

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Coach Grant McCasland

Media Day Press Conference



GRANT McCASLAND: Awesome to be here in Kansas City. Having played in the Big 12 and gotten the opportunity to be an assistant in the Big 12 and now a head coach, there's nothing like the tournament in this venue.

As a Red Raider and being a part of Texas Tech basketball and just the current run that we've had, it's an exciting time for us, and to be in the best league in college basketball, there's nothing like it.

We love our team. We love the returners. I think we've added some guys that we feel like can help us, specifically around the rim, and these days in college athletics, recruiting high school players, you never know what you've got, but we have some high school guys that we love, so we're just thrilled about our team, and thankful for the opportunity to compete in the best conference in college basketball.

Q. You added J.T. Toppin; obviously went through the draft process and was available later. I'm curious, navigating the portal these days, how do you approach a guy like that where there's a possibility he'll come back to college, but how do you line up the alternate plans in case he doesn't and what did that recruitment process look like?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, you know it changes faster than your plans can accommodate. I think that's just the nature of what we do.

I do think there's a quality in the relationships of the people that you really have to trust who you're talking to, and it sounds obvious, but I think it's the most important part of all of this, is can you tell the truth to people and can they hear what you have to say and can you decipher if it's actually going to work.

The one thing about J.T. Toppin that we felt all the way through the process from the time he got into the portal to the time that he ended up saying that he was going to be a Red Raider was there was just a constant communication of, like, this is where we're at and this is what we want.

That was the most important part, and we felt like there was a sincere interest in knowing that he could get drafted, but ultimately for him we did feel like there was a consensus that going back to school was a big part of him growing and getting better, and that was kind of the emphasis for him was, like, how does he keep getting better so he can sustain it in the long run.

Man, he's got great people around him, and obviously he's going to make a significant impact for us. In this league rebounding translates, and he did that at the combine and led the combine in rebounding.

When you see that, even when you know there's a possibility he could go back to school and we were in a good place with him. You know they could always go, but really his people, I think they're the best, and thankful we had a great relationship, and I think that's the key to all this is who you trust and who you talk to.

Q. Before you got to Tech, there have been times where their three-point shooting wasn't consistent or wasn't at a high level. You kind of changed that last year with Chance and with Darrion and now you've got Elijah coming in. How does the three-point shot way a role in how you want to play offensively, and does it help with your interior game?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, you know, I think when you evaluate players, and we've tried to figure out a formula that we know wins, I think space on the floor in college basketball is so important, and how do you create space, and one of the best ways to do it is with guys that can shoot.

Chance McMillian, Kerwin Walton, and Darrion Williams who actually are helping us today at media days are the three best returning percentage shooters at the Power Five level, and for us specifically to have a group of guys that



have this much experience and can really shoot the basketball I think allows the game to be easier for everybody, as long as you share it. It causes the most problems for defenses.

The biggest thing for us is how do we put guys around them. And now we have Elijah Hawkins, who I think creates opportunities for those guys, and then by better ball movement and -- we love the guys that we brought in. I think the size at the rim and verticality give those guys a chance to be on the floor longer, and we can play multiple different lineups because the one thing about having three-point shooting is good, but when people take it away, how do you put pressure on the rim.

I think these guys made big steps in the off-season of being able to bounce the ball and make decisions, make reads, and Darrion Williams being such a versatile player, he can do all of it. And his three-point shooting I think really changed our team last year, and a lot of people didn't see that as a strength of his.

But shooting in college basketball I think provides the most space and gives everybody an opportunity to attack the rim and create opportunities for themselves.

Q. You've said it multiple times. Other coaches have, as well. Best conference in the country. On one hand, that's awesome. On the other hand I imagine it must be exhausting. I was looking at your schedule; there's a stretch in your schedule where you go Houston, Baylor, Arizona, in an eight-day span. How important is the way you approach this mentally because you can be great in this league and you're still going to lose a lot.

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, it's funny, I wouldn't know this if I didn't experience it and do it the wrong way. I was a junior college coach at Midland Junior College, and one of the first years as a head coach I went through the schedule and we had a pretty good record about halfway through, and I started counting the wins to make it in the top four, because if you were a top-four team in the WAC Jack, western junior college, you go to go to the regional tournament, and it was the only way you could make it.

There were no at-large bids. You had to win the tournament to go. I started doing the math and we started losing. Every second I wasted trying to do the math I could have invested in something that actually impacted us.

To your point, I looked at the schedule and I got it and everybody likes to critique it, so I started going through Game 1, Game 2, and I got to Game 4, and it is overwhelming just looking at who you play, where you play

them, and I just stopped. I really did. I stopped.

People ask me, who do you play twice, and I do know just because of the names we've asked repetitively who do we play twice in this league, but I could not tell you the order. I could not tell you who we play after the first Big 12 game right now.

I just made a conscious effort to focus on the one at a time. That sounds like a corny answer, but I honestly believe it with all my heart. I think the moment you try to look at the schedule and try to figure out how you're going to navigate it is the moment you're losing, and the more you can invest in your team and that energy, the better off you are.

Q. Everybody talks about how difficult this league is, and we look at the names on the jerseys and stuff and the history, but what makes this league so tough?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, I think anytime you've got this many Hall of Fame coaches in a league and you've got this much history of teams making deep runs in the tournament, winning National Championships, but honestly, I think it's the basketball venues and the culture of the places that we play.

I'm sure there's difficult places to play across the country, but the depth of that in our league and the physicality that you have to endure with such good defensive teams, such great talent, I think it's a combination -- I just think it's the most physical league in college basketball when you look across the defensive teams you have to play against.

It turns into not only a great environment but it's literally the gauntlet of how physical every team is that you play and how competitive it is.

It's can you withstand that over the course of the entire league schedule.

Q. What did you just take away from coaching the U-18 junior national team, being an assistant there?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, well, one, I'm thankful I got to learn all of Tommy's system at Arizona so now we know how to compete -- that's actually not true. Tommy wouldn't give me any information. I think he was changing all his calls.

No, USA Basketball in an Olympic year, to be a part of that, it's humbling, and I think what it teaches you is that the more you can give in those moments, I think you go into that realizing that being a part of USA Basketball is so much bigger than who you are as an individual coach.

There's nothing like being a part of a team that has the best players in the world, and just the expectation that goes with that, but also it's such a great opportunity to learn how it's not about you as an individual, it is about what you can give.

And I think that experience of seeing guys that have never been selected or not selected to a team who have been the best players in the world in their age, to deal with that, but then how do you get a group that's not been together to be together in a short amount of time. It honestly is such an awesome experience.

Then to win a gold at the AmeriCup with that 18s group was just an awesome experience, and Micah Shrewsbury who was also on that staff, and I learned a lot from those guys and very thankful for how it all gets put together.

And really what you learn is what you give, it's not what you get. Really an awesome group to be a part of.

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