

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

## Maryland Terrapins

## Kevin Willard

## Ja'Kobi Gillespie

## Derik Queen

## Julian Reese

### Media Conference

Maryland - 81, Grand Canyon - 49

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

KEVIN WILLARD: Really proud of the way these guys focused in. Obviously after a really tough loss against Michigan. These guys have been resilient all year. Knew we had the advantage inside and proud of the guys that, you know, that they stuck with it and got the ball inside. We played physical against a very good basketball team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. With all the stuff that's going on off the court at Maryland, how are you able to block out the outside noise and turn in this performance?**

JULIAN REESE: Staying together like a family. It's not like this is the first time that somebody has been talking bad about us or talking negatively and it's been distracting such as things like that off the court. So I feel like we're kind of used to stuff like that and we just stand as a family and we know what's up with us, so we just keep doing that. We're good.

**Q. You guys start 2-11 from the field and all of a sudden are 10-12 and flip the switch there. What happened to get you on track shooting-wise?**

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: I think everybody was just nervous a



little bit. Just let that get to us. But we locked in defensively and I feel like that helped our offense.

**Q. What was most impressive about what you guys did tonight, you had five players in double figures, eight steals, and you dominated the boards. What was most impressive from you tonight?**

KEVIN WILLARD: I think the biggest thing was I thought we did a really good job defending one-on-one to be honest with you. They are, their guards are, they're older, they're experienced, and for us we don't see, you don't see in Big Ten basketball like a lot of one-on-one. If you think of Wisconsin's Purdues, Illinois, all the tournament teams, you see a lot of flow, you see a lot of sets. We see a lot of post play. So for us to flip the switch and go against guards that can get down hill, we hadn't seen that in a while. So I thought it was really good the fact that these guys really focused in for three days and really the guards, I challenged the guards to play a little bit more physical defensively and I thought they did a great job.

**Q. JaKobe saying there were some nerves, you were the first guy to score, saw you a couple times clapping trying to get guys to settle down. What was your mentality in those first eight minutes when you guys were really hitting a wall?**

JULIAN REESE: Yeah, I kind of tried to be that guy to just comfort everything when things aren't going well or when guys like you said is just getting little jitters out. I think I was just that guy again today and that's all that was needed.

**Q. Largest margin of victory by Maryland in any NCAA game. What does it say about you guys, you started slow and were able to win by 32 points.**

DERIK QUEEN: I mean, we just stayed together as a team and just kept punching and kept punching kept punching and we defended and just -- like we did everything well that we usually do as a team. We just went out there and just played hard.

**Q. Derik, seemed pretty excited there after DeShawn's and-one at the end. What was it like for you to see him have the game he had?**



DERIK QUEEN: I'm happy for my roommate. He's my roommate.

**Q. Almost had an alley-oop there, what happened on the connection?**

DERIK QUEEN: Hard to tell.

JULIAN REESE: I was a little excited. He doesn't really happy don't really pass the ball to me, I was a little excited, that's all it was. That's all that was.

**Q. You called JuJu a safety blanket for you guys all year, do you feel like once he got going a little bit it settled the rest of the team down early on?**

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I was disappointed that Ju, A, wasn't on one of the first three teams, and B, wasn't on the all-defensive team. So I challenged Ju this week to kind of just show everybody the type of player he is and he just, I think the problem with Ju and it's a great problem to have is that he's so, he's been so consistent in his career, through ups and downs, good games, bad games, I know the big fella's going to show up and he showed up for four years. Early on there was definitely some nerves, but I knew getting the ball inside to him would just, it's their safety blanket too. So he did a great job of being physical and getting the basketball, getting a couple buckets and just calming everybody down.

**Q. A third straight game in single-digit turnovers. Plus 19 in points off. What has gone into this stretch of really good ball security?**

KEVIN WILLARD: We got really good guards. I can put the ball in JaKobe's hands, Rodney's hands, Sel's hands and I think they have really learned how to use their big guys to their advantage. And we play through our bigs and these guys have learned to make good decisions, be physical, it's been a learning process, but I'm proud of 'em. I mean, when you got the guards we have, you're not going to turn it over very often. Plus they're going to jack it up.

**Q. You addressed this yesterday obviously, but with the situation with Damon, how much did you have to black out the distraction --**

KEVIN WILLARD: There's no situation. The only situation is you guys and Twitter. And I can't control you guys and I can't control Twitter. So there's nothing -- I talked to these guys, these guys know exactly what's going on, I've been open with them, I've been honest with them, they know exactly what's going on. I can't control you guys. Whatever I say you're going to write whatever you want to

say any ways, that's why this is a ways of my time. We have a website that's like might as well be TMZ, so I can't do anything about it. I can't do anything about Twitter, I can't do anything about what's going on. I can handle what I can handle. We were focused. I'm excited to be here, I'm excited to be with these guys. There's nothing else to talk about. You guys just write whatever the hell you want to write, I don't give a shit, I really don't. I'll probably get a letter from the NCAA on that one.

**Q. I'm going to follow-up on that, yesterday I think a lot of us in here were surprised and appreciative of the fact that you gave such a what felt like such an honest answer to a question about like coaching carousel stuff. Why were you so compelled to go on the record and talk about things got to change at Maryland and do you think your message was received?**

KEVIN WILLARD: Because, probably -- probably not. I don't think anyone listens to me. If you're in my household, my wife doesn't listen to me, my kids don't listen to me. My dog does. No, I mean, I didn't say anything that's false. I just wanted to make -- I had the same conversation with these guys. This is what's going on, my job to the University of Maryland, to our season ticket holders, to my donors, is to try to make this program the best it can be. And I live it, eat it, sleep it every day I get in the office every day around 6 o'clock, I don't leave until they leave. So this is my life. This is my, you know, I'm 49 years old I want to be coaching for another 15 years. So my job is my passion. And if something's not better and I have an opportunity to make it better, I'm going to make it better. And the really only way to do it in college athletics is put it in your contract. Because if not they're going to lie to you. They're going to sit there and say, Oh, we're going to do this, we're going to do that. Next thing you know they don't. Unless it's in your contract, they don't do it. And that's just the way -- I mean, that's -- I understand it. I know how to play the game. I want it in my contract and I want to make sure my program is the best is can be, for me, for my staff, and most importantly for these guys. So I'm going to fight for it every day.

**Q. You guys came to Maryland to play on this stage, what was it like to finally get to March Madness and to get in there and go?**

JA'KOBIL GILLESPIE: Yeah, I'm just grateful to finally get here after three years and yeah, it's really exciting and it's what I dreamed of, really.

DERIK QUEEN: What he said. Maryland missed it last year and then we had to get it this year, because we have seniors on our team, we have two freshmen, and like we all want to experience it. Then like we might never get a

chance to experience this again, so like we go out there, work hard every day, and just play to get here.

**Q. You mentioned getting these guys ready for this tournament. What was the chief message that you had heading into this game and with those nerves how did you calm them down?**

KEVIN WILLARD: I don't think we should answer questions if you're not here. No. To be honest with you the message was this is your, this might be the last time you set on a college basketball court. For Ju, for Derik, for our seniors, you never know when you get this opportunity. And they worked extremely hard, they're the best group I've ever coached. But you don't you don't not take advantage of opportunities. That was it. I just wanted to remind them that like, you know, this is it, you lose and we go home and everything starts all over again. So I think these guys really understood that and they played that way all year.

**Q. In the second half it seemed like you guys really locked in on Grant-Foster. You guys had mentioned about the seniority and the continuity and stuff like that, what was the message at halftime for him specifically?**

KEVIN WILLARD: We were up 14 and if you looked at the box score at halftime he had 16 and they had 28. So it was just a little bit a matter of just getting a little bit more refocused. We went under a screen early in the first half where he hit a three and kind of got 'em going. The only adjustment we wanted to make was make sure that we keep a body on him. Like we gave him a little space, his story is unbelievable. He's a tremendous, tremendous player, but we just want to be a little bit more physical with him.

**Q. Harris-Smith, a season high today what were your thoughts on his performance?**

KEVIN WILLARD: DeShawn has been, he's been steady all year and he's been a great leader. I think these guys will all say it, I'll never forget the Indiana game, I asked if these guys wanted to come out and there was about seven minutes left and DeShawn was the one who said, Hey, no, Coach, keep them in. They got it rolling, we're there with 'em. He has grown tremendously as a person, although the year hasn't gone as good as he wanted, I think he's really grown and I think he's just going to, he's stepping into, he's starting to figure it out, he's starting to become the player that he knows he can be, because he's been a great leader all year.

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