

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Wofford vs Tennessee

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Wofford Terriers

Coach Dwight Perry

Media Conference



feel the history and tradition that is Kentucky basketball.

Q. Dwight, we had a chance to talk to Jackson, and he spoke a little bit about the portal, getting out of Murray State, that you were the coach from Wofford who first recruited him. Can you walk me through the process of recruiting of him a second time around to come to Wofford, and then also any additional recruitments that had to happen, because obviously you weren't the head coach when you got him to finally come to Wofford?

THE MODERATOR: At this time we want to welcome to Lexington Wofford Head Coach Dwight Perry. Coach?

DWIGHT PERRY: First off, really excited to be here. Excited to be back. Excited to be able to play in a great venue that is Rupp Arena. I know our guys are excited to be representing the SoCon and Wofford College. Anytime you get a chance to be part of a great event like the NCAA Tournament, that's truly a blessing.

And to be able to do it in a venue that has the tradition and history that is Rupp Arena and against the good teams, the great teams that are well coached that we'll get a chance to compete against starting with Tennessee is something that I think our whole program truly relishes that opportunity.

Looking forward to what tomorrow brings, and excited to be a part of this whole process.

Q. Dwight, how many times have you been back in this building?

DWIGHT PERRY: I haven't been back nearly as much as I would like. With the profession I chose, the overlap is pretty similar with obviously during the year that Kentucky will always have, and obviously we will be playing around that same time. And when there's breaks, we will use that opportunity to get a break, my family as well.

I have been back just a handful of times. Anytime I come back, I feel like I see drastic changes in a good way, whether it's the city, whether it's obviously the arena, the building. It's always great to see the changes that are taking place.

But one thing that hasn't changed, every time I'm back, it's very welcoming. The people here are amazing. And no matter how many times you walk into this arena, you can

DWIGHT PERRY: If only the second time recruiting him, if only it was as easy the first time. Jackson was great. Got a chance to watch him a decent amount in high school and in AAU, not only across the country but obviously going to McCracken County, where he went to school.

But out of high school we thought it was going to be tough with Murray State playing at home and his dad playing at Murray State and the family ties there, but we saw a guy that could not only shoot the ball and was really skilled, but we noticed a guy that was committed to winning and was tough and hard-nosed and had a lot of attributes that have made a lot of really good players at Wofford successful.

And just like in recruiting a lot of times, it didn't work out the first time around, completely understood it. And I think after his experience there, after a couple years, he wanted something different. He wanted to look at a different place. And we had the opportunity for that.

But the second time around was really simple, but it was because we had recruited him. He had visited already. We had built a relationship with him already. He knew the style of play. He knew what we were about. For lack of a better term, he knew the strengths and the weaknesses.

So the second time around was, hey, what are you looking for? Coach, this is what I'm looking for. You already know in your mind if we check those boxes or not. You want a family atmosphere. You want to be place where you're going to be pushed in a healthy way. You want to go somewhere where they value skill and toughness.

So the second time around was really quick. Didn't even visit, didn't really need to, he and his family. Even though it



didn't work out the first time, that was one of the better official visits I've been a part of, not just with a player, but with a mom and dad ingratiating themselves and being part of the family. And even though it didn't work out the first time, I think it's cool because it ended up working out probably exactly when it was supposed to.

Q. Dwight, who on your staff is responsible for turning in the lineup card tomorrow? How much do you remember from that experience? As kind of your NCAA Tournament moment today, what did you --

DWIGHT PERRY: I have no idea. I have no experience with any lineup card areas at all in my life. We joke about it a lot. Every once in a while I'll just ask. I think maybe I just get triggered randomly. And I'm like, hey, did we turn the lineup in? And without fail a couple of our coaches always joke and they say, oh, I think we forgot.

But that was -- I remember a lot about that day. I was a freshman, and obviously as a freshman at Kentucky and walking on, my chances of playing in the main part of that game were very low. So I was excited. I had no pressure, no stress.

We were playing Villanova in the United Center in Chicago where Michael Jordan played, so I'm taking it all in. And everything that happened between the horn sounding and the starting lineups taking place, it was fast. It was a blur.

But my biggest thought in my head was do not mess this up. Do not be the reason we lose.

If nothing else, I'm excited to be undefeated as a starter in any UK career.

Q. Dwight, who was the person on staff who thought let's suggest to Kyler maybe a different way of shooting free throws? What was the connection to get Rick Barry to come work with him? Obviously if you're going to learn from somebody, he's the best.

DWIGHT PERRY: 100%. I think the second part, that last part you just said, is probably the most important. You know, people don't realize Rick Barry is the best free-throw shooter statistically in NBA history. So to your point, if you're going to learn from somebody, you definitely want to learn from the best.

I think the other part in this process that people don't understand is Rick Barry is one of the best 50 players to ever play the game of basketball. So even outside of free throws, for Kyler and our whole team to be able to learn and soak in that information from a player of that magnitude, even that alone is phenomenal.

But to your original question, Coach Anderson, Ty Anderson, played at Georgia Tech. He didn't overlap with one of Rick Barry's sons, but they have a relationship. So it got to the point where Kyler was not effective from the free-throw line and was open to change and was willing to change.

And as coaches, we ask our players a lot. They have to be open and receptive to change. As coaches it has to be the same way. Neither side can be stuck in their ways.

So Kyler came to us, and he was open. He said he wanted to figure out a way in which his free throws were not going to cause us games to lose that we should otherwise win.

So it was a collaborative deal. Coach Anderson was able to get ahold of Rick Barry. Rick Barry graciously came and gave his wisdom and kinda gave some pointers. We were very fortunate. It was a couple of days in which they did that in the middle of the season.

Typically you would like to do that in the off-season to where you kind of have time to really work through all the nuances. It happened in the middle of the year, so we didn't quite have that.

But to Kyler's credit, he's been awesome. It obviously has taken social media by storm, and it's obviously something that's atypical in today's day and age. But to Kyler's credit, he's been fully bought in, and I think it's allowed him to do what we wanted it to do, was to keep him being confident and aggressive on both sides of the floor.

Q. Dwight, Tennessee is the number one three-point shooting defense in the country. I know three-pointers aren't a massively big profile of your team but obviously important. How do you go about that to game plan for such an elite three-point defense? Is that something you try to game plan around?

DWIGHT PERRY: Well, step one is you pray, right? So that's a key piece to this. Tennessee is really good at, I feel like, everything defensively. I feel like sometimes they have seven, eight guys on the court defending.

But that's obviously a credit to their team, to Coach Barnes. His reputation speaks for itself. But for us, we've talked about it a lot. They're a really good, to your point, No. 1 three-point defense in the country. A good rebounding team. They frustrate you and bother you with how they play with not only their speed and quickness and length but also their physicality.

So the biggest thing for us is we have to still play to who



we are. We have to fight for really great shots. We have faced great teams. Obviously Tennessee's defense is on another level. But for us, the biggest thing is we're going to have to be aggressive and still be disciplined and simple.

And we're going to have to do a great job -- if you just pass the ball around and you're trying not to be aggressive, you're probably not going to turn the ball over, but you're probably not going to generate high-quality shots. So there has to be a balance there.

I think for us the biggest thing is we have to get great looks. A lot of times that's probably going to be from three, but we have to do a good job of puncturing the defense, the heart of their defense, and taking great looks from wherever they come, whether it's from two or three.

Q. Dwight, as a player you had to earn your spot as a walk-on. You didn't have your name on the jersey at first. With your multiple coaching changes, your career ended early when the new coach cut the walk-ons. How does that shape you as a coach?

DWIGHT PERRY: It's foundational in shaping who I am. Growing up for 18 years in Durham, North Carolina, being around my family, that was a key foundational part of who I am. And coming here and being a part of the tradition that is Kentucky basketball, playing for the coaches that I played for and playing with the teammates that I played with, that definitely shaped who I am.

It made me resilient. It made me tough. Definitely sharpened my competitive edge and continued to ignite that competitive fire that I still have today and instill in the teams that we have today.

So through all the good, the bad, the ups and downs, the adversity, the highs, the lows, I'm forever appreciative of my total experience here. Obviously there's definitely great times, there was bad times, but I wouldn't trade any of it because, to your point, it made me who I am today.

I have memories and friendships that without being here I wouldn't have, and those people are just as important, if not more, than any high or low that you could have in any college experience.

Q. Coach, you've talked a lot about what this program means for the school and being on this stage, but what does this program mean to you individually?

DWIGHT PERRY: That's a great question. It means a lot. I honestly can't put it into words. You know, this program has welcomed me with open arms. The people that make up this program and the college have been nothing short of

amazing.

I couldn't -- I wouldn't want for myself or my family, for my first experience as a head coach in the NCAA Tournament, to be at a school other than Wofford because I think both places share -- or both the school, the program, and myself share a lot of similarities. I think can be overlooked sometimes, but it's got the heart of a champion.

Through the test of time, through all the different periods, one of the constants is Wofford has always found a way to be successful. I try to have that same resiliency and try to have that same mindset through all the ups and downs of my life.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time. Good luck tomorrow.

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