

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Grant McCasland

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Head Coach of the Red Raiders is with us, Grant McCasland. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, obviously I thought, as I said last night, the Wilmington team was so tough. We knew they wouldn't go away. It was great to have all the Red Raider fans in the house. It was a remarkable lift for us, and our people travel and love hoops. Being here in Wichita, it's such a great environment.

Then in preparation for tomorrow's game against Drake, I mean, it's been well documented that we know those guys well. The respect is through the roof for their coach. I think it's probably the best coach in college basketball right now. An unbelievable staff and just a tremendous team of grit that belong and are capable of winning this whole thing.

We know that it's going to be a difficult task, but we are excited to be playing and looking forward to tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Obviously statistically they have a really good defense, but what do you see from them schematically and then personnel-wise defensively?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, their switchability is one. They don't like to do it much, but they have such good gap help. Their ball pressure is unbelievable. Their activity on the ball is unbelievable. They don't give up angles. They know how to create turnovers with their hands. It's one of the most underrated teams at turning people over even though they really have a gap mentality. They do not give up offensive rebounds very often.



For being size across the board and maybe not having a huge team and what people would consider maybe not an athletic team, they're one of the most physical and tough teams that you'll play against.

They know how to make it difficult, and they know how to create turnovers also. That's really a unique aspect. A lot of people can play gap help, but maybe not turn you over. I think their ball pressure and their ability to guard the ball and get turnovers and not give up angles really it is elite.

Q. Talk about the challenges between the first and second round game, getting ready for an opponent, and maybe pull the curtain back on complimenting your assistants and your support staff because you didn't get finished until midnight last night, and I'm guessing they were either up until early this morning or woke up early to get a scouting report and film ready for your guys to look at today.

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, we don't -- you come to our practices, and you sit in our film sessions, and you'll know very quickly that this is a staff. This is not -- I mean, it takes us all. Our guys have significant voices in this process, our coaches do.

When we got back last night, we had food in the team room, and we stayed in there until about 3:30. Then everybody tried to get some sleep. Then we got back in there early the next morning to try to put a prep together so we could watch film before we came over here as a team and have a game plan in place.

A lot of work is done before you get here. So we had a staff member that was specifically focusing on the defensive personnel of playing UNC Wilmington, but then we had a staff member that was focused on Missouri and then we have a lot of familiarity with Drake. So our program felt like we knew a lot of that personnel, but putting all that together, all that stuff is done before we even play them.

Then the decision-making in regard to how you want to put it into action is where we really spend a lot of our time. We watched film before we came over here of what we wanted to do defensively and we'll walk through what we want to do offensively.



But man, I feel like we've got the best staff in the country, and I mean that sincerely. From an offensive standpoint, Coach Linder and Coach Nottingham have put together what I think are some of the best actions that give ourselves a lot of confidence. Coach Braeuer, Coach AC, and Coach Barnwell have headed up the defense with Coach Braeuer, who is going to be the head coach at Stephen F. Austin when the season is over with, and I think he is one of the young guys that has the rare combination of grit, toughness, but also elite feel on how you want to play the game. Very few people have -- a lot of people have great feel, and they want everybody to feel good about themselves. He has the ability to have feel, but then also hold people accountable. For being as young as he is and as talented as he is, he is going to be a fantastic coach. He's done a great job for us defensively.

Q. It's no secret that Texas Tech has gone all in on athletics to be successful in this national landscape. Patrick Mahomes is around. We know that. I wonder how that's reflected in your area, on campus, and in Texas Tech athletics.

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, well, you know, West Texas is Texas Tech. We have such a unique opportunity because very few places have that many people in an area that are focused on one place. I know this because I obviously played at another Big 12 school, and I worked and lived in the Metroplex of Dallas-Fort Worth area. There are so many things that have people's attention.

Man, there's nothing like the sunsets of Lubbock, Texas, and there's nothing like the passion of the Red Raider fan base. Other than throwing a few Fireball bottles at the end of maybe a basketball game, man, the passion is elite, and our students love it. It's real. I mean, you don't come to Lubbock and talk about anybody else. You talk about the Red Raiders.

To have that passion and it's filtered all throughout the state. When we played in Fort Worth and played A&M at Dickies Arena, we packed the place. It was Red Raiders and Raider Power and like it was yesterday in here.

Then I think the thing that makes it unique is we have a unique access to resources that is fundamental to I think being successful in college athletics these days. Dusty Womble and his family are here, and they all came to breakfast, and he brought his wife and his daughter and son-in-law and their whole family. They're all in there cheering us on.

I can't tell you how cool it is to not only be at a place that has passion, but it still feels like a family, you know? That's

a rare place to be that our family just loves, and I don't think there's a better fit, and I can't thank the people enough for having the combination of resources, but family atmosphere and love and passion. It's unrivalled I think in college athletics.

It allows us to have the best basketball atmosphere in the state of Texas.

Q. You kind of talked about it before, but walking into an arena and specifically one that's not your home arena, and seeing your fan base, what does that do for a team in terms of confidence and how does that affect a game, at least the mental part of it?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, you know, you get in these close games, and you need stops. I do think that there can be an edge in these NCAA Tournament games where it feels like you don't want to mess up, you don't want to lose. I think the environment of having our fans here and having Red Raiders is there's like this will that gives you like playing a home game where you know you can get a stop because there's a belief.

I've been on both sides of it. I coached in the Junior College National Tournament. We were up 15 in the national championship game, and we didn't have any fans there, and everybody got behind the road team. The other team that was down, and it willed them. There was just a different edge to the end of the game. It is awesome to play in front of this many Red Raiders, especially when the game gets close because I think it builds the momentum and gives you confidence.

Q. A quick one on Chance. Where does he stand going into tomorrow and really managing what he's dealing with and looking forward?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, you know, there's nobody that wants to play more than Chance, and I can't understate -- I can't emphasize that enough. He really wants to play. So we wake up every day with an optimism that we can somehow get him on the court. Obviously it was an ankle earlier that was significant enough to keep him out. Now this is completely different. This injury I do think is significant in regards to impacting his ability to play the game and play it with a lot of confidence is one thing, but just to even get out there.

We're still trying every day to put him in the best position, and we're hopeful that we can get him on the court, but it's honestly so hard to say until we get out there and get him out there and see if he can go.

Q. Then on a very different note, there's clearly a



tremendous amount of respect between you and Ben. If you think about the success he's had now at two places and the relationship you've developed over a couple of decades, what do you admire most about the way he coaches his basketball team or just builds a program to get to where he is now?

GRANT McCASLAND: You know, I could talk about Ben as a basketball coach, but a lot of people talk about basketball with him, and a lot of people call me and want his number to talk to him about basketball, but we just don't talk about basketball that often.

We do, but I just love his family. His wife, Michelle, their boys, Peyton and Tate, his daughter Grace. What I'll say about Ben, he's an awesome husband, and he's a great father. So to me in this profession a lot of people are trying to figure out what the next step is, and he's one of those guys that has a ton of opportunities, but what I respect about him the most is just that he loves his family and that he cares deeply about who he is with more than he cares about what's next. That's rare I think in this day. Those are the things we talk about more than anything, and that's what I respect about him the most.

That says a lot because I think he is one of the best basketball minds in the world.

Q. Follow that up, Coach, how much gamesmanship is there between you and Ben having known each other so well and how each other operates as a coach?

GRANT McCASLAND: Honestly I don't think there is any because we're pretty honest with each other throughout the season. I mean, we help each other a lot. He talks to Coach Linder a lot, and we've all been friends, and we all have different conversations. Luke Barnwell on our staff is close with him. He literally talks to everybody on our staff, so it's not like -- our staff and their staff are so close. We talk about a lot of things.

When you say gamesmanship, it almost seems like that there's an underlying -- I do think what you'll see is two teams that play really hard, and I mean that. I think that's the foundation of both teams' success. Both staffs I think do a great job of making adjustments over the course of the game. So I think that's what you'll see is the quality of the adjustments being made over the course of the game that try to give our teams the best chance, but it goes down to the physical plays.

You can watch all the offense they run, and it's unbelievable. You can watch their defense, and it's tough, but when that ball hits the rim, that's where it feels like these games are going to be won.

Q. Coach, how do you build on Thursday's game defensively? What does your team need to do tomorrow to propel them to Texas Tech's ninth Sweet 16?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, I think similar to UNC Wilmington, Drake does such a great job rebounding offensively, so you have to do a great job of boxing them out. They move and cut better than anybody in the country, so being in help and being able to identify and see both is really important. So I think those aspects will carry over in preparation for this one.

But more than anything, I think it's the ability to get rest and to be at our best in regards to our health. That gives us the best chance to win.

Q. J.T. got sick in the Big 12 Tournament, and he was good last night, but didn't seem like his normal dominant self. Is he healthy right now or not?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah. No, J.T. is great. I think he started the game a little bit slow, and part of it was there was an emphasis on rebounding, and I do think they tried to throw the ball in the post. I think that physicality took a little bit out of him to start the game.

Man, he was unbelievable in that second half. I mean, down the stretch his ability to get two hands on the ball, to finish around the rim, he made a couple of really tough baskets, and his passing is remarkable.

Trying to get him involved more would be an emphasis, as you know, and the earlier we can get him involved, the better he plays. I think that's important. He did look a half-step slow going into the game, for whatever reason. I don't think it had anything to do with health, but man, as the game went on, I thought he really picked it up. I wouldn't anticipate him having that problem again.

Q. You were able to see Drake in a scrimmage back in October. Christian said that was his first collegiate competition. While that was so infant in this stage of the whole season, can you take anything out of that? Coach McCollum said he told your team afterwards, you're a Final Four team.

GRANT McCASLAND: That's easy to say for him at the time, and I appreciate him. You know, I didn't have any confusion in regard to how good their team was, and I think more than anything this day and age, you just try to prepare your team in a short amount of time that they can trust you and that you are telling them the truth.



So going into the game, we said, man, they're going to be really difficult to guard. They're going to be comfortable getting in under ten seconds in the shot clock, and a lot of times under five. The amount of times they scored in that -- I just think what it did is confirm that we're going to be honest with them because they were really good. That was with playing a lot of new guys in a short amount of time, and we're all doing that.

But I think walking away from that scrimmage, I think there was a tremendous amount of respect for how they competed. We knew, just like we did going into it, that you can put a lot of labels on people, like D2. People want to talk about that. I was the Division II coach, and we went to the Elite Eight, and I had as good of a team as I had in Division I. People can say whatever they want to about levels, but it's the heart and competitiveness of a group and how they play together that determines the outcome, not what someone says you are in regards to level. I think that stuff is clear.

Now when you watch their team play. It's even dumb for people to say, well, you're a D2. It honestly has nothing to do with it. It has to do with it because everybody likes to talk about it, but when you play 40 minutes and you step on the court with somebody, that day they're a basketball player and you are too, and who is the better team? I can tell you, our guys walked away from that knowing that they are legit, and we felt the same way about them going into the season that they're going to win, and they had a great chance to win their league, which they did, in regular season and the tournament, which is so hard now to win a tournament in addition to win the league like they did. They didn't win it and it was close; they won it with a few games to go.

Did they play the game the right way and our guys got a ton better because of that game? Did we hope we would play them in the NCAA Tournament? It would have been awesome. We hoped we wouldn't play them this early, but obviously we're both here now, and we're excited about the opportunity to compete. Any time you're playing this time of year, it's a blessing, and we're excited. I know our guys are excited to play.

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