

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Drake vs Texas Tech

Friday, March 21, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Drake Bulldogs

Bennett Stirtz

Mitch Mascari

Media Conference



I think it's the threat of the shooting three that hurts the most, so our defense can't get spread out. We'll have to stay shrunk and just not let the threat of the shot affect our defense. Just trust our spots out there. Yeah, just stay intact.

MITCH MASCARI: Like Bennett said, I think our defense is built to guard the three-point line, as long as you stay in our defense. You can't get stretched out. Our hand pressure helps a lot as well. You know, when a shooter doesn't get a clean look at the basket and a clean pass, it makes it more difficult to make the shot.

THE MODERATOR: We have the Drake Bulldogs. Bennett Stirtz and Mitch Mascari are with us. Questions, please.

Q. I know you're not a team short on confidence. We saw it last night here whenever you talk, but the confidence coming from a game like last night and knowing you've sized up a team that plays in a big conference and has that physical matchup, does that carry into that momentum moving forward?

MITCH MASCARI: I think so. Obviously they're a very talented team, and they have some great players, but I think we showed that we can get active on the defensive end regardless of us being a little undersized against teams like that.

So when it comes down to it, I think our toughness really helps out in those games.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Just not trying to stay too confident. Just trying to stay level-headed, I think that helps a lot. Just respect our opponent. We know they're a great team coming in. We're going to have to trust our coaching staff and trust them with the spots that they'll get us in.

Q. You guys shut down one of the best three-point shooting teams in the country last night. You play another one of the top shooting teams in the nation again tomorrow. What gives you confidence that you can go do it again?

BENNETT STIRTZ: Yeah, I think we worked on it a lot last week in practice. Mizzou plays faster paced. Texas Tech kind of plays fast, but yeah, they both shoot a lot of threes.

Q. When you are going through the course of your season and playing nonconference games, Missouri Valley Conference, do you follow the progress of a team like a Texas Tech? Do you know anything about them before you get to March Madness, or are you learning a lot about them here in the last 24 hours?

MITCH MASCARI: Yeah, we watch them all the time. We're basketball fans through and through. You know, we have games on all the time in the locker room. Texas Tech is one of those teams that they're fun to watch. They have great players. They're very well-coached. Yeah, we've been watching them all season long.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Me and Mitch are basketball junkies, so yeah, we just like to watch basketball. If it's on ESPN or whatever and it's a good game, we'll be watching it.

We'll obviously learn more about them this week and today as we watch film, but yeah, we've been watching them.

Q. Coach called it his super power, finding guys like yourselves, finding tough guys and believing in them. You saw that with him at your last school. If you can think back to perhaps the summer when this teams got together, what was it like watching his system and his whole program approach implemented with a new group of guys, even with the familiarity he had?

BENNETT STIRTZ: It took some time. There was obviously bumps in the road. Over time the four guys from D2 and the rest of the coaching staff that came from Northwest helped build that culture. It took some time, but throughout the season even we established it, and I think



it's here now.

MITCH MASCARI: I thought it was really cool to watch. I've been with Mac for a long time. When I got to Northwest, they just came off a national championship. They were 38-0. The culture was already set there.

So coming to Drake and just seeing the process of people buying in. Everyone talks about we're D2 guys, whatever, but the guys that came from different schools whether they stayed at Drake or the Wyoming transfer, whatever it is, they did a great job of buying into the culture and really buying into what Mac wanted us to do.

Q. You say buying into what he wanted you to do. How would you describe what that is with the buy-in and what this program is about that needs to be bought into there?

MITCH MASCARI: I think it's the unselfishness that Mac expects out of his teams. He says it all the time, but everyone is okay with sacrificing until it's, like, okay, now I need you to sacrifice something. I think it's really just putting other people first and not having your own personal agenda.

Mac does a great job of making us uncomfortable in the offseason and pushing us so that we can get ready for games like this.

Q. Can you just talk about playing for your dad at Liberty High School and what it's meant having your family here and the Drake fans that showed up last night, and there's going to be more coming. Just your dad and what he's meant to your game and your progression?

BENNETT STIRTZ: He obviously means a lot. My whole family means a lot to me and just the support they give me. I grew up going to his practices, always watching his games.

It's kind of a shock going freshman year to college having a new coach because I haven't had another coach other than my dad.

So, yeah, three years with Mac, crazy it's been that long, but yeah, Mac and my dad have been a great mentor to me. Just in the basketball world and even outside of basketball too.

Q. Just talking about D2 basketball and I think that it often gets overlooked for just the level of talent that is there and the good coaching that is there. Can you just talk about just making that jump from there and

maybe make a pitch that D2 is a good place to go as well?

MITCH MASCARI: Yeah, I mean, D2, there is some high-quality basketball there. It's not going to get the same national recognition as Division I, but it's still very high-level and very high-quality players as well.

The coaching in D2, especially at the MIAA where Northwest is, it's one of the best in the country. Just seeing the impact that this year has had on D2 basketball, it's been really cool.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Yeah, I think there's obviously good players in D2 basketball and any other level of collegiate athletics, but there's also good coaching. I think that goes overlooked too.

I mean, there's a bunch of good coaches at every level, and yeah, they just make you better human beings.

Q. You've each had your own journeys to this point, but if you can think back, what do you remember about the coach who recruited you initially to come to Northwest and begin this journey?

BENNETT STIRTZ: Probably -- man, good question. It was a long time ago. Probably that he wants me to make me a better man off the court. I think that's what really made me decide I want to follow him to Northwest. I didn't have any other options. I didn't have many D1 offers or D2 offers. He really trusted in me, made me a better player and man.

MITCH MASCARI: I think it's transparency. When you are getting recruited, it's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking you're the best player in the world because a lot of coaches are telling you that, but with Mac he's, of course, going to tell you what you do great, but he's also going to say what he thinks you can work on the most. I think that's kind of what people are drawn to him for is his ability to find what he needs to push you in, and he does a great job of getting that out of you, even if you are a little resistant at first.

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