

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Georgia vs Gonzaga

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Georgia Bulldogs

Mike White

Media Conference



MIKE WHITE: RJ is as consistent as anyone I've coached. There's two or three other guys on this team uniquely that I would put in that category as well. His experience in going to the Elite Eight last year with some of the things that he's talked about, you know, in meetings, in the apartment, in the locker room, in the film room amongst us as a staff hold weight because he's been there and he's done that.

He's not a guy chasing numbers. He makes winning plays. He's better than his numbers indicate. He's really valuable to this team and to this program.

THE MODERATOR: The head coach of the Georgia Bulldogs is here, Mike White. First we'll have a statement from Coach.

MIKE WHITE: Great to be here. Our guys are excited. I'm excited. Our staff is excited. I know our fan base is excited. Chuck is excited. Ready to have a good shoot-around today in this arena and go over to Wichita and have a great practice.

That's it. We couldn't be more excited about being here. Our approach has been good. Gonzaga is terrific. We anticipate playing well and it being a great game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Mike, obviously you guys just got through playing a gauntlet of an SEC schedule. You beat some good teams. In what ways can that experience help y'all in a game like this against Gonzaga tomorrow?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, I think it's prepared us to be as resilient as just about any team in the country, which is really unique for the lack of experience that our group has. It shows the character and the connectivity, the mental toughness that our group has.

We'll respond to adversity, to runs. What does that mean for the outcome of the game, who knows, but it's a resilient group, and you've got to be resilient in situations like this against really good teams on the big stage because adversities are coming.

Q. What have you seen out of RJ Godfrey what he has brought to the team this year and how has his past NCAA experience helped you with preparation this week?

Q. You look at tomorrow and the stage and players rising to the occasion on the biggest stage. You look at Asa Newell, what is it about him that makes you believe he's ready for this big stage?

MIKE WHITE: He's unfazed. He has been since our first game. We knew a week in -- probably a month in that he was special. We're winding down here. He's never had a bad practice. He's never had a bad day. He's the same guy every day.

He could start a game missing his first four and might make his next four. His face expression is not going to change. He's still going to be compliant in terms of making winning plays, passing to the guy that's open, chasing offensive rebounds, closing out correctly. He's a winning player. He's been a huge pleasure to coach. He's a great teammate. He is humility. He is consistency. He's a stud.

Q. Speaking of Asa, how much has it helped having his older brother on the team and helping him navigate that spotlight as you kind of went through the season?

MIKE WHITE: Jaden has made a big impact on this program even before Asa got here, but he's been a positive impact on Asa, of course. He hasn't taken it easy on Asa, especially in that first couple of weeks, three, four weeks of practice where Asa knew he had his hands full with other front-court guys that have made him better, including his brother.

I'm sure there's a lot of mentorship that Jaden has provided Asa that we're not even aware about, you know, as a staff. Those guys spend a lot of time together. They live



together. Got a beautiful family.

Asa obviously, deservedly so, is in a lot of the headlines, right, and individually he's a terrific player, but Jaden means a lot to this program as well.

Q. Big challenge from a back court and front court program in this ball game. Specifically about Gonzaga's front court. Those guys are very adept at drawing fouls and very physical around the rim. The challenge for your big guys, not to be able to still defend the rim, but not get in early foul trouble in this one.

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, foul discipline is a big key to this game, particularly with Gonzaga's ability to convert. They're one of the best free-throw shooting teams in the country.

It's not just front court play. It's back court play as well. They have guards that can make shots. Battle can create his own. Hickman has got a beautiful stroke. They've got guards off the bench that are really good, and they've got arguably the best passer in college basketball in Nembhard. He's just an unbelievable quick thinker and surgeon of a passer, sees things before they happen, makes everyone around him better. Good speed, good player. Just a really, really good player. He makes those guys better.

Our bigs have to be in full alert, and it starts the second they get a defensive rebound or you score. It starts in transition for them. Their tempo is terrific. Their early post touches, their late post touches, their ball screen execution. Collectively we just have to be on point. We have to be really good defensively. It's one of the best offensive teams that we will have played all season.

Q. You're sharing your part of the bracket with two of the most successful teams in the country, Gonzaga and Houston. When you allow yourself to kind of dream or hope, would I be correct to assume that that's kind of where you want to get to, where you are here every year and playing for titles?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, I mean, it's one day at a time for us. It's growth. We've spent three years rebuilding, and we're proud of where we are. It's about Gonzaga, and that's it. That is it.

It's about today and our preparation and playing really well and optimistically thinking if we play really well down the stretch we have a chance. That's it. Everything else will take care of itself.

Q. Your team is fairly fresh in NCAA Tournament experience. You're going against a program with a whole lot of it. How do you attack that as a coach and kind of prepare your guys for what they're going to experience tomorrow and moving on if you guys keep winning?

MIKE WHITE: We're attacking it with hunger. You know, we're chasing it with excitement. We're going to play with joy, and we're going to play with connection.

We're playing a program that's been to a bunch of Sweet 16s in a row. It's important to them. It's got to be important to us just to play our best. Again, it's not nearly as much about outcomes for us. It's about playing well. It's just about playing well.

It's a big neutral site. We've had some neutral site games against high-level opponents. This is elevated. I would be lying if I didn't tell you that we've hyped this thing up with our guys. It's the NCAA Tournament, right? It's the big stage. It's what our guys came to Georgia for. It's really exciting for them. We're not going to downplay that.

We're focused on playing well and being sharp today.

Q. On Selection Sunday you talked about the team's resilience and Blue said this is something that you talked about every day in practice. Is it something that you feel like you've had to instill in your team, or is it something that they've just showed up and kind of showcased every day?

MIKE WHITE: I think when you've got guys that are bought in, when you've got a good culture, what you emphasize as long as your guys are connected you're going to get better at. With this group, again, a lot of the mental pieces of the game we've emphasized because of our youth and because of our lack of winning experience.

At the end of the day it's the fact that Blue Cain and Silas Demary and Dylan James and Asa Newell and RJ Godfrey and all these guys have embraced it and collectively they've pushed forward for months and months to get better in these areas to become, again, a really resilient group.

Sometimes we're good offensively. Most of the time we're good defensively, but we're always resilient.

Q. You mentioned Nembhard earlier. Got some familiarity with that family. How far back do you go sort of knowing Ryan? What stands out to you about his game?



MIKE WHITE: Oh, a long time. I would have to get the calculator out. I've been around him since he was a young player. Seen him play a bunch. Big fan of his game. Big fan of his older brother's game, of course.

We talk about our team's toughness and resilience. Both he and his brother have that. They just do. It's been fun studying him these past 72 hours or so. We're all college basketball fans, and you've watched him over the years, but the more you watch him, the more you appreciate how tough he is, how smart he is, how he makes everyone around him better.

We talk about Asa's ability to be unfazed and unflappable. That's what Ryan Nembhard is as well. He is just a heck of a player.

Q. You've seen a couple of Coach Few's teams. Albeit it was a while ago, but how different or how similar is this Gonzaga team to the ones that you saw eight, nine years ago when you were at Florida in terms of characteristics and style of play?

MIKE WHITE: Very similar, Mike, and I think that's one of the beauties of their program, and what Coach Few has accomplished for a long time is their consistency. Probably with how they recruit, how they play, what they run, how they defend. It's been very consistent for a long time.

I will tell you the one thing that sticks out that makes this team a little bit different than those other teams that we've competed against are the fact that there was probably more balance in their back court with three guards that were pretty similar as opposed to this team that's got a quarterback and the nation's best passer next to some guys that score it.

They're a little bit more diverse with their back court. Front court very similar, very deep, pound it inside, very efficient scoring twos at the rim. Another really good team.

Q. Just to follow up, as far as coming to the NCAA Tournament, different venue, same game, are there things that you do to help your team adjust to the NCAA Tournament versus the SEC Tournament, versus the regular season? Is there a message for young players like Asa that haven't been on this platform before? Anything different about how you prepare out here versus SEC play or regular season?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, we're trying not to make it mentally for our guys where it's overly different. I want our guys to be excited, but I also want them to continue to understand it is just a big neutral site game against a very good team, and we've been there. It is do or die, and we've been

there. We were sent home last week.

Until you actually play in it, I'm not sure that your guys will fully feel it, right? I think at the first media timeout they will have felt it, and we will have to respond to some positives and to some negatives throughout the game, but this group has done that. Now it's time to do it on the biggest stage.

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