

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Grand Canyon vs Maryland

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Maryland Terrapins

Kevin Willard

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, excited to be here. This is always one of the best times of the year.

Really proud of the way my team has played this year. Battling through some really tough losses, especially the four buzzer beaters this year, to bounce back and put us in a great position and to get a 4 seed.

So obviously going to play a very, very good basketball team tomorrow, but looking forward to being here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You've had a chance to look at GCU a little more and obviously they're a lot of experience, they were here last year, won a game. What do you see out of them initially?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I don't know how they got a 13 seed, to be honest with you. They've won 27 games. They won a game in the Tournament. They have a six-year senior, six-year senior. They're a veteran basketball team. From my standpoint watching them on film they're probably the most connected defensive team that we're going to play all year.

Their guards are long. They remind me a little bit of USC in the fact that their guards are really long, they're active, they play extremely hard. The big kid protects the rim tremendously with how he walls up. He's always there. Then offensively they got transfers from Oregon, I mean, from everywhere. So it's an experienced basketball team, it's a team that's really good and that we're going to have to play really good basketball against.

Q. Curious, I was asking Penny about this earlier, how does coaching great players change you, push you, you have someone like Derik, how does he make you a better coach?

KEVIN WILLARD: He gets buckets (laughing).

Actually the way I looked at it, people ask me if there was a lot of pressure at the beginning of the year having a guy like Derik, and I looked at it completely different. It's been so much fun to coach a guy like that. He's so good, he's so engaged, he's a great teammate. He makes going into the game a game plan where you know you have a guy like that that you can do different things.

I think yeah, obviously we're only going to have him for about eight months, but I've had so much fun coaching him and I think from looking at it from, there's pressure to how will I do with a McDonald's All-American to a guy that was maybe draftable, not draftable, to now probably being a top-5 pick. I've had a lot of fun and I think he's had a lot of fun.

Q. Obviously last time you guys were out here difficult West Coast road trip, what have you done differently preparation-wise to hopefully fuel better results?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I think the big thing is that we came out a little bit earlier. Last time we practiced and we flew out late and we got out here really late. Then spent the day before Washington adjusting to the time zone. We came out early and practiced out here this time to try to give our guys a little bit better chance of adjusting.

Kids sleep on planes. So when you fly out late, they sleep the whole time, like it's an amazing thing, I wish I could sleep for a minute the way they sleep. So when we came out here for the first time, I think we took off at 7 p.m. eastern time and they slept for five hours. Then when they got here they didn't go to sleep. It is just normal. This time they slept all morning on the plane and then we got out here, I worked 'em pretty hard yesterday, we went out and had a really great dinner. But everybody was tired and went to bed. I think just getting adjusted that way is a big difference.

Q. It is that time of year where?



KEVIN WILLARD: Took you guys three questions.

Q. I wanted to ask about the basketball too.

KEVIN WILLARD: Okay.

Q. But obviously your name has come up in as a candidates for various positions because Maryland has done so well this year. Have you felt compelled to address any of that with your team at all about your future at Maryland?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I've addressed it with them directly. I'll say this: Damon and I talked on Sunday night right before Selection Sunday. He gave me a term sheet right before Selection Sunday. I really wasn't focused on it. Been focused on this team and this. Damon's talked to my agent. I talked to Damon this morning at length about where we are.

Obviously it's difficult right now because I think we know his situation. He's probably going to SMU, so it's kind of tough to negotiate with somebody that's maybe not here. But I need to make fundamental changes to the program. That's what I'm focused on right now. That's why probably a deal hasn't got done because I want to see -- I need to see fundamental changes done. I want this program to be great. I want it to be the best in the country, I want to win a national championship, but there's things that need to change.

When you're at a place for three years and you put your heart and soul into it, you kind of sit there and say okay, wait a second for us to be really successful X, Y and Z needs to change and first and foremost, I need to make sure that we are where we are with NIL and rev share is not where we've been with NIL over the past two he years. We've been one of the worse, if not lowest, in the NIL in the last two years. So that's first and foremost.

I also have to make a fundamental change where I can do the things that I want to do with my program. I wanted to spend an extra night in New York this year to celebrate Christmas with my team and I was told that we can't do that because it's too expensive. So I don't know how we can be a top-tier program and I can't spend one extra night in New York because it's too expensive.

So there's fundamental things I'm fighting for for my team and my program. It's not so much about me. I want to make sure that whatever we do going forward we're successful and we're successful at the highest rate.

So I am confident that we'll get things done. It's a little

difficult right now, I'm not going to lie, but I'm confident that no matter who we're negotiating with at the end of the day, this program's going to be in a great spot and that's really my focus is this Tournament, this team, and this program.

Q. Talking about those fundamental change, do you feel like Maryland's the last few years has been operating like a basketball school or do you think it needs to take the next step in that regard?

KEVIN WILLARD: Well, absolutely. I mean, this is a phenomenal program with an unbelievable history. But like I said, it's simple, when you've been somewhere for three years and I love it here, you're going to find things that need to be changed, and right now I think I have to take the fact that I think I have an opportunity to make sure that I make fundamental changes to what I believe we need to do to be successful.

Our fan base is unbelievable. Our donors are unbelievable. It's just sometimes when you get into the nuts and bolts of a program you sit there and say, okay, can we make these changes? Let's make these changes for the best.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you, Coach.

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