fell in love with college basketball doing that. I always thought that experience was special in Greensboro, it was the right place for the ACC Tournament. You get that same sense that we have that old school conference tournament feel right now with the Big 12 Conference in Kansas City.

I think our guys got to feel what March has been like traditionally and historically. This town is the right place. Yeah, this is really neat. It brings me back to my childhood, a little bit, in a lot of ways.

**Q. Coach as you prepare for the rest of the season over the next couple of days, can you walk us through what that looks like?**

WES MILLER: Yeah, let's just say this: After coaching in this league, and I've been in other people's shoes. I've been in mid-major programs that had a chance to get an at-large. So I've been other places. After coaching in this league, I don't know how this league doesn't get a massive amount of bids. There is just nothing like this in college basketball right now.

I think I have an NCAA Tournament team. Good thing Joe Lunardi isn't on the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee, because he ain't been on our side. I believe this league deserves 10 or 11 teams in the tournament, no doubt about it. We'll see. I think we will learn a lot about what the Selection committee values this Selection Sunday. Dan just said it, Cincinnati basketball.

We play postseason basketball. We're going to be ready to play. This group is going to be ready to compete. We've got to get home, get rested. It's been a long three days. This group will be ready to compete wherever we are playing.

**Q. Coach, you talked about earlier the ACC Tournament you grew up going to it. Can you compare playing in the ACC Tournament when you were in North Carolina to coaching in the Big 12 and the differences it offers you as a player and now a head coach?**

WES MILLER: It's hard to compare, because it's such a different experience coaching and playing. I told our staff, we haven't slept the last three days as coaches because

we've been up all night getting ready for the next game. The only thing I miss about playing versus coaching is that the players get to focus for an hour, and our guys did a great job, and then they get to go freaking lay down and sleep.

That's probably the biggest dang difference. But it's special. It's special in both circumstances. The swings of March, coaching and playing are real. Losing hurts at a level that you can't describe, and winning is a thrill, and a high that you can't describe especially this time of year, and that's been the same for me whether it was playing or coaching.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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