

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - McNeese vs Gonzaga

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Delta Center

## McNeese Cowboys Coach Will Wade Christian Shumate Shahada Wells

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the McNeese student-athletes.

We'll open up questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. Looking at the season you had, winning 30 games, 12 seed, what led to your success, having the breakout season?**

SHAHADA WELLS: I would say just the hard work that we put in throughout the summer, just building as a team, coming together, just being connected always, just knowing we could win these games, knowing that we have a team able and that we can do it.

With these guys being by my side, me just being one of the leaders, I just knew we could do it in the summertime. I feel like anything's possible for us.

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Yeah, same thing he really said. It started in the summer working out, doing all the hard work and the preparation that Coach had us going through. We had high beliefs from the beginning. The work and the belief translated into winning some games, so...

**Q. What else do you have left to prove this year? You both said you wanted to be on the center stage. What do you have left to prove?**

SHAHADA WELLS: I feel we don't really have anything to prove. I feel like just being us. We've gotten this far just being us. I feel like we just got to stick to that, stick to our principles, standards. Go out and be us, win, lose or draw. We fought; we got here. We're trying to win. We just got



to be us at the end of the day.

**Q. Christian, Shahada has been here before with TCU. We talked about what this feeling would be like, but now that you're here, what has this been like for you?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: It's been good so far. You dream of moments like this all the time. To finally be here, it's an amazing feeling. We want to do more than just be here. We didn't do all the preparation, like we said, we didn't work super hard to be here.

It feels good, but I'm sure it will feel even better winning. We just want to leave it all out there and do what we do. Like he said, just be us, do what we do, be connected, relentless, up to our standards. Just do what we do.

**Q. I don't know how many times you have been to Utah or even Salt Lake City. Mike Saunders Jr. played basketball here. How have you seen, what has his mood been like? Has he given you any tips of where to eat, what to do?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: No, not really any tips or anything like that. You can tell he's definitely been excited to be back here. He even told us when we came, this is basically his second home. He's been here a lot of years. You could just tell his energy has been good. His energy has been really high. He's excited to be here.

**Q. The air is a little thinner here in Utah. Are you going to jump higher for us here than you do back home?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: We'll see. We'll see, maybe so (smiling). I'm going to try to keep it the same as it always is, but it will be good if I can go higher. We'll see.

**Q. We've talked about the turnover margin. Gonzaga has had one of the best turnover margins this season. Is that something you've been focusing on preparing for tomorrow's game?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Not necessarily. I think that we kind of just been kind of sticking to our standards. A lot of



the things that we do is universal for a lot of different teams. We don't want to turn the ball over. We want to try to turn the teams over. That's a focal point sometimes, but we just more so want to play our game. If that creates what you're talking about, then that's good, yeah.

SHAHADA WELLS: Piggybacking off him, basically what he said. We're not too much intrigued on doing those type of things. If it happens, it happens. Feel like we just going with Coach's game plan. Whatever he tells us to do, whatever he thinks works. We've seen what he told us in the past works, so now why not stick to it.

**Q. You played Gonzaga last year. This year it's all been about your redemption, knowing what you can do. How much do you want to show them you can do more than you did last year?**

SHAHADA WELLS: I want to show everybody, not just them. Not just us being here. We want to win games here, not just to be here to be here. I feel like I have to step up as a leader and lead this team as I've been doing all years. Talking to the guys, keeping them focused, keeping their heads right.

Coach told me today in practice, don't criticize as much, uplift, have everybody's head as we enter these games and hopefully we get a win.

**Q. The question about Mike, Shahada?**

SHAHADA WELLS: This is Mike's second home. He's happy to be back. I actually played here last year. TCU played Utah last year. I got a chance to meet Mike. I didn't get a chance to talk to him, but I got a chance to meet him.

Seemed like a good dude. Now that we're teammates, he's a very good dude and we just click together. Like he said, this is Mike's second home, so he's happy to be back.

**Q. Will Wade as a coach has had success at previous stops. What about his system and approach to the game allows you guys to have the kind of success that you've had this season?**

SHAHADA WELLS: I would just say the time that he puts in. The scouting reports, him just watching video all the time. We're seeing the time he puts in, and we know how serious it is to him. His winning, we've seen his records, the schools he's been to, we see that it worked. Why not listen to somebody that's been there, been to March Madness multiple times, won SEC championships, whatever.

I feel like just listen to the guy, he knows what he's talking

about.

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Yeah, basically the same thing. I also think he believes in us and we believe in him. With that trust factor, we go harder for each other. Whatever he wants us to do, we just go out there and do it to the highest of our capabilities. What he says works, so if we go out and do that as much as we can, we usually be in a good stance.

**Q. Seeing the way that the southwest Louisiana community has embraced y'all, how has that pushed y'all to this moment, to get to this moment?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: I mean, it's huge. Along with what you say, everything that's going on back there, how hard they go for us, all of the things they do for us, showing out to games, selling out games, showing up to basically everything that we hold.

We want to give back to them. It feels good to have a community like that behind us. We always appreciate that. We love our fans. We love the community. They love us, too. It's a big thing for us to have that behind us. We just want to keep on giving back to them, give them something to be proud of.

**Q. Shahada, would you like to answer that also?**

SHAHADA WELLS: He pretty much answered it (smiling).

**Q. Is there a little clash of styles here with Gonzaga playing the three bigs pretty much all the time, maybe you guys with more of a smaller ball approach? Is there give-and-take there?**

SHAHADA WELLS: I would say it is a give-and-take. Us just having faster guards, them playing three big men. I feel like we can move faster. Something Coach told us, we're going to have to rebound more, the guards are going to have to help rebound, them having size on us.

I feel like it's give-and-take on the offensive and defensive end.

**Q. In your last game against Nicholls, you got out to a fast start. How important is a fast start going to be for you tomorrow?**

SHAHADA WELLS: It's very important. He told us that we don't want to be digging ourselves out of a hole early. We're going to have to hit first. Like I always says, be aggressive, hit first, come out with the first punch. I feel like that's what we're going to do. We'll see how it plays out.



CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Yeah, no, same thing. You just don't want to get behind early in the game, dig your way out of a hole. You want to kind of set the rules of engagement early so they can't feel like they can do whatever they want against you. If it gets to that point, it's pretty much too late. We want to come out and set the rules of engagement early.

**Q. All over Lake Charles, there are these different watch parties set up. Is there a particular message you want to send back to the students and the campus community?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: I just want to say thank you, thank you for everything y'all did this season. Thank you for the continued support. Basically what I was saying earlier, y'all living and dying by us right now. It feels amazing to have this community behind us. I just want to say thank you to them all. We appreciate it more than y'all probably even know, so...

SHAHADA WELLS: Me, as well. I want to say thank you to everybody supporting us, not just the students, but the people in Lake Charles everywhere. Thank you for just supporting us all the way through this season.

**Q. They say in football, defense travels. Y'all got the D. You bring it with you?**

SHAHADA WELLS: Most definitely. I'm not sure if we're still number one D in the country right now. We were there. We know what we can do defensively. My steal, Shu's blocks. Everyone else, they just align with us. We're going to bring it.

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: Yeah (laughter).

**Q. Christian, how would you describe Shahada's game, what he does out there?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: He's amazing. I never seen nothing like it. He's a scoring guard. He's a defending guard. He does basically everything you want out of a guard out there on the court.

I'm glad to be his teammate and glad I don't have to play against him. He scores at all three levels. He defends. He does everything. I'd describe it as amazing.

**Q. Now actually being here, you've been with the program, what is it like to be in this stage now?**

CHRISTIAN SHUMATE: It's crazy. I never would have thought to be in this position. I'm always going to be

grateful and thankful of everything that put me here. I just never take these moments for granted because I seen the other side of it. I know how dark it can get sometimes.

Now that I've seen some light, I'm grateful for it. It's an amazing feeling. I don't want it to leave yet, so... We're going to do everything we can to keep it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Best of luck to you tomorrow.

We're joined by coach Will Wade of McNeese. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

WILL WADE: Yeah, we're excited to be back. Excited for the opportunity. Salt Lake is a tremendous host city. I was here in '17 with VCU. They do a phenomenal job. We're excited to be back. Get ready to get going.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Looking at what you've been able to do with McNeese State this year, the steps the program has taken, what has been the underlying key to your success as a team?**

WILL WADE: Well, the biggest key was getting Shahada Wells. I mean, he's everything for us. He's the league Player of the Year, league Newcomer of the Year, conference tournament MVP.

Look, we have some other good players. We have really good support from our university, from our athletic department, our direct director, our president's office. Everybody is on board with basketball being very, very good. They've given us the resources to go out and compete. We've been fortunate to land some really good players.

**Q. We talked earlier this week about the different styles of play. Gonzaga primarily with the forwards. Talk about the different styles, what challenges that might present for you tomorrow.**

WILL WADE: Yeah, I mean, the biggest challenge is going to be their speed and their size. They play extremely, extremely fast. They're one of the elite teams in transition in the country. We're going to have to be able to get back. That's going to be critical, especially early in the game. We don't have time in a tournament setting like this to adjust to their speed or we'll be down big. I think their speed is a huge part.

Look, their three man is bigger than our center. They're huge. They've got big bodies. We've got to be able to find

a way to try to get our quickness in the game as best we can. They do a really good job of Xing out on ball screens, moving those guys around.

It will be a big challenge. If we can get back in transition somehow, try to limit them to one shot as much as possible, which is a lot easier said than done, hopefully we can give ourselves a chance in a six-minute game.

**Q. You have a player on your team, Mike Saunders, who played basketball here. What has his mood and excitement level been coming back here?**

WILL WADE: It's exciting. He'd rather be here than playing in the NIT. He's excited. He went to Wasatch, which is a ways, about two hours from here in the mountains. I think he's fired up. He certainly has some friends here in Salt Lake from his time here. His high school coach he's very close with. He has a family in town that kind of adopted him when things weren't going as well at Utah for him.

He's excited to see them.

At the end of the day he knows he's got a job to do. We got to get down to business.

**Q. Hoping you could provide some insight into Bucky McMillan?**

WILL WADE: The best (laughter).

**Q. What were your first impressions of him when you were starting to recruit Trendon?**

WILL WADE: I've known Bucky a long time. Bill Armstrong, my assistant, recruited Bucky to Birmingham-Southern. Even before we recruited Trendon, I knew Bucky. I talked to him the other day for a while.

I told everybody when he got the job, I said, Listen, I don't know how it's going to work, I don't know exactly how he's going to do it, but I promise he's going to win and win big there. How he's going to do it is going to be a little bit different than probably most people would do it, but he will win and win big.

Everybody talks about his run at Mountain Brook. At the end he had Watford, Colby Jones. He was winning state titles with whoever kind of showed up, his first couple state titles. Then other kids wanted to come and play for him there.

He's a phenomenal coach. He's very analytical, very linear thinker, plays to the numbers. The biggest thing is, he has

a unique system, a unique style, and he doesn't let anybody stop him from implementing that. Some people would get scared. You move up from high school to college, keep doing the same thing. He says, No, what I do works, it works really well, we're just going to keep doing I.

I know Samford doesn't like this, when he leaves Samford and goes to a higher level, he's going to be able to win doing the exact same thing. What he does works across any level. He does a great job in practice, getting the guys...

When we were recruiting Trendon, he was quizzing me about analytics, numbers, what do you think about this, that. Doing the 6:00 a.m. workouts. He'd be out there talking to us all the time. Very, very smart guy. He's fearless. He doesn't care what anybody thinks. He's not trying to be the most popular guy in the room. He's just trying to win games and do what he does. He does it at a very, very high level. He's going to keep winning.

Samford hasn't been to the NCAA tournament since they got to the SoCon. The last time they went was in the OVC, right? He just goes and he wins the league almost every year. Finally punched through in Nashville, which is hard to do.

**Q. You called getting here the greatest accomplishment of your career. What would it mean to win a game and will that top it?**

WILL WADE: I haven't even thought about winning a game. Getting here with this group, everything our community has been through, our school, absolutely as good as it gets for us. To have such a narrow path to get here, to be able to still do it, just phenomenal. I hadn't even contemplated winning a game, but it would certainly ratchet up the accomplishment if we could do that.

**Q. Javohn Garcia, DJ Richards both made the All-Tournament team. Can you talk about how their growth this season has impacted the team?**

WILL WADE: I thought they both should have been on the All-League team, too. I don't know what some of the coaches in our league were watching all year.

I thought both of them should have been on our All-League team. They didn't even make Second Team All-League. Both guys were certainly capable of doing that.

Garcia is so steady for us. He does so many little things really well. You can count on him. He's reliable, dependable. DJ is instant offense off the bench. Every

time he shoots it, you think it's going in. It's disappointing when he misses, deflating, because you just count on it every time it leaves his hand.

Those guys have been really, really good players for us. DJ would start on any other team at our level, but he's accepted coming off the bench, which has been a huge part of our success, a huge piece to what we do.

**Q. Just knowing some of the things you've been through personally, some of the adversity that you've been through --**

WILL WADE: You can say it. I got fired (smiling).

**Q. Is it good to show the kind of resiliency to get back to this stage, translate this to your team, not only over one day but over just a string of days, a string of months?**

WILL WADE: Yeah, I mean, look, it's not about me. We have a lot of guys who have overcome a lot of adversity, too, to get here. If you look at our roster, it's littered with transfers from multiple schools, guys who have overcome a lot of things to get here.

I think that's what bonded all of us. We're kind of a mismatch group. We've come together pretty quick. Everybody has a common thread. We all need each other. We all needed McNeese. McNeese needed all of us. It's kind of bonded all of us together as a group. That's been the most rewarding and most exciting part of the year.

**Q. You talked on Monday about how important the turnover margin is going to be tomorrow. Expand on that, how important that is, considering both teams turn the ball over less than 10 times per game.**

WILL WADE: Yeah, if we come in here and have a bunch of light ball turnovers, we might as well get on the plane and head home. We cannot have live ball turnovers. I'd rather punt it in the stands where we can set our defense.

If we come in here and turn the ball over more than eight times, it's going to be extremely challenging for us to win.

**Q. Since we ripped the Band-Aid off, you weren't the only one that got fired, there were a lot of people that got into all kinds of trouble seven, eight years ago. Do you think anything positive came out of that investigation that was supposed to change college basketball or fix it?**

WILL WADE: No, I mean, I think it ruined a lot of people's -- I was able to recover. There were a lot of people that

were not able to recover. I think it ruined a lot of people's lives for very little reason. I think it was extremely unfortunate. I stay in touch with a lot of the people who haven't been as fortunate as me to be able to find a route back.

No, I mean, I don't see much good that came from it because it ruined good people's lives for very little. I mean, look, we're talking here today, everything that some of these people got their lives ruined for, I mean, it's standard operating procedure today.

I mean, it's just extremely disappointing. I wish the NCAA would step in and say, Look, we need to let these other folks back in. We need to get rid of some of these punishments that they had. The Books, the Lamonts. They need to wash it, start clear, let those guys back in, let them get going and give them the opportunity to rebuild their career.

They've been punished - I promise you - they've been punished enough.

**Q. We talk about anniversary days. Seven years ago today you were hired by LSU. What are your thoughts on the last seven years and this ride?**

WILL WADE: I didn't know that. You always bring that stuff up (smiling).

I mean, look, we're never short for excitement on our roller coaster, so... It's been fun. Look, if I didn't get the LSU job, I wouldn't have been introduced to the state of Louisiana. If I wasn't introduced to the state of Louisiana, wasn't at LSU, I wouldn't have been fortunate enough to get this McNeese job, have this magical and special season that we've had.

I'd say it's a net positive.

**Q. You've talked a lot over the last couple weeks about Hada's experience, being the only player that's been to this stage. You're leaning on him more?**

WILL WADE: Yeah, he's one guy that can talk to our guys, one guy that can put our guys in the right mind frame. He always has a voice, but he's had a little bit more of a voice this week.

**Q. Graham Ike was named AP All-American Honorable Mention. You mentioned you are a little undersized compared to Gonzaga. How do you propose to stop him? What is your plan to try to neutralize him?**

WILL WADE: Pray (smiling).



I mean, look, he's a tremendous player. You let him get to his left hand, I mean, he's going to make that every time. So, I mean, look, I'm worried about him on the duck ends, especially in transition. I'm worried about him on the offensive glass.

Look, our best chance to stop him is to get him in foul trouble. The last couple games he's had some issues with foul trouble. I think he has had four fouls, four fouls, five fouls, four fouls, five fouls. That's a lot easier said than done. We've got to find some way to neutralize him on the court because when he's out there, we're going to have a very challenging time stopping him.

**Q. I'm sure you've heard about the Dan Monson situation at Long Beach State. They're playing here. What do you think about them in general? And also is there a right way and a wrong way to fire a head coach in college basketball?**

WILL WADE: Well, I'm an expert in this. You asked the right guy (smiling).

When they fired me, they didn't let me coach again. That's probably what Long Beach wishes they'd have done now. They fired him and they let him coach. LSU just fired me and said, Get on out of here, we'll let somebody else coach them. So you don't risk something like that happening.

I think you should always let the season play out. I don't know that situation. I don't like to comment on stuff I don't know a ton about. But I think in general, I don't see any reason to have cut the cord when they did. They could have just waited till after the conference tournament. What were they going to do? Get a jump-start? They should have let it play out and whatever happened happened.

This doesn't look good, I wouldn't assume, for what they're doing. I'm happy for Coach Monson. I don't know him very well. I'm thrilled for him. I like anybody that can rise up and go against the grain a little bit. That's a good thing.

Yeah, I think in general you either let it play out, or if you fire him, you fire him and you put an interim coach in there and you move it. But I would let it play out more generally.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach. Appreciate your time.

WILL WADE: Thank you.

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