

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - McNeese vs Clemson

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Amica Mutual Pavilion

McNeese Cowboys Coach Will Wade

Media Conference



Q. Coach, you talked a lot about this year is different. When talking to Heath yesterday, he called it more business-like. Now that you're here, how does it feel different than last year?

WILL WADE: I think last year everything was so new to everybody. I think once we made the NCAA Tournament, we had not been in a long time. Everyone exhaled. I think now the kids who came back, we brought back over half the roster. We added some new guys and they all understand we want to do more this coming season, so I think everybody is still excited.

It's hard to be here, it's hard to not get excited. It's hard to get here, so it's hard to not be excited when you get here. But I think everybody understands we really want to try to win a game or two and try to advance in this thing and it's not just so giddy about getting here. Last year we were giddy about just being here and it was almost like a field trip. This year it's much more about our business and about, hey, let's see if we can do the things we need to do to try to win a game, or maybe more than one, but we'll start at one.

Q. Obviously a lot of physicality on Clemson, five guys over 6 foot 9 inches or above, so how do you handle that and apply that to the game tomorrow night?

WILL WADE: We'll see. We need to be better against it than we were last year, so, look, there's a difference in the levels. It's like football, the difference between FCS... it's on the line of scrimmage, right? Basketball, it's the big guys. So we're a little smaller, quicker. We got to try to play to our advantages and they try to play to their advantages, which is pound the ball on the inside and annihilate us in the paint. We have to try to play to our advantage, having some quickness. They have one of the

premier rebounders in the country. They have a great front line, a great coach, a great scheme, so it's a lot easier said than done.

Q. Last year after the Gonzaga game you said you wanted to get to this game and improve from this spot. You think you have done enough, and what else do you need to do?

WILL WADE: We'll find out. We have a better positional side, but we don't have a big center. You can't lead in our league with a big center. We would be sitting the kid for a long time with a big ol' center. The goal would be to win the Southland. We have better size in the one through the four. We just don't have a center. Not in a traditional sense. I think we improved at the margins.

Have we improved enough? We'll see tomorrow afternoon.

Q. You've been open and honest and talked about your experience at Clemson and your players talked about what this would mean and all these different things. In a day and age where so many people are willing to go, oh, it's about the game, you can't focus on that stuff and shy away from admitting and being honest about that stuff, why be open? Why be honest? Why share the truth?

WILL WADE: All the players know we don't practice when Clemson plays football. They got these three hours on a Saturday. They all know. They joke with me about it. We had to change our pre-game schedule up around the ACC title game this year. Took them too long to kick the damn field goal, but, you know, they all know that.

Look, I've always been at -- I'm at an FCS football school now, was at VCU. It was hairy when LSU played Clemson for the national title but they know that. That's the one reprieve I have. I like watching their football program play. It was no secret to them. One of my assistants is one of the all-time great players at Clemson. He's still top five in steals at Clemson. I was a manager, he was obviously a player. I always joke between the two of us, we scored a thousand points, but he scored them all.

Our guys know that, look, I follow the basketball program loosely, not as close as football. I graduated in '05, so I'm



a relic. It won't be any different when we're playing them. This is the first time I have played against them. We're hitting our stride, then.

Q. You just mentioned yourself being a manager. I wanted to ask about your manager who got a certain amount of viral fame. Is the person we see on screen or on our phones, who is he behind the scenes and what has he done to help elevate this program a little bit?

WILL WADE: Yeah, first off, he's a servant leader in the sense that when I was a manager at Clemson, you're at a bigger school. You have scholarship money we can divvy out. We're McNeese. We have no scholarship money. This is strictly volunteer. When we got the job, we had no managers, we had nothing. He volunteered and he gets there at 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning every morning.

He's working hard. I joked with him. He's our clock guy, which is the hardest thing to do in practice. You have to know the scoring in each of the drills. I said, man, all this fame is getting to your head. You have to buckle in.

No, he's a great kid, comes from a great family. His father is a doctor in town and it's been surprising. I'm not watching when we go out. I'm back in the back doing my breathing exercises and stuff when they're doing all that so I didn't know anything about it until P.J., who is in here now, our social media guy, he filmed it and I'm not on social media either, so my special assistant shows me all this stuff and he says, hey, Amir is blowing up.

I'm happy for him, our kids are happy for him. He's a big sports fan. He wants to be a journalist. He's graduating in sports management. He's an oddity. He grew up a DePaul fan. We always joke with him about DePaul basketball. He knows a ton. He's just a really, really good person, really low key outside the viral video, I guess.

Q. What are you like when you watch Clemson football? Do you ever rip coaches?

WILL WADE: (Laughter) It's hard to rip Dabo. I get nervous. I follow it. I follow the recruiting closely. I followed... big recruiting week a couple weeks ago. I follow all that stuff pretty closely. I've gotten better as the years go on. Of course, winning a couple National Championships helps, too. I'm not nearly as into it now as I was, but the further I get away from graduating, the less I'm into it. But I do get nervous. I don't rip the coaching. I know how hard coaching is.

Q. You mentioned Vernon and you talked about how he watches every Clemson game. Does that help with

scouting?

WILL WADE: Vern worked with Coach Brownell. He worked for him when he got back from playing overseas. He has a familiarity with him, certainly.

Q. How do you address, if you do, some of the chatter about your future with the program with your players to keep them in the moment?

WILL WADE: We addressed it head on. I talked to them Saturday about it. Here's what it is, here is where we are. It was just me and our players and we all talked about it. I'm aware of what I have got going on. They're aware of what we've got going on. You just hit it head-on. We're all on the same page with everything.

Q. I want to follow up on that. Rumors linking you to NC State, specifically. Have you, your agent, anyone close to you spoken to NC State?

WILL WADE: Yes.

Q. I have a macro question, Will. The reason you're on this journey back through McNeese is the NCAA infractions process. We're in a world that's rapidly changing. April 7th, I think, there's a new infraction process coming from outside that's supposed to uphold some of the rules they struggled to uphold. As you have come back to the new world we're in now, what is your perspective?

WILL WADE: I think it's evolving. It doesn't affect us as much at McNeese as it does at other places, but I think it's slowly evolving, unfortunately, through the courts. It would have been better, probably, if it was done not kind of piecemealed through the courts like we have now. If we had a little foresight on some things. But I'm all for the student-athletes having opportunities and having the ability to move around.

I told our coaching staff last year I don't want to hear any complaining about calling kids in the portal while we're in the NCAA Tournament. Half the coaching staff are in the country -- those assistants are trying to get other jobs, too. If they're trying to get other jobs, why can't the kids? That makes intuitive sense to me. I think it's moving in a good direction with the revenue share, and I haven't followed it all that closely. I know there's going to be a clearinghouse with the NIL deals so it seems positive. We're going to share the revenue and make sure the NIL is actually NIL, for the most part. I think it's moving in a good direction.

Q. Getting back to the game tomorrow, what do you guys have to do well to come out with a win over

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Clemson?

WILL WADE: We got to guard the paint, keep the ball out of the paint as best we can. We got to not turn the ball over and we got to try to force some turnovers. That's easier said than done. Sounds great standing up here, but if we can keep the ball out of the paint, which would be a modern miracle, if we can value the ball and not just let Zackery take the ball from us, we need to force him into some turnovers where we can get out in transition and get easy baskets. It's going to be tough sledding against their halfcourt defense.

Q. The Noon Time Basketball Association... do you ever play Dabo Sweeney in basketball?

WILL WADE: No, he was an assistant there. I'm not a very good player.

Q. You mentioned being honest with your players and with us just now. Where does that come from, taking that philosophy? That's kind of rare among coaches.

WILL WADE: Just tell it like it is. You may not always like what I'm going to say, but I'm going to tell you what I think. I've always kind of been like that, and there's no need to hide it. The guys are reading it on social media. It's no secret. I'm not going to ask them to do something I'm not willing to do. It's no good if you don't address it and if you sit there and BS them. They can read right through the BS, so you might as well, hey, this is what it is. Here we are, and we'll figure it out.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time, Coach.

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