

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - McNeese vs Purdue

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Amica Mutual Pavilion

McNeese Cowboys Coach Will Wade Quadir Copeland Brandon Murray Christian Shumate Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will open up for questions here.

Q. For Quadir, when we were talking to the High Point guys the other day about prepping for Purdue, the had won 14 in a row, hadn't lost in 63 days. You guys might have lost once since January. How much does that constant winning give you that level of confidence that you can do this again no matter who you're playing?

QUADIR COPELAND: I feel like the preparation is amazing because we didn't just start preparing when we went on the winning streak. We prepared for this all summer. That's what people don't realize. This is a moment we prepared for when we all stepped on campus in June or July. Whenever we stepped on campus, we have been preparing for this moment. Of course we enjoyed this moment, but this is something we planned to do. This is a goal we planned to achieve, so locked in on it.

Q. Christian, for you, how do you guys move on from an emotional win like last night to refocusing for another big opportunity tomorrow?

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: I think our conference schedule kind of helps with that. We play one day in between. For the last couple months, that's how we have been playing. Play a game, got a day off and played another game. Like you said earlier, it was a good, emotional one for us, but we knew that wasn't the main goal so we're right back to it.



Q. For Cope and Brandon, your coach is kind of on a revival tour of his career. You're on a revival tour in the NCAA Tournament. What's it like to be back on the center stage?

QUADIR COPELAND: I ain't ever been on this stage. This is my first time, so I will let B answer. He's been here before.

BRANDON MURRAY: Playing a place like March Madness is great, honestly. Especially like with Coach Wade, what he's been through the past couple of years, a couple of the guys, what they've been through, just to get a win like that and back on center stage, it's the biggest stage. It's great. It's what any player would want.

Q. For any of you guys, Coach Wade said that you used a 2-3 against Clemson the first time all season on Thursday. How often do you work on things that don't show up in games throughout the season?

QUADIR COPELAND: It depends on the timing, but that was something we learned fast and picked up on quick. But we also understood. We practice on it a little bit in the past, but we didn't know when we would be able to use it. Coach Wade does a lot of that. We work on a lot of things and we remember the preparation and adjustments, but we never know when he will pull the trick out of the bag, and that was just the right moment, and as you guys can see, it worked.

Q. Brandon, is there a certain trait that you notice or quality that this team has that led you guys to have success last night and this season that maybe you didn't have on some of your older, last couple of teams that didn't lead to success?

BRANDON MURRAY: I can just say about this team and this program, honestly, it's just the grit playing in the Southland. Doing this every week the last couple of months has been gritty. You know how that league is, it's physical and everything. Just playing games like that, you just got to prepare, honestly. I think that's what's been going on the past two years.

Q. For any of you guys, Quadir for you first. Yesterday, a tale of two hats. A lot of success in the



first half and then struggled towards the end of the second half. What can you take from that second half specifically and try to focus on today to try to improve for tomorrow?

QUADIR COPELAND: I feel like just staying the course, never getting too high, never getting too low. I feel like we did a good job at that. We had a Top 25 team to 13 points in the first half. They were going to score. It was going to happen regardless. I felt like we did a good job of sustaining, but it was just the last four minutes and the last -- we work on six-minute games all the time. That's what frustrated us, the last six minutes of the game they kind of came back in and was hitting big shots but we expected them to score. We understand basketball and we get it. We expected them to go on a run and hit big shots. It was about us staying consistent with our offense, pressuring them on defense and making them think about a lot of stuff.

Q. Speaking of second half, I guess what was Coach Wade's attitude and demeanor with you guys in those final six minutes when Clemson was on a comeback?

QUADIR COPELAND: I was talking to B the whole time, telling B... as long as we're up by 20 with eight minutes, I think we'll be able to keep the job done let's just keep the score up by 20 with eight minutes. When we got to the six-minute game, we came into the huddle, Coach told us it's something we have been working on all year. We practice this every day in practice. Stay the course, they're going to hit shots. In those moments, you can't get too up. You can't get too down. You got to stay together. That's all it is, and I feel like we did a good job with that. That was one of the times when we struggled a little this season, when stuff gets a little hard or adversity hits, sometimes we have our moments, but that was the closest we stayed and it worked out for us.

Q. Yesterday was the first time in program history you beat a Top 25 team. You guys have played in big games before. How comfortable were you in this situation and, two, the bigger question is how much did it mean having guys who played against those guys and beaten them, how did that kind of change from last year when you played these teams?

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: I would say it was big for us having guys that's been in those situations before. I know for me personally, being in that moment last year, it was just a lot. You don't know what to expect and you kind of just try to get your feet wet a little bit. Before you know it the game is already halfway through the first and a lot of stuff is going on, and this year, we had a lot of experienced guys and we just have been having the same goal in mind

since, like they said, the summer. And so we have been thinking about that for a long time. So getting to the moment this time, we were just prepared, we were more prepared, more mentally and physically prepared and we just wanted to win and we knew we could. We knew we could the whole time and, like you said, we got tested earlier in the season against some tough teams and it paid off because we learned a lot from those games and we just applied it to the last one.

Q. All three of you, yesterday against Clemson, you guys came out, hit them in the mouth right off the jump. Kept that game physical, all right? Purdue is going to be another team with two tall trees. How do you keep the physicality against Purdue given that they know you're coming at them and who you are now? How do you keep that physicality? How do you hit them in the mouth? How do you do that?

BRANDON MURRAY: Honestly, I think we, not have the same game plan or anything like that, but we have to have the same energy like the play before. Just be yourself, lock in, pay attention to the details and not just thinking it's Purdue. It's just another opponent.

Q. Going off that, Quadir, for you, they have two dynamic players in Braden Smith and Fletcher Loyer. What's the game plan going up against a quick team like Purdue?

QUADIR COPELAND: Pressure, you know? I feel like Clemson had good guards also with Chase Hunter and my guy from Boston College. I forgot his name, but that's my guy. It's the same thing. I don't feel like none of our team, we're looking at players. At the end of the day, we put our shoes on and jersey and shoes on the same exact way. I think people underestimate the Southland a lot. That's a tough league. I played in the ACC, I understand both sides of it. You get prepared for moments like this, but you're used to the physicality, the intense battles, the arguments, all that. It makes these moments or the lights being as bright, it makes the lights dim a little bit. I feel like we're way more than prepared because we know our goal. I don't think we look into all that stuff.

Q. For all three of you guys, one of the fun things about your team is your team manager signing the NIL deal. How cool is that to watch his come-up, if you will?

BRANDON MURRAY: It's been great. Seeing Amir putting the work in and everything, honestly just being there early mornings with us, of course, being there late at night. It's just fun to see somebody get an opportunity like that. It's great. We just all love each other like that.

QUADIR COPELAND: When we're there in that first summer session in June or July, those managers are there with us. Amir, Jake, Landry, Mitch, my man Jordan, they're all there sacrificing their summer to be there with us. Everything plays a part. It all comes together. We're sacrificing, but they're sacrificing as well. When we see them get the shine and the light, too. Amir is getting most shining light, but he deserves it. Same way he shows love to us, we're going to show him the same love back. He deserves it.

Q. Does Amir have the song picked out for tomorrow? What are we hyping up for the game tomorrow? Do we know yet?

BRANDON MURRAY: No, I don't think we know yet. We'll figure it out, though.

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: We'll find out tomorrow, then. Appreciate you.

Welcome, Coach. We will open up the floor for questions.

Q. Coach, how quickly did you move on from the emotional of last night's win to focusing on tomorrow?

WILL WADE: We got back to the hotel, finished up eating about 7:00. I let them go with their families and we got back together at 9:30. We have a normal two-day prep. This is normal for us. You guys know who follow us. In our league it's a little bit different. We play Saturday, Monday every week. We have a one-day prep. We have been doing this for two months. We have a routine that's worked for us pretty well throughout the course of the year, but this is pretty much our normal deal. We went back, got into style of play, let the guys sleep in this morning, did some treatment. We let them go out and have dinner and at 9:30 last night, we turned the page to Purdue.

Q. Yesterday you said the win ranked pretty high in your career beating Clemson. Did it matter a little bit more because it was against your alma mater?

WILL WADE: No... no. I don't want to be a prisoner of the moment and say it's the best one, but it's close to one, if it ain't one. Playing Clemson didn't have anything to do it. Just being able to win a game for McNeese and win a game for our people in Lake Charles and our five parish area, that's what was meaningful for me.

I guess it being Clemson is a cool story line that people can write about, but more about McNeese and winning for

our folks.

Q. Did coach Swinney reach out?

WILL WADE: No, but a bunch of my friends did, a bunch of my former players I was there with reached out. That was fun to talk with them. Some of them sent me texts with their Clemson gear on. I had one guy I was really close with rooting for us. That was good. I had one. That was it.

Q. Saw one interview where you mentioned wanting to help Amir advance his career in the sports industry and yesterday helping your players get in potential P5 opportunities. Having a culture where you want what's best long-term for everyone on your team, does that help keep the outside noise out right now?

WILL WADE: I don't know if it helps keep the outside noise out, but I think all the guys know we've got their best interests at heart. We're not trying to hold anything back, and if we're the best situation for you, by all means. If we're not the best situation, we'll help you find a good situation. We want everybody to be successful. That's what we're supposed to be in this for, right? The rules of engagement have changed a little bit, but instead of fighting it, we just embrace it and move forward.

Look, last year on our team we had 13 guys. Seven of them came back and the other six, four or five of them were out of eligibility and one kid wanted to come back and I said, look, you may want to redshirt. And he transferred and went to Queens and was the sixth man at Queens this year. Had a great year and lost at the ASUN championship. He texted me last night. His dad texted me last night. Look, if you're honest with them. He went to Queens and had a great year. It worked out perfectly. His brother plays for the Charlotte Hornets, so it worked out. They're in the same city. You're honest with them and you want everybody to end up in a good place. At the end of the day, that's the goal.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the zone yesterday, how that came about and how you thought it went?

WILL WADE: I thought it went well. We would be called a bunch of idiots if it didn't work, so I'm glad it worked. The guys did a good job with it. We worked on it some and we were saving it for a big moment. We thought we were going to need it in the conference tournament, but we didn't end up using it so we saved it for here. We didn't have any film on it because we hadn't played it. We played the 1-3-1. Whenever we played zone this year, we played that 1-3-1, but hadn't played the 2-3. It worked out well. The players made it work.

Q. Will, Matt Painter was just talking about in this era of college basketball people go into portal but it doesn't always work, right? The pieces might be there, but to get a team to play connected, how do you do that?

WILL WADE: First off, Coach Painter is one of the best coaches in the country if not the best coach in the country. A ton of respect for him.

You don't always know how it's going to fit together. I told our team this before the game and I told them, win, lose, or draw, we were not very good early in the year. This team has grown quite a bit. Last year's team, it was smooth sailing. Our best player was our best leader, was our best kid, was our hardest worker. I have been doing this a while. That's like the second time in all my coaching career I have had that. When you get that, you have a special year. This year we haven't had that and it was tough sledding. We were 5-5 at one point this year. I don't know what our record is now, but we've only lost, I think, once since then, or maybe twice.

So you don't always get it right. We had to change some things because we weren't right early in the year. We just weren't right. I think the more you can dive into personalities and have a better sense of what works, we know what works for us. We know what works -- look, if they're at McNeese, there's a reason we're all there, right? We know what fits and what can work for us, so we understand what that is and we're fine with that and we try to get them all to blend as best we can.

Q. When I was prepping for Thursday's game, talking with High Point's kids, they won 14 in a row, 63 days without a loss, you have only lost once in three months. How much from a confidence standpoint does that match up with winning and winning and winning and not really knowing anything different?

WILL WADE: I don't know. I try to turn some of our wins into losses just to keep our guys on edge. So we try to turn some of those into losses and make our guys feel like we lost even though we won because you can't accept in winning what you wouldn't accept in losing. So the same mistakes you get furious at when you lose, you have to get furious at when you win, too, or you're not going to have the team that you need.

I think winning is a byproduct of what you do and your preparation. So I think that's the sort of stuff we lean on, the structure of how to win, not really the winning part of it. The reality is Purdue is a different breed of cattle from what we have been winning, for the most part. So it's not going

to have the same bearing, but I do think you get some confidence from it.

Q. Coach, you just mentioned you have warts, some of your players have warts? How much --

WILL WADE: I figured you would pick up on that, Jim. He's our beat writer and the host of our award-winning radio show that ten people listen to.

Q. I didn't think we were bringing this show on the road. How much of this is validation or redemption for you guys or rehabilitation for you and some of the players?

WILL WADE: It's about our guys, man. It's about our guys and school. I'm just fortunate that McNeese gave me the opportunity, and I'm happy for our guys to see. Amir, his life has changed. All these guys' lives are going to change because of the winning and everything else that's gone on.

I'm very, very pleased for them. Our school is forever going to be changed because of this and I'm very, very pleased for everybody at McNeese and our town and everything. Some of the coolest stuff I got was some videos last night. I was going through my phone responding to everyone last night and we had videos from all over town of restaurants, Eric from Visit Lake Charles sent me something from Buffalo Wild Wings. It was awesome. To see all that, that was phenomenal. The police chief sent me some stuff from McNeese. So that sort of stuff is cool.

Q. When you have the upset win and you have the defensive switch, I saw that and it was kind of scrutinized about how you guys won the first round. Do you just lean on basketball at this point or do you have extra tricks up your sleeve? Are you going to switch to southpaw for this?

WILL WADE: We're going to try. If you throw Matt Painter and Purdue fastballs the entire game, they're going to hit some grand slams. They're too good a staff and team. You have to throw some change-ups, some curves.

We watched a bunch of film. It's a lot of stuff we have seen, just have to have a greatest hits of some of the stuff that's worked against them this year, but they'll be prepared. They're very, very well-coached.

Q. I could sense from Christian the pride that he had and in the journey that he's had. When you're recruiting guys coming from the portal and you've said it, they've all had a different journey or two, what was the impact of having him when you took the job in

place? Why did you guys connect instantly and how do you blend all these personal agendas into one common goal?

WILL WADE: First thing is Shu transferred from Tulsa, but he was under Coach Aiken. He went in the portal when I got the job. I didn't have any contact with him. I'm one of those guys if you don't want to be here, see ya. We're not going to beg anybody to be here. He called me a month later and said I would be interested in coming back. So we set up a Zoom, did some of that and he decided to come back. I think that's a credit to just the school and the area. He is a celebrity in our town. There are billboards up of him all over town. He's a local celebrity. He's been tremendous, and having him come back, because he just come off the Southland tournament, he grabbed like 50 some-odd rebounds or 40 some-odd rebounds in three games.

So having him come back gave us a jolt locally because everyone knew him. I had never met his parents or anything and I was under recruiting restrictions at the time. After he decided to come back, I flew to Chicago. Since he was a player of ours, then I could go to Chicago, and I met his parents after the fact. We sat at a restaurant, his dad hugged me last night. Said, man, we've come a long way since sitting at J. Alexander's. I said, yeah, we have. That was the first time I met him in person.

I think what you said earlier or what you're asking about, the key to any team is you have to get their selfish desires to fit into your team needs. Everybody is selfish, right? Everybody wants something out of something. You're asking a question. You want me to give you something or whatever. You're probably Tweeting something out right now. Whatever. Like, huh? Yeah, okay.

Q. (Inaudible).

WILL WADE: There you go. My point is if you try to fight their selfishness, your never going to win. If you can get what they want to do and get everybody on the team to understand how it fits within your team needs, then you got a chance to bring everything together. Louisiana, you put all the ingredients in the gumbo, put it all together and it tastes pretty good. But we have to get their selfish desires to fit into our team needs and sometimes that takes longer than other times, but this team has figured this out.

For instance, Christian's shooting numbers have gone down this year. He doesn't have as many shots because we have more players, but we talk about rebounds per minute. So he's our selfish rebounder. All our guys know if Shu is around the ball and you're close to the ball, let him get the damn rebound. That's where he's going to be

selfish. Copeland is selfish with the assist. He overpasses. We got some other guys who are selfish shooting it, which is fine. We're all open about it, everybody knows what they're doing. We talked about it.

So you try to get all that and blend it together as best you can.

Q. Coming off that, last season was magical. This season started with a loss to South Dakota State.

WILL WADE: Thanks for reminding me. John's Field of 68 guys talked me into going up to South Dakota playing in the Sanford Pentagon and little did I know that South Dakota State was like -- I'm not very good with geography. I didn't realize Brookings, South Dakota was like an hour from there, and we played a road game. Then I found out afterwards they've won like 23 straight games there. So I got set up to go up there. (Laughter) Smart. And I ate during the game. What was the name of that steak? Some sort of chislic steak from up in South Dakota.

Q. What kind of different grind has this season been? Last season you had the magic. This time you had to get all these different, selfish players. At one point in the SLC Conference, Q talked about how you had to teach him how to win, how to be a winner. He knew how to play but didn't know how to win. Can you talk about how this team has jelled over the course of the season? They felt like they have come together the last two or three weeks.

WILL WADE: Yeah, it started a couple months ago, just spending time and chipping away at it. You keep chipping away at it. We haven't been a finished product and now we're rounding into better form. It's just a matter of chipping away at it and everybody being a little bit better with their defined roles.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to try squeeze in two more if we can.

Q. Amir mentioned he wanted to be an on-court coach, which 5'7" guy who's rec league is his highest.

WILL WADE: He's got a good rec league team.

Q. So I've heard. What do you think is his future as a coach?

WILL WADE: Look, he's certainly positioned himself where he can do it and we're going to help him. He knows that, we have talked about that openly. So we're going to help him get started on his journey.

Q. You got the offense last night despite DJ and Javohn not having their best games. How big would it be for them to improve tomorrow?

WILL WADE: DJ is our best shooter, Garcia, Javohn and then Joe Charles. Joe was in foul trouble. We need those guys. I think they were one of 15 combined. We're not going to win tomorrow if they're one of 15 combined. We need those guys to make shots and they have stepped up and made shots for us all year.

Q. Hey, Coach. I wanted to ask you a question about Vernon Hamilton on your staff. You guys have been familiar with each other, but can you talk about what he brings to the table and what he has done to help your program?

WILL WADE: We went to college together but he's incredible. Heads up all our player development. Our guys have always gotten better. He was with me at LSU. He put in all the work with Brandon Murray who played great last night for us, and so he's a phenomenal assistant. He's going to be a great head coach sooner rather than later.

I got a great staff. Him and Coach Chambers and Coach Forrest. We got great people, and Vern is top-notch and does a great job with recruiting and player development and just huge for him. He's got tremendous relationships with the guys, the guys all trust him and go to him and just love him to death. And like I said, we have known each other since college. He was a hell of a lot better player than I was, but he's a great dude.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much, Coach. Good luck tomorrow.

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