

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Texas Tech Red Raiders

Grant McCasland

Darrion Williams

JT Toppin

Media Conference

Texas Tech 77, Drake 64

THE MODERATOR: The Texas Tech Red Raiders are with us, and they are heading to the Sweet 16. Head Coach Grant McCasland, Darrion Williams and JT Toppin make up the dais. We'll have a statement from Grant on the game and then we'll go to questions. Coach.

GRANT McCASLAND: First of all, you know, when you go into these games, especially playing Drake, who it's wild that we started the year with a scrimmage against them, and then we told these guys how much respect we had, and the reason why we scrimmaged them, because we felt like it would be the best test of being able to defend. I mean, could we really guard somebody?

Ben McCollum and their whole staff and their seniors that came with them and the guys that they added, they have so much toughness, and we had so much respect. We felt like going into this game we would have to play inside-out, and everybody knows. Everybody is talking about how many threes we shot last night -- or on Thursday, but I think we showed that we can win in different ways.

These two guys were the reason. I mean, just the game plan and our staff did an unbelievable job putting it together.

But the two things that really stood out to me that we talked about. One was could we keep them off the glass. They only got six offensive rebounds, and one of them was on the free-throw at the end. Then could we not turn the ball over and give them advantage baskets, which I felt like they needed. We only turned the ball over five times.



Man, we didn't make threes, and that just shows the resilience of Darrion Williams and JT Toppin, just to be persistent in the way we put it on the block.

It's an awesome way to win, and we have so much respect for Drake and how well prepared they are, and they were extremely difficult to beat.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. For Darrion and JT, can you just talk about your day today, 53 combined points. You guys were monsters out there.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Like Coach said, they put us in a great spot. We watched a ton of film the last 48 hours or since the last game. Just putting us in the right spots to go, and I think our staff does a great job of that, and we just benefit from it.

JT TOPPIN: Going off what he said, we watched film, and we knew we were going to have to beat them inside-out. Because of the mismatches, we knew we were going to have to opposing play on the outside. So we just executed at a very high level.

Q. Coach, these two guys had a great game tonight, but Elijah had a pair of really good games, and then tonight he broke the single season assist record for Tech. Can you talk about his performance here in Wichita.

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, man, that dude you talk about, somebody that wants to win. He wants to win. Seven assists, no turnovers. He got to the free-throw line 11 times, made 10 of them. I'll tell you what I'll always remember is how well he guarded Bennett in the game. If you saw how many times Bennett ran off of screen after screen after screen, and he just never quit. I mean, he did ask for a timeout at the 1:50 mark. That was the only thing he asked of us all game long.

We would not have won that game if it wasn't for his grit and his fight.

Q. Coach, 77 points is the most points Drake has given up all season. What was the offensive game



plan coming in? Was it playing through two forwards?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, specifically we felt like that you couldn't play off ball screens, that you needed to give it to our guys in space and let them play in space, and then tried to clear a side so they couldn't make it difficult to catch and allow -- I mean, these are two of the best ball handlers. They're basically the two best passers outside of Elijah Hawkins on our team.

So we just trusted them to handle the basketball, and it shows what they're capable of doing. They didn't catch it very often with their back to the basket. They had to catch it at the elbow and face and then turn and then rip down. When we got the advantage and they saw it, we were able to take advantage of it because of their footwork and because of the spacing.

So really it was like change up the angles and try to make it where we cleared sides to give them space, so they couldn't dig it out.

Q. Coach, at the beginning of this year you said it depended on how this team played defense where this team would end up. What are your emotions as you head to San Francisco for the Sweet 16?

GRANT McCASLAND: Well, I tell you, our team can really specifically see the game plan, understand it, and everybody can execute it. Man, we had a lot of different scenarios. We told everybody, you're going to have to know every position because we're going to need to switch and different people are going to guard different guys. JT was guarding a guard. D5 was guarding the 4, then he was guarding the point guard, then he was guarding the guard. We just felt like the ability to help and not let them score off cuts would be really important.

Then try to keep their primary guys out of scoring. Mitch Mascari is such a difficult guy to defend, and we felt like if we could limit his threes and not allow him to score, it would make them more where they needed to score inside the arc. Mitch didn't get a basket from three, but they did.

Daniel made five. Bennett made a couple. Kael made one. Those were the guys that we felt like we wanted to play off of, and these guys, man, just the toughness, the grit, not only just to stick to the game plan over the course of the game, but to rebound I think is kind of what has been our greatest improvement.

Q. For all three, but Coach, you have mentioned the first game was like a home game. Can you guys just talk about Red Raider fans who showed up here in Wichita. A lot drove seven hours. The send-offs have

been phenomenal. And just how important it is, by all means necessary, Red Raider fans need to get out to San Francisco?

JT TOPPIN: It's just amazing to have that support. Red Raider Nation is crazy. They're amazing. I love it. The atmosphere is crazy. They always support. I just love it, man.

DARRION WILLIAMS: Yeah. I felt like a mini-USA in there a little bit. The energy they bring, like you said, the send-off has been kind of crazy. You can hear them cheering from the elevator on the 10th floor. I think it's just great to have.

GRANT McCASLAND: I couldn't say it better. There's a difference between cheering and knowing when your team needs you, and Red Raider Nation knows when we need them.

I think that's a big part of why we've been getting better defensively. There's a grit that our people appreciate, and when we play with that grit, they show our support, and we love being a part of it.

Q. Darrion, you went down with that leg injury, but came back out. How is that hampering you, and how are you health-wise right now?

DARRION WILLIAMS: I'm good. I was being dramatic, I guess.

Q. Darrion, you always play with a lot of swagger, especially tonight. How does that kind of enhance your game when you are playing with that much confidence?

DARRION WILLIAMS: I think it just goes back to the work I put in throughout the summer. It all translates to now. Like Coach said, we've already played them before, so I kind of had a feel for what they would want to do on me and JT. We kind of talked about it last night.

Then somebody on their team said something to me, so it kind of got me going a little more at the beginning of the game.

Q. Coach, you said it all year, "Toughest team wins." What's it like seeing these two up here, play through so much physically, and have the games that they did?

GRANT McCASLAND: Yeah, that's I think the biggest compliment I can give Drake. When we played them the first time, we knew how physical they were. They stood us up. They pushed us out. They guarded us in gaps. They



were overaggressive. That's the mentality that you have to have.

They have a championship mentality, and they have a championship physicality, and we knew we would have to do it at a different level.

I think there's a difference between being physical and composed, and that's what I loved about these two guys tonight. I mean, that is reflected in the fact that we only had five assists, and we got to the free-throw line 22 times. We made more free-throws than they attempted, and that's always the formula for us. Out-rebound them, don't turn the ball over, get to the free-throw line more. We haven't done that often this year.

But man, our guys were so composed and tough. I thought that was a huge part of the win.

Q. Coach, can we just get some initial thoughts on facing Coach Calipari and Arkansas next week?

GRANT McCASLAND: I'm going to celebrate this one and celebrate our guys being here, and we'll talk about that. We'll have plenty of time to celebrate that.

We are excited to move on, and that's been our vision for this the whole time. One thing I do know, we'll have Red Raiders in San Francisco.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

