

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

## Drake Bulldogs

## Ben McCollum

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have the head coach of the Drake Bulldogs, Ben McCollum. We'll start with a statement from Coach.

BEN McCOLLUM: I thought our kids executed the game plan at a high level. Obviously we battled, and it was a tough game. I think Missouri is obviously a really good SEC team. We were fortunate enough to come away with a win.

The next team we play is obviously really well coached, very, very, very talented, can really shoot it from an offensive perspective. They're as good of team we've played all season.

We need to make sure that we're at our best and ready to compete.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Can you kind of run through your relationship with Grant McCasland and what it's going to be like to square off in the tournament tomorrow?**

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah. You know, Grant, obviously Jeff Linder, Luke Barnwell actually played for me at a year at Emporia State, and then A.C. was in our league for a while. I know all the rest of the guys very well also.

I was an assistant at Emporia State after Jeff Linder was. I think there was a guy in between. Then I became the assistant for a guy named David Moe. Dad is Doug Moe. Then Jeff went and worked for Grant at Midland. Then all of us kind of connected.

I know that Grant and Jeff were really close. One summer I went to an event in Dallas and spent a lot of time with Grant. Then became really close with him. All the people



on that staff are pretty close friends in regards to that.

So it's a good relationship. You know, he helps me a lot. Jeff, obviously, helps me a lot. I feel like I help them quite a bit as well.

**Q. All of you guys, the coaches, kind of associated with this, you all came from the NAIA, JUCO, D2 level. Was there a moment where you guys talked about being in this spot playing for a Sweet 16 game and happened to have it against each other?**

BEN McCOLLUM: No. You know, a couple of weeks ago we said what if we both make the NCAA Tournament and have to play each other? Then that bracket came up, and it was, like, you got to be kidding me.

Look, it is what it is. You compete. I think for guys like myself and Jeff and Grant and all those guys, competition isn't a personal -- it's not a personal thing. It's a compete and take yourself to certain levels and see if we can beat them and they'll see if they can beat us.

You don't take competition personal. You just fight, and you compete, and it makes it fun. There's not going to be anything different in regards it on that game.

**Q. Beforehand a couple of your players were talking about you being able to bring out the best in them. What are some of the best things that you've seen for your team throughout the course of this season and even in the game yesterday? What were some of the best things that you saw in play yesterday?**

BEN McCOLLUM: I mean, our ability to move to the next play very quickly. I think sometimes when you turn it over, you're not playing at your best, you can get frustrated. That can snowball into a 6-0 run that is a problem or a 9-0 or 10-0 or 12-0. Usually we're able to calm those runs pretty quickly just because we don't compound our mistakes by being frustrated or if we do make a mistake, we try to make up for it on the other end.

So the ability to move to the next play is probably one of our greater strengths. Our ability to be connected and allow good players to be good players and kind of role define is probably unique to college basketball.



**Q. Thinking back to your first season at Northwest and some of the conversations you had and the confidence you had and confidence has been a through line this year and in your journey. Can you think back to then and perhaps either what shook your confidence or how you held that confidence even in the midst of the start you had at Northwest?**

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, you know, I don't know that the start we had at Northwest probably helped my confidence. It probably shook it quite a bit in those first two seasons.

I think the good part about that is we stayed the course in what we wanted to do, which is get the right people and put them in position to be successful and understand that's how you create a culture. That's how you bring value.

So early on we did a lot of the right things, even though we weren't totally sure that it was actually going to work. We got enough of the right players that third season. Obviously we still had a lot from the first two. Then we were able to kind of get over the hump and we won the league that third season.

It was hard, very hard, but sometimes I don't envy guys that come in their first year and finish third place because I think a lot of times they're not able to hit that -- I don't know if it's rock bottom, but they're not able to learn to the level that they need to learn because they're, like, well, I'm close enough. There's nothing I need to adjust.

We had to soul-search and change who we are. We had to be better. Our group that fought for that became better.

**Q. Can you talk about the concerns you have facing the Red Raiders?**

BEN McCOLLUM: There's a lot of them. They're good. I told those guys I thought they were a Final Four team before the season. I thought they were super talented. They're built well. They've got shooting everywhere. They've got enough paint presence to be able to score.

Obviously with Grant and Jeff and all those guys, Luke, and A.C., and Matty B, they're just really, really well-coached. They're good. I mean, they're as good as any team we've faced all season.

They present a lot of issues offensively and defensively, and we need to find a way to kind of slow some of those things down.

**Q. We spoke the other day about opportunities in the past and that remaining a head coach was an**

**important piece of that, but I'm curious over the years in the patience you had before taking the job, what those factors were that you made, and what made Drake this time just a little less than a year ago the place that felt like the right one to jump to?**

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, there's a variety of factors that go into coaching searches that probably most people don't totally realize. Part of it is timing where if you are playing deep into the tournament and you want to focus on your team, sometimes you're not really allowed to.

So you have to create boundaries to make sure that you focus on the team that you are coaching, so you don't have a complete divided heart. That's the way I've chose to do it. I don't think everybody probably chooses that same path. It's just what works for me is I have to have boundaries. I have to focus on my team and the school that I'm coaching for.

So that's part of it. The other part of that is sometimes for me I just get a gut feel, and sometimes the feel isn't right, so you just don't take that opportunity.

Why this one? Timing was perfect. I love the Athletic Director, Brian Hardin. He's fantastic. Their administration is great. Earl Martin is fantastic as a President. It is close to home as well. Especially for your first move because you do have to take into account that you are moving your family too.

When you do that and maybe you take a low major in the East Coast or something like that and it's a culture shock and on top of it it's going to be a difficult transition to be able to win games right away, you know, there's a lot of factors in there that you have to think about, and it makes it tricky to move positions often, for a guy like me. That's not for everybody, though. Some people are on the fast track, and they just want to move. It helps their ego, and I'm the higher level coach, blah, blah, blah. I don't really need an ego boost in regards to that.

**Q. How have the Red Raiders changed from when you first saw them, and how has your team evolved from then?**

BEN McCOLLUM: I think we've gotten more confident. Our team has and really understood this level a little bit better.

I think from their end how have they evolved, they just have more of a grip on who they are. I think the first time we played them, they really didn't know their identity from an offensive and defensive perspective. Then I thought they figured it out right after that.



Even into their early season games, you could just see them slowly progress and really get an offensive identity and a defensive identity. They've been special ever since.

The other part of that is too, you know, obviously Jeff and Grant and Grant and Jeff are pretty good together. They figured out how to bring the most out of each other. You see that within their team as well.

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