

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Wagner vs North Carolina

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

## North Carolina Tar Heels

## Hubert Davis

## RJ Davis

## Armando Bacot

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the North Carolina student-athletes.

**Q. Wagner runs a really slow offense, averaging 20 seconds per possession. How do you think that will affect the team considering the tempo you guys play with? You guys have high level success playing up-tempo basketball.**

RJ DAVIS: I think we've just got to do a good job playing our pace and getting out in transition. I think if we can get easy transition buckets, that can affect the whole flow of our game, and we don't have to play the slow pace.

I think we also do a good job of also finding different ways. When we do play a slow pace, we run our half-court sets really well, we execute. Whether it's slow pace or fast pace, we should be fine.

**Q. I imagine you watched the Wagner game last night. How much have you had a chance to sort of dive into who they are since their game ended and arriving here today?**

ARMANDO BACOT: Yesterday in practice we kind of went through both teams' stuff a little bit. Last night obviously we all watched the game, but we went over Wagner film last night too.

Like she said, they do get out in transition some. Yesterday I thought they did a great job in transition, but in the half-court they definitely played slow.

So it's one of those things where we've got to limit our



turnovers, which is kind of like playing against UVA where every possession matters. If we can get a big lead and they have to play faster, I think that will help us too.

RJ DAVIS: We can't just take the halfway decent early looks. We can't just get a good shot, great shot actually, and get the ball inside. I know we have with Armando, J. Wit, J. Wash. If we establish post presence, it should be an advantage to us.

**Q. This is a team that has seven players. They just played last night. How much will you stress wearing them out by increasing the tempo and maybe playing faster than you guys normally play?**

ARMANDO BACOT: I don't think it will matter honestly. You look at a program like that, who they win their first NCAA Tournament game, I don't think it will be a matter of fatigue with them. They're just as hungry as us, and they're on one of the biggest stages that they'll be on.

I don't think that's really a matter of fact. I think it's more of us just playing our game and not taking anybody lightly and limiting turnovers and just sticking to what we do.

RJ DAVIS: I agree with Mando.

**Q. Just wondering about your emotional state today? After what happened last year, you're back in the NCAA Tournament. Is this fun? Is there a lot of pressure involved? You've experienced all kind of highs and lows. Where are you emotionally right now for both of you?**

RJ DAVIS: First and foremost, I'm glad to be back. Just playing in March, especially in March Madness, is a great feeling. It's the type of feeling that you've always wanted, you've dreamed of as a kid. You kind of just watch the half-court shots, game-winners.

But just to be back in this position, it feels great not only for us but for the program, just to get Carolina back onto the map. We're hungry to win.

We set a lot of goals, and one of the goals was to be in



March Madness and do well. We're back. We've just got to do a good job of our preparation, our mindset going into these games because, at the same time, everyone's hungry and everyone wants to win. So we have to have that in the back of our minds.

**Q. What's your thoughts on playing here at the Spectrum Center, and just in general, playing close to home and just to have your fans and your energy nearby? What does that mean to you guys?**

ARMANDO BACOT: It's huge for us because Charlotte, obviously we played here earlier this year versus Oklahoma, and we sold it out, and it was probably 98 percent UNC fans, and we're expecting that same type of turnout for these games.

It's great to be able to have two home games in a place that we all love and are familiar with.

RJ DAVIS: I love playing in Charlotte. I feel like we were just here. So far the two times we played in Charlotte, we were 2-0. Hopefully we keep that streak going.

Just the overall environment, the fan support is great. So why not play here in front of your fans?

**Q. You guys talked earlier about a team winning their first NCAA Tournament game, your opponent tomorrow. How much does experience -- obviously you guys have been here before. How much does that experience matter in games like this in March?**

ARMANDO BACOT: It definitely plays a factor, I think, but it's March at the end of the day, and really anything can happen. You'll see it all throughout the tournament. It will be teams getting upsetted and just different things like that.

So really it's just a matter of teams that are the most locked in and most together and make the least amount of mistakes.

**Q. For both you guys, just wondering what it was like Sunday watching the Selection Show, sort of waiting it out and seeing if you would be a 1 seed or not? And also just seeing your name back in the bracket after the absence from last year, what was that whole sort of time like?**

RJ DAVIS: It felt good just to sit as a team. We just kind of watched the Selection Show Sunday, and we kind of had emotions whether you're going to be a 1 seed or a 2 seed. Not really knowing what to expect. Hopefully expecting the best.

Just to see your name be Number 1, just a congratulations to us because of all the hard work we put throughout the whole year, and preseason, we were building a whole new team. We were just happy, but at the same time, just ready to work.

ARMANDO BACOT: I agree with what RJ said. We were super excited to get the 1 seed, but we know we've got to come with our "A" game. Just like our junior year, we beat a 1 seed. We don't come ready to play, anything can happen.

**Q. RJ, you said you don't know what your future is going to be. Armando, you've got at most six more college games left. Has that sort of dawned on you, and how is that impacting your mentality going into the tournament?**

ARMANDO BACOT: I think we've all got that same mentality. It's win or go home for all of us. Obviously we want to go far in this tournament. For me, I've just been taking everything day by day. I haven't even really looked too much into when it's all over.

My goal and our goal is when it's all over, for some confetti to be dropping.

**Q. There have been in recent years some 16 teams that have taken down Number 1s, more so than in the past. Why do you think the disparity has shrunk a little bit and you're starting to see these upsets a little more?**

ARMANDO BACOT: So much talent all around college basketball. You get a lot of teams now with a lot of older guys. Really anything can happen now. Like I said, just really all the transfer portal and so many different guys being in so many different places now. It's really tough to know what can happen.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, guys. Thank you.

We're going to start with Coach Hubert Davis of North Carolina.

**Q. What's your thoughts on playing here in the Spectrum Center and in general being able to, I guess, stay close to home and being able to still have your fans around and their energy? What does that mean to you?**

HUBERT DAVIS: I think it's a huge deal to be able to be close to campus where a lot of our fans can travel and be able to support this team and this program. We played here earlier in the year in the Jordan Classic, and we

played Oklahoma and had a number of our fans here.

So just to have the opportunity to be here in Charlotte and play close to home is a big deal for us. Hopefully that helps us play at our best tomorrow.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, a lot of discussion about changes to the tournament, the format, expansion, things like that. I'm curious kind of where you fall on that and what you feel like is kind of the future of the NCAA men's basketball tournament and where it might go moving forward.**

HUBERT DAVIS: One of the things I try to stay away from is making comments and thinking about things that I have absolutely no control of, and I have no control of that.

The only thing that is in front of me is, as a coach, trying to prepare this team to be the best that they can be every year. Whether the tournament stays the same or it expands or changes, it's an honor and a privilege to be a part of this tournament, and it's something that we're really excited about.

**Q. I saw online that -- it's a two-part question, by the way. I saw online your favorite rapper is Lil Durk. I'm curious how you came across Lil Durk and why it's your favorite.**

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't know why everybody is so surprised at that. I'm 53. I'm not that old. I like little Dirk. I like Meek Mill. I like Biggie, Rod Wave. They asked me to pick my favorite, and it's Lil Durk. I just love his music and listen to it all the time, especially before games. It's something that I've done for a long time.

**Q. Part two to that, you were drafted in the '90s, played 12 years in the league. When you think about rappers in the NBA now and then, you had AI, Shaq back then, guys like Dame Lillard, Kevin Durant now. What do you think the connection is between music and basketball, whether it be college or across the NBA?**

HUBERT DAVIS: I think there is a connection. We're all -- all of us love music, and all those different artists come to our games, and we get an opportunity to meet and develop relationships with them. And in some sense, we're all entertainers.

So being able to develop relationships and to be able to have those relationships, I think it's something that's really important. But it's always been, whether it's music and basketball, it's something where there's always been a connection and always will be, and I think it's always been

a great connection.

**Q. There's been in the last, couple few years, some pretty significant upsets we've seen. Obviously St. Peter's went on a run a couple of years ago and FDU last year. What makes Wagner dangerous? What makes them the biggest threat to you that you've seen on film?**

HUBERT DAVIS: One, they're a basketball team that's extremely well coached. Just for their conference tournament, just to get to the NCAA Tournament, they had to win three games on the road. That's real to be able to do that. And then to beat a very good Howard team on a neutral site, it's a team that's very confident, a team that can really shoot. They're outstanding defensively. I already mentioned they're extremely well coached, and they're excited about the opportunity about playing us.

It doesn't matter what conference, where you come from, if you're a part of this tournament, you've experienced success at some stage, at some way throughout the season, which allows you to be successful. Wagner has our full attention because they are deserving of having our full attention, and we're excited about the challenge of playing a really good Wagner team.

**Q. What's your hype-up song that you like to listen to? And the second question, what's your expectations for Elliot in his game play considering this is his first March Madness?**

HUBERT DAVIS: The first question is Started From and Backdoor from Lil Durk. What's your second question?

**Q. What's your expectations for Elliot?**

HUBERT DAVIS: It's the first for Harrison too, first for Pax. It's the first for a lot of guys. Our job and our expectation is to be the best that we can be really in three areas that we've identified all year, for us to be really good defensively, rebounding the basketball, and taking care of the basketball.

But most importantly, I want these guys to enjoy this experience and have fun. That's something that is expected of them throughout the rest of the tournament.

**Q. Your roots in the ACC go back a long way. When you see something like yesterday where Clemson filed a lawsuit, FSU did a couple of months ago, I know there's a lot of concern over the future of the league, the direction of the league, the direction of college sports in general.**

HUBERT DAVIS: I didn't hear about it.

**Q. Clemson filed a lawsuit essentially challenging the grant of rights, which many would assume is a first step towards trying to leave the conference. Do you worry about the future of college athletics in general and why it's being driven largely by football? Particularly given the history of basketball in this conference, that those conversations are sort of unfolding the way they are.**

HUBERT DAVIS: Yeah, that's the first that I've heard of that. Again, just staying away from commenting on things that I just, I'm not in a position to make those type of decisions.

You mentioned that I have a long history of the ACC, and you're right. I've always felt like the ACC was the best conference, specifically in college basketball. But in general, I remember it, for me experiencing the ACC for myself when there was only eight teams and you were playing each other twice.

My senior year was the first year we actually had to get on an airplane, and that's when Florida State in '92 joined the conference.

Things change, but I've always loved the ACC, and I've always felt like it was the best conference. My hope is that this conference not only will stay together but will even get stronger.

**Q. With your players before a game like this, do you go with only positive vibes and uplifting sorts of emotions, or do you remind them that in this very building UMBC beat Virginia in the first 16-1 upset ever in 2018?**

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't talk to them about that. I don't even know what age those guys were when that happened. One of the things that I always talk to the guys is to focus on what is real, and what is real is our preparation, our practice, and our play versus Wagner tomorrow.

That's the only thing that we have control of, and that should be something that's celebrated and enjoyed, and we're excited about the challenge of competing in the NCAA Tournament and competing against Wagner.

It's not necessarily uplifting things, it's focusing on truth and what is real. We have a game tomorrow at 2:45, and our job and our responsibility is to play our best game tomorrow.

**Q. Hubert, obviously Harrison does a lot for you guys. What have you noticed about him offensively these last few weeks and kind of highlighted on film to kind of get him going again on that end?**

HUBERT DAVIS: Harrison is just a huge piece for us on both ends of the floor. You mentioned offensively. His ability to score in many different ways is a huge factor for us. We've just got to find some ways to be able to get him more looks around the basket, getting to the basket, getting to the free-throw line.

I feel like over the last two or three weeks a majority of his shots have been from three, and he can really shoot the basketball. But I think his gift offensively is his versatility. Those are things that we have talked about. Those are things we have worked on at practice, and I hope can be put into play tomorrow, starting tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports