

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Drake vs Missouri

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Missouri Tigers Dennis Gates

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: The Head Coach for the Missouri Tigers, Coach Gates, is here with us. Opening statement from Coach.

DENNIS GATES: We're definitely honored to represent our institution and obviously the SEC conference during this historic year as a conference bringing 14 out of 16 teams represented. Collectively as a unit, it's something we've built upon at the very beginning of the summer with our sports psychologist, Dr. Joe Carr, who has done a great job throughout my life, but also with our team getting us all on the same pages as we pursue excellence in the classroom, court, and in our community.

We're thankful to represent our institution.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. There's so much talk about the contrast in the way these two teams play. Drake's guys said, We can't get sped up. When you are the team that plays faster, what goes into trying to speed a team up?

DENNIS GATES: Trying to speed a team up, what goes into it? I don't think anything primarily goes into it. I think both teams and both programs will continue to do what they have done throughout the course of a season, and we'll continue to do that as well.

I think at the end of the day if their ball isn't going in and ours is going in, it can feel like things are being sped up a little bit, and that's kind of what we want to continue to do, defend and do the things necessary to allow us to sort of look at our 30 games or other 20 games in conference or 18 games in conference and make sure we're being consistent in what we've done.

There's a body of work that both programs have come

from, and they'll do their job. We'll do our job, and we both have to adjust to in game, and the whistle is going to be important as well. I think those things line up, but making sure our players consistently do the things we've been doing.

Q. Coach McCollum talked earlier about how they have nine players in their rotation. They don't have the wealth of depth like your team has. How much of an asset is it to have not just different defensive looks but different line-ups in the sense that you can throw out at Drake, especially with them utilizing the shot clock as much as they do?

DENNIS GATES: We're going to make sure we're consistent. I think it's documented how deep our team is, but still, there's only 200 minutes in a game, and that's consistent across the board, whether it's five players that play the number of 200 or if it's ten players that play. I think ultimately those that are in game have to be engaged a certain way, and I've got to make sure that our team, our program, is engaged, especially when it comes down to playing an opponent out of conference that have won 30 games and to the level of respect that we respect Missouri Valley and obviously Drake and Coach McCollum. They've done a great job throughout his time.

I'm thankful, again, to represent who we are. Now you can see the clash of two programs who rightfully put themselves in this tournament, but contradicting styles that can both play well, but one has to win and one team has to lose.

Q. When talking about a player like Bennett Stirtz, what is makes him so hard to prep for? What does he do so well on the court?

DENNIS GATES: He's a pro. He's a good player. I enjoy watching him play, and I respect it. Not just him. This team isn't just about Bennett, right? Bennett does a great job, but collectively although it's their first year at Drake, it's not their first year together.

The rest of the team collectively does a great job being stars in their roles. If you look at their 30 wins, there's been different guys step up. It's not just been an All-American step up. It's not just been their best player.



It's been other guys playing their role, but when it's their turn, they're prepared to produce. That's what you see.

You're a team, and they play as a team. They play as one. I've enjoyed watching them play, studying them, and obviously building a scouting report.

Q. For some of the fans of the other teams in this pod, can you explain how the shush or hush, whatever your guys' thing came about?

DENNIS GATES: I will say this, it's organic. When you put players in one room together at the very beginning, you want to make sure they're on the same page. Each team has to be built upon enduring hardship, enduring pain, but also trying to execute the plan which leads to wins. Those opportunities that they show the public are a consistent build-up day in and day out of the time that they spend together, A, wanting to invade each other's interviews post-game, and B, allowing themselves to share the same platform. That's the unselfish spirit that they have.

Now, add to that their reasoning. Our players have talked about doing things, not broadcasting it verbally or on Twitter. It's just more so action. Again, it's players having fun. It's a true brotherhood, and it's just deep relationship that is you see in that moment. That's just the act that shows how close our guys are.

Q. When Coach McCollum was in here, he said the first thing he wanted to do was build his culture with some players he knew and tough players. Do you see some similarities in how he's approached that in his first year to what you did in your first year bringing in guys like D'Moi and Tre?

DENNIS GATES: I know exactly what he means about that because there are certain things you cannot teach. There's not enough time in a day to add up the sum of experiences that those guys have shared together that has sort of, I would say, galvanized their belief in one another. Trust is built over time and experiences.

What you see is trust. You see guys that have cut nets down before together, guys that have gone through the recruiting process with them.

I've had that same relationship with D'Moi Hodge, Tre Gomillion, Ben Sternberg, and obviously Mabor Majak. You add to that equation now it's one of the main reasons that Jeremy Sanchez on our team can come in and be a captain for us because he was a part of my first-ever team that I have ever had as a head coach.

You can see his seamless transition and what he adds to

our locker room, but also the guidance and the direction he adds to our new players. That's what you see.

I agree with that culture piece. There are sometimes things coaches can't do. It has to be from player to player.

Q. Just rolling off Ben McCollum jumping from the D2 to the D1 level and finding the success that he has, how impressive is that for you as a coach?

DENNIS GATES: It's impressive because I have applied for D2 jobs, and they've turned me down before, so it's very impressive that you can have success at that level, whether it's high school, Division II, Division III.

You have to understand my view is a worldly view. I'm cut from a cloth of mentors. I was given opportunity, and I'm thankful for it, but you look at JUCO coaches, you look at Division III, Division II, you look at Buzz Williams, right? Buzz is a JUCO guy through and through.

You look at even Nate Oats. I was recruiting at Nate Oats' high school when I was a young assistant. There's a level of respect that I have inherently because I have relationships. Not only with Ben, but with other guys who have taken roads less traveled or roads less popular.

I still consider my road less popular, right, because I had to really knock on doors, and I really say that in jest, but also seriousness. I sent my résumé to high schools and to Division IIs and IIIs, and it got turned away, really.

So I respect everything about the game of basketball and the coaches. I'm sort of a historian, and I love to see where people have come from and how they've risen to where they are now. Ben is definitely a person that will inspire a lot of coaches who come after him from different levels.

Q. This is your third NCAA Tournament appearance. I'm just kind of curious, what have you learned about yourself as a coach coaching in this tournament from your first one at Cleveland State, the two games two years ago, and now here this year?

DENNIS GATES: They're all different, and you have to be able to neutralize expectations of players, staff, and make sure as a head coach you try to stay in the moment and make sure you don't try to change as much as you need to, but work on it throughout the year and throughout the summer.

So what I have done is kept notes on those things that I wish I would have done after my first experience, and I've implemented them whether it's the situations, whether it's



end of game. You guys saw a great Alabama State game last night. We played Alabama State, and we're sitting there watching the TV cheering for them as well because we knew they were a good team, and those situations are situations that can insert themselves into your game. You have to be prepared.

So from a situational standpoint in March and obviously with your team, those are things that we kind of do a little bit different. I make sure our players are shown different situations throughout the year that happens nationally, happens in the NBA or college. No matter the level, it can be Division III, Division II, or Division I.

Q. You've mentioned your players studying the game of basketball and growing up watching this tournament. I was curious, what is your first memory of this event, this tournament?

DENNIS GATES: My first memory? It's the best national anthem of college sports. That's "One Shining Moment." If you don't know "One Shining Moment" or at least watch the last part of the season, that is like no different than "Midnight Madness." That is the closing part of the season.

It's not the trophy presentation. It's not the team who wins. It's one shining moment. At a young age that's what I would be tuned into.

There's a voice that's missing. Recent death of Gumbel, and obviously not being a part of Selection Sunday. We all felt that watching the TV. We were, like, man, it is different. These things that we see take place consistently are things that adds to the memory.

For me just talking to my friends throughout the years as an assistant, one day becoming head coaches, no different than childhood. These are moments we all share and moments that we're grateful for. You can't take it for granted because there's a lot of people, a lot of institutions, a lot of coaches who would want to be in our position right now.

Q. One thing that Drake does so well is getting shots up and getting them down with five seconds or lower in the shot clock. A, how important is it for you going to be handling your team's mental state in situations like that because they will happen, and also, from a strategic point, how important will ball-screen defense be in those situations?

DENNIS GATES: Well, for me when you build a schedule, you build a schedule out against whether it's a closed scrimmage or even nonconference schedule to try to touch every single style of play out there. That's what we've

done.

Your conference schedule adds to that. There are situations that add to that, but also, there's practices that add to that. That's no different than our preseason endurance training drills of our system and trying to put our players in those situations.

We don't start with a 30-second shot clock. Sometimes we've defended with 45 or 50 to see where our team is. Those are things where you add the very basics of your defensive philosophies because you know as a head coach, you could face teams like that.

Now, in the SEC that may not be the case, but internally that has been the case as it relates to our scouting report and preps.

Q. I think it's been a little over a year since Coach Nutt's diagnosis. I wonder if you could take us into how bringing him -- being able to bring him back and have him involved with the team all season and what that's meant both to you and to him?

DENNIS GATES: Well, to me Coach Nutt, when I first became a head coach, it was important. His office was across the hall from my office while we were both working for Leonard Hamilton.

I asked him and I told him I needed him. I would love for him to join me because of his experience as a head coach, but also where he was in his career. I thought I could learn a lot, and I was right. I've learned a lot from Coach.

That's why when I went to Cleveland State it was important for him to be there with me, but also when I came to Missouri, it was important for him to be there with me and be here with me as well.

That's why when you probably have read some of the articles that Coach has talked vividly about his battle with cancer, that sometimes after games I would be at the foot of his bed in the hospital as he was going through chemo. Well, it was just because the support and love that he has had for me is pouring back into him. There's no better person out there who I would rather do it with than a coach, Coach Nutt.

He comes from a sports family. We know who his brothers are, but we know who he is as a person, as a man, as a mentor, as a coach, as a father, as a son. He's the same person that can't wait to see his mom. He'll drive up to Little Rock to see his mom on his day off. "Coach, I'm going to drive up and go see my mom." "Great, go ahead, Coach."



He is the same person that would invite his brothers to our practices or to our games or even his children to our games or even to our tournaments.

So for me from my perspective he's taught me how to be a father, how to be a husband, how to be a son, how to be that while juggling the rigors of head coach, while also balancing mentorship, while balancing discipline, while balancing different things that I have to balance. He's just been a calming voice for me.

Having him here through his battle on the other side of his battle is rewarding. It's a great experience, but I just wanted to be there for him just like he's been there for me, and that's very important as I continue into coaching.

That's a great question.

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