

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Texas A&M Aggies

Buzz Williams

Men's Media Day Press Conference

Q. Buzz, toward the end of last year, you adjusted your offense and y'all went on a run and won 11 of 13. I wonder, coming into this season, do you stick with that same kind of offense, or do you go back to something else?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: It'll probably end up being a combo of both. A lot of good things happened down the stretch that we like, and then we've tried to adapt relative to our new guys to add to what we were doing towards the end. So it'll probably end up being a combination.

Q. The void of Quenton Jackson and what he meant in that role in that offense that y'all were running toward the end of last year.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Well, we'll miss who he is. We'll miss his person. We'll miss his competitive character. We'll for sure miss his speed and his skill.

I thought over the last month of the season, he was one of the better perimeter players in the country, and he was a big part of what we were doing.

I don't know that there is a person on our current roster that will step in and do immediately what he did at the end of his career, but I think there are guys that will be able to kind of do bits and pieces.

But we don't have at this time that explosive, everything is broke down, you have the ball, make a play. I don't think that we necessarily have anybody that's as fast with the ball as he is.

But we do have some guys that can do a lot of good things, so I don't think it'll be one person that replaces him, so to say, but I think we'll probably do it in different ways.

Q. You added KK Robinson from Arkansas in the



portal, and you brought Ethan Henderson back, so you must like how he played for you. What about KK attract you? How is he fitting in and what are you expecting from him and what are you expecting from Ethan for this season?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: We had recruited K when we got first to Texas A&M. He has some family that lives in Texas, and that's kind of how we got involved.

He's fit in great. He's an exceptionally hard worker. He spends an inordinate amount of time in the gym working on his game individually, at a rate that I haven't seen in a long time.

He gives us another ball guard. I like left-handed guys. He's done a good job of learning how we play on both ends of the floor. Obviously every day is brand new to him. He feels like he's trying to catch up on what he doesn't know.

But he's been remarkable. Great character. Thankful that he's here.

Ethan is using his COVID year to come back. He's real close to finishing his diploma. An elite defender before the ball is shot. We need him to do better when the ball is in the air, but before it's shot he's spectacular. He can guard anybody on the floor or in the paint.

Obviously those two guys have known each other a lot longer than I've known them, so hopefully maybe there's some symmetry between the two, if and when they're on the floor together.

Q. What kind of improvement have you seen from the guys who were freshmen last year, like Wade and Obaseki?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, they've been great. They've been great. Those guys were really important cogs in what we were doing last year at a very young age, and I think the continuity of having them back and knowing what we're doing -- we've tweaked some things, obviously, on both sides of the ball, like all teams do, but that they know our habits and they kind of know how we go about things.

They've done a great job from a leadership standpoint with



the six new guys on this is what's important, this is not what's important, this is how we do it. Both of those guys have been phenomenal in that regard.

Q. I'm left-handed, by the way.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: How many of these have you been to in your career?

Q. I guess about every one since '92 when they had them, since Arkansas got in the league. Arkansas used to be in the Southwest Conference.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: When did they join the SEC?

Q. Their first year was '91, '92.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Is that when the Big 12 began?

Q. No, I think the Big 12 began about five years later. I think there was --

BUZZ WILLIAMS: So Arkansas left the Southwest Conference to join the SEC, but the Big 12 was not formed?

Q. Not yet.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: So it was just still the old Southwest Conference?

Q. I think for about five more years, something like that. I'm trying to remember my question now. You guys obviously finished great last year, probably got screwed getting to the NCAA Tournament, but that's another story. But expectations are pretty high. You guys were like the first team not to make the AP poll. How do you feel about this team going into the season? Do you feel like this should be your best team, maybe better than last year?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think this probably sounds like a coach response: Year number one with the group that we had upon arrival, a lot of newcomers, a very young team. We were terrible for a long time and then towards the end began to figure it out. We won five out of our last seven in conference play.

And then six hours before the tournament started that we were to play in, obviously the world changed. Had an awful COVID season, a lot of which we couldn't control, played less games than any Power Five team in the country.

Many dynamics were ongoing, personally, professionally

within each person in the program.

We signed eight players off of Zoom that we never saw in person. They never saw us, their families, et cetera.

Last year felt like year one, even though I understand we won't be judged that it was year one.

Started 15-2, 4-0, and then we lose eight games in a row. Four of those were one- or two-possession games.

Then I think it was 12 out of 14. Olin said 11 out of 13; that might be the number. Obviously to be able to finish the way that we did, had a lot of momentum.

In some regards, even though it's year four, it kind of feels like it's year two coming out of COVID.

So I like that we have some returning players. I think our staff did an excellent job in identifying the character fit to our program and who we signed, KK being one of those guys, but also what we needed from a talent standpoint on where we were deficient.

It just feels like for the first time -- I think this is only the second time I've ever even been to this, so it's been such a disjointed tenure in many regards, but this feels like the first time there's some level of normalcy to what we're doing.

Q. Just wanted to get your thoughts on a couple big ideas for college basketball right now that are floating out and about. One, summer basketball; and two, the expansion of the NCAA Tournament field.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: What was the deal on summer basketball? What's floating?

Q. (No microphone.)

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yes, sir, they mentioned that on one of the Zooms I was on.

I don't think anybody has an answer on any of it. I think what I would say, and I'm not -- I don't have a vote on anything, nor am I on my committees or a part of any clubs or organizations other than Texas A&M, I just think that there's been such change within the landscape of college athletics that everybody is trying to sort through what is this new model going to be and how is it going to look and what is best, and what is best in regards to all the different categories that are now involved.

I don't think anybody has an answer, and to be honest, it's been such massive change no matter what role you have

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in college athletics that I've just tried to stay in tune with how can I do my best at what I'm supposed to do. How it ends up being, I don't know.

After what I did last March, I don't think anybody with the NCAA is going to listen to anything that I say, so I'm going to be politically correct going forward.

I think it will head that direction, but again, how would student-athletes feel about that? How would the NCAA in the time that we're able to spend with our guys feel about that? Like there's just so many factors within each decision, and then I think at the end of the day, who is making the decision, and I think that probably has to be established first. Like whatever the question is, which group or persons is making the decision, and currently I don't know what the answer is to that, much less the question.

Q. A lot of coaches take pride in their shoe game, Coach Williams, but you seem to take pride in your pocket square game. Who's behind your pocket squares?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I was raised by a single parent, mother, and I had to pick out my clothes the night before each day of school, so it's my only hobby. Whatever I wear, I pick it out. I'm behind on shoe game, pocket squares, whatever. So thanks for your compliment.

Q. Coach, just wanted to get your thoughts on Dennis Gates. Obviously you went up against Florida State --

BUZZ WILLIAMS: He's a star. He's an absolute star. Known him for a long time. Known him since he was a player.

I think he and his brother are elite human beings. I think he works at his craft incredibly hard. I think he's been preparing for this moment for a long, long time. Obviously I know Desiree very well and have known Gates for a long time, and I have sung his praises from early in his tenure at Florida State.

What he did at Cleveland State was not a surprise to me. The ability that he has to lead as a person speaks for itself, and I think what he's been able to do in a brief head coaching career says that he can lead an organization.

I think he'll do great at Missouri. I think he's deserving of the opportunity. He's earned it. I think he works at it very hard.

I think he's an absolute star. I always have.

Q. Are you going to welcome Oklahoma and Texas to the conference? Is that something that you look forward to, playing teams in your state and bordering state?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, that's one of those questions I'm not sure how to answer. When I grew up, Texas, Oklahoma and Texas A&M were in the same conference, not that I ever thought I would be a part of that conference. When are they joining, how are they joining, what's the money, what's the TV, how does it affect the scheduling, is football going to play nine -- I don't know.

In truth, as volatile as this has become, I hope I'm here whenever that happens, and then you can ask that question, and then I'll answer at that moment in time.

Q. Since you alluded to it, have you ever had any second thoughts or regrets about the statements you made about being left out of the tournament?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: No. I'm going to always do regardless of what Twitter says or the opinion of others. I think that I've been blessed way more than I deserve, and I think with that blessing comes responsibility, and the number one responsibility is to do what's right for the people in the organization.

What I said is what I believed regardless of the fanfare and the velocity of things that were said about me. I understood going into that what was going to be said. But if you can't stand up for your people when you believe you should stand up for them, then I don't believe you're worthy of being a leader. Not a coach, just being a leader.

I was convicted by what I said. If you know, I didn't use anybody's name. I didn't use anybody's institution. It was just based on what I had studied.

The study over that 48-hour period was what I believed I had to do to explain to the people involved, specifically our kids.

Do I think it's good for my career to do that? No. Do I think it helps me get another job? No. Is it offensive to others? Do I sound like a crybaby and all of the stuff that people wrote me, texted me, DM'd me? I understood all of that. And without being condescending, if you look at my career at that moment, I'd been a head coach for 15 years, I had never done that before.

But I felt as though it was right relative to the children and the families they represent, and so I don't regret it, nor will I ever regret it.

Q. What have you noticed to be the benefits versus the weaknesses of the portal and combined with NIL?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Pretty interesting on the first part of your question. If you study the percentage of transfers in this league and break it down per team, it's pretty interesting. I'm not saying that it's good or bad. I think only time will tell.

But I think it's a new component to the job. Are you going to be Michigan State and not sign a transfer and have 10 kids on scholarship instead of 13? Are you going to be UCLA and not have a transfer? It kind of depends on your roster. It kind of depends on what type of program you want to build.

I don't think that there's necessarily a right answer or a wrong answer. But if you study just the numbers in the SEC relative to the portal, there are multiple guys that are on each roster that are -- that started in the SEC that went in the portal or that didn't start in the SEC and arrived in the SEC through the portal.

I think it's too early to say what's good or what's bad because it just started 18 months ago.

And then I kind of feel the same about NIL. Every state is different. In the state of Texas I can't even speak on NIL because the state law says that I can't. I can't have anything to do with it. Every state is a little different. So within this league, every state has different rules.

So coaches in certain states can do different things in regards to their activity in NIL and what they speak on.

It's too early to say on that, but if you look at the last two-year period of college athletics, the model has for sure changed, in my opinion forever, based on those two categories. Is it good? Is it bad? Is it professional sports? Should you do that? Could you do that? They say it's a one-time transfer. That's not really true, either, because you can keep transferring.

So the data is just the data after two years, but what it's going to end up being or meaning, I think every coach probably has a different thought on it.

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