

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Cincinnati Bearcats

Coach Wes Miller

Media Day Press Conference



WES MILLER: Well, excited to get this thing kicked off. I think I saw this, that we're under two weeks away today on social media when I got up this morning. Ready to get it kicked off. I'm proud that we have a lot of continuity on the roster.

We returned not just guys on our team but guys that were massive parts of our starting lineup, massive parts of our rotation, and logged a lot of key minutes and got a lot of experience in this league from a year ago.

If we're going to be the team that we're capable of becoming, that's going to have to be a huge factor. It won't just happen just because, but if we do the work and make that continuity matter, I think it can be important for our season this year.

Then I'm proud of some of the additions. I thought we did a nice job of not just adding people that aligned with the things we value in our program, we did a nice job of adding people that fit in with the guys that we're returning, with the key guys that we're returning.

I think we have a chance to be a very good basketball team. In this league, everybody is a very good basketball team, so that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to have a great deal of success in the league. We have to be working every day to find those little things to separate us because we're in the best league in college basketball, which is awesome, but it's very challenging, and that's got us pretty motivated on a day in, day out basis.

Q. You talked about getting people who align with the program's values. I'm curious with the seven newcomers, especially the three transfers, how do you go about teaching them to kind of appreciate the culture that you've created at UC or even the history of the program that was there before?

WES MILLER: Yeah, we have a very specific way that we try to approach things on a day-to-day basis, from the biggest things down to the little things. We do have a great attention to detail, and we try to have a standard that's set for what we do and how we do it.

What's been nice to date this year is that when you have all these returning guys that not only understand those day-to-day standards and that day-to-day process, but they embrace it and care about it, they do a good job of helping those new players learn.

That's more of the old way in college basketball, which used to be the same everywhere, where you learn from the guys in front of you that have been in the program. That's not the same anymore.

We have that this year, at least to date, so that's made the assimilation for our new players, whether it's our transfers or our two freshmen, a lot easier.

Q. Day Day Thomas was scheduled to come today; he didn't come. Obviously he had a pretty good scrimmage against Ohio State. Can you update his status?

WES MILLER: Yeah, he had the broken foot in the NIT last year and had surgery, and everything has gone exactly according plan all the way up into practice yesterday. I don't think it's serious, but he had a little bit of a setback on the foot.

Again, not serious, so just out of precaution held him back to do treatment today. I think it's a day-to-day bring. Nothing to be alarmed about, but this media day is not quite as important as getting ready for our season, and we'll monitor what's going on day-to-day, and we didn't think it was serious but maybe a little bit of discomfort in that foot, so we're just trying to be safe.

Q. With so much depth on your team this year, how do you go about managing those minutes and different lineups?

WES MILLER: Yeah, aren't these the good kind of

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problems? I think if you're sitting up here as a coach early in the year and the challenge is how to find the right combinations and figure out the right minute distributions and right rotations, and the challenge of that is because you have so much depth, I think that's where you want to be as a program and as a coach.

What we'll do is just go through our typical process of the preseason. We play live in practice every day 5-on-5, so there's so many opportunities to try things and to let these guys compete. Obviously we have the two competitions that the NCAA allows. Those are important.

Then I think you have the first month of the season -- this will be my 14th year as a head coach. I've never coached a year that everything you did from a lineup, rotation and minute allocation standpoint was the same in January as it was in November.

So we'll use that time to kind of move things around to find the right balance going into league play.

Q. Talk about the importance from year one to year two within this conference, and what were some things you were able to take away as a coach as you make this transition to year two in the Big 12?

WES MILLER: Well, let me just say it; you knew sitting up here a year ago you're going into the best league in America, but experiencing it is something completely different. You gain a little bit of wisdom as you go through any experience.

The first thing I'd say about last year's experience is what an awesome experience to coach in this league. I mean, it is awesome. It's hard. Every single night you're playing against old players, talented players, smart players, and elite coaching.

As difficult and challenging as that is, it's awesome because it really helps you elevate yourself as a coach, it helps you elevate your program and the things that you do and the way that you do them.

So that experience was awesome.

I think the thing that is a little bit different going into this year than last year is a number of us, whether it's our coaching staff or whether it's all these returning players, we knew we were heading into the best league. Now we've experienced it.

There's more of an understanding of why you're preparing at the level you're preparing because there's the experience of what's ahead of you.

Q. At SEC media day last week a lot of coaches were saying they have the best league in the country. Obviously the coaches in this league think this is the best conference in the country. Why do you think this is the No. 1 league in America going into this upcoming season?

WES MILLER: I mean, listen, everybody is going to beat the drum for their league. Again, this is my 14th year. I've coached in three different conferences. Every league is really hard, especially when you get into league play and the stakes are higher and the awareness of each other is different. Every league is really hard.

I think when people like myself stand up here and say we have the best league, it's not a slight towards anybody else's league or disrespect. It's fact. I don't think it's an opinion. Just look at the numbers. Seriously, look at the numbers.

Look at average NET ranking for the last five years. It's actually not even close. National Championships. Look at NCAA Tournament appearances. It's not even close when you look at it over the last four or five years in college basketball.

Then you're going into this year, and I'm not one that puts a whole lot into preseason rankings, but the coaches' poll I think will come out. I'll bet you we have five of the top eight or nine or ten teams in the country. So that means the coaches think it's the best league at the top.

But what's really been the separator to me -- like I just got in the league. I've only been in it a year. Some of this is speaking about what it was before I got in it. What's really been interesting to me is not just at the top, and it's been incredible at the top.

The middle and the bottom have been all the other Power Five leagues. I think that's been the biggest separator. It's not comparing the top to the top somewhere else, which we'd probably win in this one, too. But if you compare the middle of the league to the middle of other leagues or the bottom to the bottom of other leagues, it ain't even close, and that night in, night out battle in our league, the level of basketball is just so high.

My concern -- I love the question. My concern isn't whether we have to prove we're the best league. It's been proven. The concern is can we continue to do that throughout this season. I think we can.

The only other concern is I hope we don't beat ourselves up too much by the time we get to March because that's

the hardest part about playing in this league.

Q. Following up on that, any specific things you're doing in the preseason or off-season to prepare, knowing what you went through as far as either scheduling travel or off-season work knowing what's ahead on the court?

WES MILLER: Yeah, we believe in trying to grow and improve every day. I'm probably not very different than most coaches that will sit up here and talk to you today. When you go through the year that we went through last year in this league, you take notes, you learn, and you try to adjust and apply the things that you learned differently to the next year.

We've done that, so we have made some changes, but I ain't telling you guys. That's for me and my program. We're doing some things differently. We're trying to maximize everything we can to be the best team we can be, whether that's how we're approaching film sessions, whether it's how we structure practice, whether it's how we structure our preseason, and any changes we made in that way to be to prepare to be competitive in this league.

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