

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

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Rupp Arena

Tennessee Volunteers Coach Rick Barnes

Media Conference



good familiarity with a building, can that matter at all going into something like this?

RICK BARNES: I don't know that it really does. If you talk about being in it, people don't realize how extremely hard it is just to win one game in this tournament, let alone try to win the whole thing. I think by the time -- in our situation, we have played here obviously.

But I don't know that it's a big deal. I don't really know -- I would think not, to be quite honest with you. I just think that guys have played a lot of basketball this year. And right now they're focused on just trying to continue to do what they've done to get here, and I think that's as far as getting some time in a gym to go shoot, players adjust pretty quickly with that.

Q. Rick, you just got into tenth by yourself for career wins. This region has a handful of coaches with seven Final Fours, still that group is looking for that first national title. When there is that point where you are good, successful, productive, but not quite there yet, is it pressure? Is there a word for it? Or does it become motivational at some point? Or is it just sometimes that's the way things happen from year to year?

RICK BARNES: I think there is always motivation to win. And, I mean, yeah, I think every coach that's ever coached the game, we dream of winning a national championship, there is no question about it. But there is only one every year that is going to end up being the last team standing there on Monday night.

Through my time in it, we have had teams that fought hard to get here, and getting here was -- you don't ever take it for granted. There have been many players that have never had a chance to be a part of this, which I think is the greatest sporting event in our country.

As coaches, yeah, we want to win. There's no doubt we want to win. Do we want to win national championships? No doubt about it. You do everything you can from the time you start in the preseason with your team to prepare them and hope that you get here and hope that it breaks your way.

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Tennessee Head Coach Rick Barnes. Coach?

RICK BARNES: Well, again, congratulations to all the teams that made it to the tournament this year. It's always an incredible experience to get here. Something you never take for granted.

We know that we have a very tough opponent first round against Wofford who we played a year ago in a very close game at our place. Coach Perry has done a great job with his team. Older, playing great basketball at the right time of the year.

Q. Coach, I know you have a bunch of seniors, but to get here with Zakai and Jahmai, and for them to finish all four years of their career in this tournament, what does it say about those two, the standard they have maintained?

RICK BARNES: Well, really they came in at a time when we were trying to grow the program. They have done an incredible job when they got here, understanding their role at the time, but knowing that at some point in time the baton would be handed to them. They have done a phenomenal job really all four years.

But when you think about this year's team coming back with Jordan Gainey, who was a part of it last year, and Cade Phillips, and then losing J.P. early, but they've done a great job blending our new guys in from the time they walked on campus almost a year ago. They talked about how we do things. And oftentimes we will leave it up to those guys to take care of situations that arise, and both of them have just been really great captains.

Q. Rick, you've been in enough of these tournaments and been to a lot of different buildings. Having such



It's hard whether you lose in the first round or whether you lose -- if you lose in the national semifinals, and I'm sure it's the same feeling if you lose on Monday. Everything has come to an abrupt end, just quickly, and that's always really -- it's tough, it really is, but the motivation to win, whether you've been coaching two years, five years, 25, 35, 40, you want to win a national championship.

Q. Bruce was up here talking about the level of investment over the last few years. You've been in the conference for a while. How have you seen that level of investment top-down really develop over the years? Do you feel like it's a big reason the conference was so strong this season?

RICK BARNES: Are you talking about the improvement of our league?

Q. The league, and the level of investment that it seems like athletic directors --

RICK BARNES: Oh, yeah, ten years ago, I mentioned it last week, ten years ago in the play-in game in Nashville, Bruce and I were in that game together. But also remember the very first meeting that year for me at Destin and Commissioner Sankey came in and gave a pretty harsh talk to the coaches in the league and said, I know we haven't done all that we can do.

He would tell you, I think, that Commissioner Slive had started moving the needle in that direction, but he knew that there had to be a commitment from all the universities. He knew that he had to take over and get the officiating where it needed to get to. I think he's done that, certainly.

A big part of it was scheduling. We are in charge of our nonleague schedule. At the time our league was probably about as bad as any league in the country in terms of how we scheduled nonleague. Then you go back, everything that has happened in the ten years has been a commitment from the top down. You see a -- I think at one time, I think maybe athletic directors at one time felt like you couldn't be good in every sport, but I remember that first meeting Commissioner Sankey said we're good in every sport except basketball, consistently. And he said we need to be there. I'm fortunate that I work for truly one of the great athletic directors in the country who expects, wants, and is going to do everything he can to help our coaches at Tennessee to compete at the very highest level.

He knows what needs to be done, he understands it, but the commitment has to come from the top certainly on every campus, and I tell everyone I think we have the best administrators in all of sports with Randy Boyd and Donde

Plowman, and the fact they went out and hit a grand slam with Danny White and the staff he's put together, that's where it starts.

I haven't coached against any bad coaches, I really haven't. I've coached against coaches that haven't had the same resources along the way, and sometimes you can win some of the time like that, but not overall at the level that you want to be able to sustain it.

Q. Rick, when you went back and watched parts of that Florida game and the rebounding stuff, was that more about what those guys were doing or things that your guys for whatever reason weren't able to get done?

RICK BARNES: When I look at that game, Florida did what they had to do. There's a lot of things that go into it but you gotta give them credit, their post guys, you come up with 15 offensive rebounds, paint points, second-chance points, those were the difference in the game. Even when we were able to maybe get a stop or they missed a shot and they could go get it and score, kick out, those are devastating body blows that really hurt. But you've got to give them credit.

They dominated the backboard. The frustrating thing was at our place we did a much better job, and that was the number one emphasis that we placed in that game, and we just didn't get it done. But, again, you have to give them credit because they had something to do with the reason we didn't get it done, and we've got to have a different mindset most certainly in this next game.

Q. Rick, in order for y'all to make a deep run what's been the biggest point of emphasis you've made over the last week and you want to hammer home this weekend that you need to do well to be better than you have earlier in the season and go as deep as y'all wanting to?

RICK BARNES: By now we need to understand truly into what makes you understand losing basketball games and getting outrebounded by 15 rebounds is going to make you lose a basketball game. So I think it goes back to the absolute focus, details, competitive spirit, working as hard as you can and understanding the importance of every possession. You know, I think every team, I'm not sure many teams will change what they do up to this point because you want to do what got you here, where your players realize, hey, this is the next step and what got us here is what's got us here, but the focus and the game plan is understanding that it's really hard to win this time of year.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.



