

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Buzz Williams

Men's Media Day Press Conference



Q. Buzz, since you've been coaching at A&M, y'all have consistently gotten better every year. What is it going to take, in your opinion, to continue that trend? And also wanted to ask you, I guess it's been six years you've had Boots with you. What are you going to miss the most about him, and what's going to be hardest to replace without him there?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I'll answer the second one first if that's okay. We all miss Boots. We talk about him often, the impact that he had on the floor and how much we miss him. But maybe more importantly, we talk about the relationships that all of us had with him, some of us in Blacksburg and obviously the rest of us in College Station.

He's doing well. I talked to him at the end of last week through text. He's doing good.

I think on the first question, I know this because you've seen most of them, I do think in increments of time, we've improved in different ways. I think the one thing that we need to see if we can ever do is can we not have a miniature slump that causes problems. We've had bits and pieces of those with each passing year.

I think that's probably the next step from start to finish, can there be a crescendo without a distinct drop. We haven't been able to do that yet, but hopefully with our team and our staff this is the year we can continue to get better but not maybe fall off the cliff for a week or two weeks.

Q. I've followed you since you were at Marquette. I know you recruited my city in Huntsville, Alabama, at Butler High School, Lee High School. You've recruited all over the country. But you value character a lot. How do you build your team with a high school class and what you're looking for in the transfer portal?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: How far is Huntsville from here?

Q. About an hour and a half.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I love coming over there. I love Lennie Acuff probably more than any other players I went to see, and I never misused the moneys of Marquette or Virginia Tech or Texas A&M for that matter, but sometimes when I would go recruiting I would also make sure that I could see Coach Acuff and learn from him. I think he's one of the best coaches. For a long time I think he's been one of the best coaches in the country.

I don't know that I really know the answer. It's something that we constantly talk about, the balance of transfers, the balance of young guys. To some degree, we've tried to balance it over the last five years, relative to their character. Do they understand the vision that we have for them? Does it align with what is important to them?

But it's a juggling act, and I don't think that there's an exact science. But at the highest level, I think the older you are relative to your body, relative to your experience and talent, that is a competitive advantage. So you can't be too young, but sometimes you can't be too old when they haven't been with you throughout because they may not understand some of the things that are important to you.

We've just tried to walk that fragile line as best we can and be transparent with everybody involved, and so far, so good, but I also understand how delicate it all is.

Q. Obviously you once coached Jaxson Robinson. He's back in the conference. Just wondering what was he like to coach and work with? Secondarily, what is it like to coach against players who you have coached and built that relationship with?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: He comes from a beautiful family. Graduated a year early so that he could come to Texas A&M and redshirt. Mom, dad, Jax, everybody was on board with that, and then by the time he gets to campus, it's the pandemic, and then eventually the NCAA says that the year doesn't count.

Yeah, great relationship with their family.



I think you could probably ask nearly every coach now what's it like to coach against somebody you've coached against with the new rules since all that's transpired. Yeah, great family, great kid. Enjoyed getting to know them. That was our first year. He was a part of our first recruiting class, and obviously had a lot of success since he's left.

Q. I don't know how well you know John Calipari. Obviously he made the move from Kentucky to Arkansas. In the coaching world, how big a deal was that or how big a shock was that? What are your thoughts on Cal staying in the league but moving from Kentucky to Arkansas?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Well, I think in the coaching world, a part of that answer is everybody knows how good a job Arkansas is, and you look at what Coach has done since he's been there, so that speaks to the support and how good it is.

Coach Muss was incredible in the job that he did in postseason play during his time there. Coach Richardson, Coach Sutton, whoever you pick at Arkansas basketball history, it speaks to how good of a job it is in the state because I think maybe you could probably answer it better, but if you grow up in Arkansas, you probably want to go to Arkansas, and there's not a lot of other teams at that level within the state.

I think in the coaching world -- I don't know that necessarily anybody was thinking about intraleague because I think that's going to happen more and more just like it does with players, but obviously Coach has done a fabulous job since Coach Muss left.

Who does Arkansas play in football this week? Where is the game? Big game. Big game. I bet you'll be there.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Wade Taylor, the importance of him, how long he has been there with you and the growth that you see for him this year.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: He will go down in the annals of history as one of the best players to ever have played at A&M. I don't know that, until his career is over, you can quantify what he's meant to the program. Two-parent household. They've probably attended 80 percent of our games, home and on the road, not just mom and dad, the entire family. Graduated from college in three years, working on his master's, will get it in four.

As a sophomore and as a junior, back-to-back First-Team All-Conference. He's like Michael Jackson; it just gets a little better and better. Jackson 5, it was Off the Wall, then

it was Billy Jean and then it was Thriller. He just keeps getting better and better.

It's hard for us to play even in practice for me. We practiced this morning, and it's hard for me to coach unless he's on the floor, and I do a poor job coaching the other job unless IV is on the floor just because he means so much to us and does things that the stats show, but he also does things that make our team better that are not necessarily a stat.

He just keeps getting better and better, and if he can be better this year than he's been the last two years, that would be tremendous.

Q. Kind of in keeping with that same line of thought, with Wade, you've got Jace Carter back, Hayden Hefner, a lot of returning production. How has that continuity helped you guys throughout the off-season, and where have you seen that benefit you guys the most?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Well, I think those returning guys kind of know how we want to play. I think they understand what's important to us off the floor, and they've done a great job categorically, all of them, of leading our new players, the transfers but also the freshmen.

They've been able to help those guys gain traction in what we do on and off the floor at a really fast rate, which has helped us in the middle of October that we're probably a little ahead of schedule, not because of the coaches but because of the returning players and their leadership.

Q. Buzz, your newcomers, guys especially Pharrel and Zhuric, how have they fit in, for lack of a better word, and what are they going to bring to this team this year?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think the staff did a really good job of analytically kind of taking out the opinions of everyone and studying what does our team need. I think the three transfers probably address the things that we needed the most.

I know you asked about Boots earlier. Obviously losing Boots is significant. He's an outlier in who he is as a player, from a rebounding standpoint, from a ball-handling standpoint, from the ability to get fouled, can guard nearly any perimeter player. So all of those things in one player is hard to find at any point in time.

But I thought our staff did a really good job as our team was unfolding, what are we good at, what are we bad at, who's returning, what do we need from an experience

standpoint right away.

I think, honestly, I think all three of our transfers will have a role on our team. Zhu will have a place. Pharrel will have a place. CJ will have a place. And all three of those places help our returning players relative to what makes us better, we hope.

Q. I wanted to ask about Manny and how he came on the last 10 games. I think people are going to talk about that. How do you communicate with him that there's reasonable expectations for him as a player as opposed to outside noise, we want that guy that we got the last 10 games?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, he handles the outside noise probably as well as any player I've ever coached. He's a beautiful kid, and of anybody who could have entered the portal for lack of good head coaching, it would have been Mo. He is phenomenal as a human being. His family, his support mechanism, it's all built on the right things.

To your point, I thought the last five regular-season games, the five games that we played in postseason, statistically speaking, who he was in those 10 games almost diametrically opposed to what he was before that.

So can he be that every game over the next 30 plus? I think that's unfair as an expectation. Can he be somewhere in between what he was the first 25 and what he was the last 10? That's what we need.

I think he's been -- he's arguably the most diligent worker in our program over the last four years. He completely understands what we need, and he's working to make better decisions in real time during the game because I think that's the next step of his development for wherever he plays next year.

But a good Mo for sure helps the Aggies.

Q. Obviously transfer portal players moving, how important has it been from your perspective to have continuity on your coaching staff in this type of college basketball era?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I'm only saying this because you asked, so I don't mean it in a braggadocios way whatsoever. There's 106 years of experience with me on my staff, more than any other program in the country. I think that's important. I think continuity with the young adults and continuity with the old adults is vital. For us at Texas A&M, we probably measure that continuity in a different way.

There's a lot of programs that are doing it different than us and doing it better than us, but within how we operate that continuity between the staff and the players is very important to me, and very thankful for the people on our staff that have been with us.

There's now four people on our staff that have been with me longer than a decade. And so 106 years is a lot of experiences together, and I do think that that helps, just like what we're talking about with the experience of our returning players.

Q. We talked about Jax, we talked about Al's move to Arkansas. Also want to get your thoughts on Pope's move to Kentucky and what he brings to Kentucky and the SEC as a whole.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I read a lot. I don't know Coach Pope, but I know he's been very successful everywhere he's been. I've read and listened to everything since he got the job, and it seems like Big Blue Nation is really excited that he's back, and it looks like he's done a really good job assembling this year's team, and they're doing a great job in recruiting.

Seems like he's incredibly intelligent, maybe too smart to be a coach, but has a lot of energy. I thought what they did this past weekend with Coach Pitino only kind of gives context to all of that, all of the former players on the bus for the press conference. Like that's hard to find in 2024 at any level where there's that type of crowd, 19,000 people at a press conference and you're driving a bus, I'm assuming, into the arena. That's really cool. Good for Coach, and I wish him the best.

Q. Obviously Wade isn't here; is there anything to that? Also, when a player has reached that kind of level, what else can he do to improve?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think we're constantly monitoring, trying to find ways that he can get better. He can get better for his future and how can he be better for our current team.

IV is probably just as smart on the court as he is off of the court. He's really, really intelligent, but he's constantly in the office watching tape, thinking of things. We text daily on, Coach, what about this? He can play special situations in his mind at a really fast rate.

It was IV's decision to not come. He wanted Andy to be here. Andy has never been here. He wanted H to be here. Very difficult decision. We have a lot of returning players who are in their last year of eligibility.

I was very transparent with all of those guys. Henry has been here before. He's a returning senior. IV has been here before. Mo has not been here before. H is entering his fifth year of college and was in our first full recruiting class and has meant a lot to our program. Andy led the league in rebounding last year. He's never had an opportunity to experience something like this, being from a different country.

Just abide by team rule No. 1. That was IV's decision, and I think that speaks to who IV is and how IV has been raised.

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