

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Drake Bulldogs

Ben McCollum

Bennett Stirtz

Mitch Mascari

Media Conference

Texas Tech 77, Drake 64

THE MODERATOR: Missouri Valley Conference champions are with us, Drake Bulldogs. Bennett Stirtz, Mitch Mascari represent the student body. Head Coach Ben McCollum is here.

Ben?

BEN McCOLLUM: First off, congrats to Texas Tech. I thought they played a fantastic game. You know, you kind of have to pick your poison with them just because, you know, the way we're built. We executed our game plan. Unfortunately, their two bigs that dribbled down the whole game made it very difficult on us to be able to consistently get stops.

You know, I'm proud of our kids. I'm proud of our season. I'm proud of their effort. I didn't think it was our best game. They had a lot to do with that because, you know, when you go to dribble-downs or the post-ups, it does kind of suck the life out a little bit. That's where we couldn't get them turned over. So I thought they had a good game plan as well, which I knew they would.

I knew what they were going to go to, and it was just like, you know, kind of hope that we could stop them in the post. You start doubling them, and then they start spraying threes. Now you've got some issues.

For our team, you know, it was neat. It has just been fun. I remember walking into the Knapp and looking around, like, what in the world did I just do? Not in a bad way, but kind of in a bad way (laughing). You're away from your family



for a lot of years, or a lot of time, three, four months, whatever it was, five months. You move your family. Once the summer started and I got to be with these guys again, it made it all better. They kind of got me through some of those things.

I'm going to wait for questions to talk about Mitch. Mitch told me I couldn't tear up, so I'm just going to move on because I will. So go ahead.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. This one is for Mitch. Mitch, how did it feel to get to play one last season and especially at the D1 level where not only were you guys division champions, but tournament champions as well and delivering Drake their first advance to the Round of 32 in 54 years?

MITCH MASCARI: It's been a fantastic year. I couldn't have asked for a better year. Kind of like Mac when I first got here, I was, like, Oh, man, we're going again. But the way that this whole team has bought into each other and the way that we just fought for each other only being together, you know, for one year has just been really special.

I wish it wasn't over, but that's the way it goes sometimes. I mean, this team is really special. Not even just athletically and player-wise, but the whole coaching staff, the whole organization, the whole Drake fan club has just been great all year long.

Q. I just wanted to ask a question for you, Coach. There was a lot of physicality in this game. Texas Tech was being very physical. You mentioned their two bigs. I wanted to ask your thoughts on the tone and the physicality of the game, and how you were able to kind of be more physical with Mizzou and this game Texas Tech, they really brought the physicality. I wanted you to comment on that.

BEN McCOLLUM: I honestly thought this was a little less physical than the Mizzou game, to be honest. I think it was just a lot of bumping in the post is probably what the physicality was.

Those two are obviously a load down there, and they're



strong. So it was more of the bumping than anything else. I think when you isolate those situations there's not as much opportunity to add some physicality to the game. They're a physical team. I think that's probably our strength. We weren't able to get them in situations where we could get to on the ball consistently and get our hands going and stuff like that.

But as far as the physicality, I didn't think it was quite as much but I understand why you would say that as far as the post-ups and stuff like that.

Q. I wonder if you might elaborate on what you meant when you said, "what did I just do," when you first arrived? How much does it speak to how difficult it is just to move?

BEN McCOLLUM: You know, I had been at a place for 15 years, and I loved the place. You know, you move your family, and you just never know how it's going to turn out. Everybody says kids are resilient, and they are, but you don't totally know.

So for me I knew I would be fine. Like, I'll be fine. I just worried about my family and my kids and stuff like that. It's a lot of work to get it to this point. It's a lot of sleepless nights, a lot of phone conversations, trying to get players, and then trying to get guys to buy into something and just have a level of blind faith.

It was hard. Hard to convince Mitch to come back. You know, just like, Mitch, make a decision here. Glad he did.

But, no, it wasn't like a regret per se. It's more just any time you make a change like that, it's always going to be tricky. It's always going to be difficult. It doesn't mean that the change is wrong because it wasn't wrong. I'm happy I did it. I came out of my comfort zone. I have a great administration. You know, the fans have been fantastic. Des Moines is awesome. All those things.

Then my son, they finished runner-up in state 4A. My other son was on the team too. Then my daughter loves it, and she's playing her AAU. It ended up working out okay.

Q. Bennett and Mitch, I saw you guys kind of embrace a little bit of a hug at the end of the game. What's your guys' relationship mean? And coming from Northwest to here, what's that meant to play together?

BENNETT STIRTZ: That's my guy. All these seniors, we were all close together coming from Northwest. Yeah, it still hasn't hit me yet that we played our last game together. I'm sure it will, but yeah, I love playing with him.

MITCH MASCARI: Yeah, Bennett has been special. We all know he's a great player, but off the court his humility and he's such a great teammate, you just want to keep playing with him forever. It's been special for me to watch him. We've always had good players in our program, but I was there for day one when Bennett got there. So it's been special to see him grow into the player he has.

Q. For Ben, it's always unfair to ask somebody about season perspective 20 minutes after the season ends, but was this success envisioned when you took the job? Did you see 31 wins coming?

BEN McCOLLUM: I didn't really think in terms of 31 wins, but I did think success was coming. You know, when you coach guys like Mitch and Dan and Isaiah and Ferg obviously came back, you coach guys like that, you know success is coming. I knew it because I have them. Obviously the rest of the guys too, but those four seniors, you know, Ferg stayed around and believed in us, and I have coached those other guys for five, six years. Mitch for six years. Yeah, I expected it.

Like people talk about culture. How do you build a culture? There's no building it. There's getting the right people. It's 100% the right people. I've been blessed to be around the right people. Obviously Mitch and Bennett and those seniors and all the kids that chose to come here and fight for this program.

Q. Coach, what emotions are you feeling right now about Mitch and Bennett and how special this team was to you this year?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, I mean, again, I promised Mitch that I would hold it together so that he didn't have to be embarrassed and have tears in his eyes.

Again, it's always cool to coach these kids and be around the people that you have, but sometimes I don't think they realize how much they do -- as a coach, it's, like, well, it's obvious what a coach does for a player. It's very obvious: We get them to play hard. We do this, that, or the other thing and get them to challenge themselves, come out of their comfort zone, but players sometimes don't realize what they do for the coach. When he has the opportunity to see them every day, again, it's like you are just hanging out with your friends every day and you are coaching basketball with them. I still believe in it at its purest form in regards to that.

So they did a lot for me. Not just winning games. That's irrelevant, but it's more just the relationships and just, hey, you know, we're with you. We're in the foxhole with you, and they've always been that. They're foxhole guys, man.



Q. You spoke about culture being about the people and the program. Just what can you say about the gentlemen sitting next to you being ambassadors for the future of this program?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah. I mean, I always say with Mitch, he's probably going to be the CEO of a multibillion dollar company. He's that intelligent. If somebody is hiring, there you go.

Obviously, Bennett, he's got a big career ahead of him. He's still just scratching the surface as to how good he can be. Again, it's just those two in particular and all the kids, but they carry themselves with a great deal of pride. They treat people the right way.

It's fascinating. You can always tell how they treat people that can't do anything for them, you know, how their character is. They're the type that talk to anybody on the street and love on them just as much as somebody that can do a lot for them. I think it says a lot about these kids.

Q. Ben, another one that doesn't feel fair to ask 20 minutes after the season ends, but your name has been in the rumor mill, and you've been patient and considerate in making your moves in the past, whether it's a move somewhere else or building toward next year with this team. How do you intend to tackle this next week and the time up ahead?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, same way I do every year. I think that I keep my focus on what needs to be focused on. I'm probably a little bit different in that respect. Again, it's probably why I ended up with the job and where I should be that I have because I'm not going to jeopardize anything that we have with the team.

I don't really have much to say about it necessarily outside of I put everything in these guys and stuff like that, and I've done it for eight years. That's what I'll continue to do.

Yeah, as far as the rumors, I've taken eight jobs already, so I'm sure it is what it is. But it floats around every year, and that's what it is. It comes with success. That's what happens with success, and it's just one of those things that's tough, but it is what it is.

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