

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

**Gonzaga Bulldogs**  
**Coach Mark Few**  
**Anton Watson**  
**Dusty Stromer**  
**Ryan Nembhard**

Media Conference

Gonzaga 86, McNeese State 65

THE MODERATOR: Joining us is Gonzaga. We will get going with opening statement from Coach Few.

MARK FEW: Couldn't have been prouder on how our guys attacked the moment of the first round game in the NCAA tournament. I thought we were as dialed in as we've been on any of the scouting reports and really executed the plan great. We played phenomenal defense, I felt, throughout the whole game.

We beat a really, really good team. We did a great job on some really good players. We guarded Wells really good, Garcia really good. Did our best to limit Richards from three, which we knew was going to be big.

Loved our confidence. Loved our approach. Again, 15 straight first round wins, doing it is amazing. To me, after doing this for 25 years, 10 more as an assistant, one of the hardest things to do is win a game in the NCAA tournament. To do it 15 straight times is amazing. The guys deserve all the credit for that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. Looking at the program, having 15 straight first round NCAA tournament wins, what does it say about the consistency of the program? What's been the secret to your success?**



ANTON WATSON: Yeah, I would just say seeing the guys before us, the teams before us, how they gelled, how they played together. It gives us a lot of confidence going into the tournament, knowing that Gonzaga, when we're in the tournament, we win games.

Yeah, I think we just came out prepared today, super confident. We knew we were going to win this game. It felt good to get that W.

DUSTY STROMER: I would just say it comes down to just us being a family. Being a freshman, you don't know what you're going to get when you see a bunch of new guys, meet a bunch of new people. They took me in early. It's a family environment. I think a big part of why Gonzaga does what they do.

RYAN NEMBHARD: I would just say it's a testament to everybody that's been through in program, the coaches, past players. Just the culture we have at Gonzaga, how we do, is why we get the results we get. It's what Gonzaga does and operates.

**Q. Did you feel it in the huddle early on that it was going to be one of those nights?**

ANTON WATSON: Yeah, I would say so. But we knew we had to be locked in the whole game. They're a dangerous team. They can make threes. I think we did a good job of just staying solid on defense. They kind of started getting offensive rebounds towards the beginning. I think second half, towards the end of the first half, we started to shut that down, get more boards.

Yeah, I think we were just locked in.

DUSTY STROMER: Yeah, I would say we had a really, really good week of practice. We were all dialed in. I think just coming into the game we were super confident and we were able to get the W, yeah.

RYAN NEMBHARD: They did a good job answering.

**Q. Dusty, you come in about the 16-minute mark, to see the first shot fall, what did it mean? What was**



**your first tournament experience like?**

DUSTY STROMER: Yeah, I mean, it's a dream come true to play in March Madness. It's every kid's dream to play in the Dance. To be out here with these guys, the group, just come out and give my all, it was an unbelievable experience.

**Q. Dusty, you've talked about leadership around you. How important are these two guys to have next to you? What was it like to have a big night in your first tournament game?**

DUSTY STROMER: Yeah, no, these guys have been playing college basketball for a long time, played a lot of games. Every day in practice I get to learn from these guys, I get to learn new things in games, and in games that bring the huddle together.

Yeah, no, just an unbelievable experience. Like I said, a dream come true.

**Q. Anton, 13 points, 13 rebounds, nine assists. Have you had a triple-double before? What does that mean to you?**

ANTON WATSON: No, I've never had a triple-double. Yeah, it feels good. They're kind of playing double, doubling the post. Gave me freedom to pass to my shooters, Dusty. I think the first six minutes, I had six assists because everyone was knocking down shots.

Yeah, when we're playing like that, it's a little bit -- I'm capable of getting a triple-double. Yeah, it definitely felt good. I was playing with freedom, yeah, just making the right plays it felt like.

**Q. Ryan, solving the traps, the full court pressure, how did you deal with keeping your cool, the turnovers down, making 'em pay when they tried to get aggressive?**

RYAN NEMBHARD: Yeah, I just think we were pretty solid in making the right read. We knew they were going to come with doubles in the post especially. I feel like our bigs were just patient in there. They took their time. They saw what they were looking for and made the right play.

Yeah, those guys are super handsy. If you throw it in a tight area, they're definitely going to deflect it. I thought we did a good job being patient and letting it come to us.

**Q. The importance of the three. They gave you a lot of threes. How much did that open up the rest of it?**

RYAN NEMBHARD: Yeah, I think that's just how they play. They're going to give up threes when you double. I think we just were hands and feet ready today. We've been working on our shots all year. We knocked them down today.

**Q. The poise that Dusty showed tonight on a big stage tonight?**

ANTON WATSON: Yeah, when he plays with confidence like that, it helps the team so much. I think we're all proud of him. We want to see that continue.

But, yeah, that was huge for us. Ben going into foul trouble, he stepped up to the plate and hit big shots, played good defense. That's what we need from him. We're all so proud of him.

RYAN NEMBHARD: Yeah, pretty much the same. He's like a spark plug off the bench for us when he plays like that with confidence. He's huge for us. He was huge for us tonight. Look forward to him keep playing well. That's just what he does.

THE MODERATOR: We will excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Few.

**Q. Everything about this game was dominant for you guys. How important is y'all's defensive identity, especially in March?**

MARK FEW: It's huge. It's huge. That's what we were talking about in every timeout, at halftime. That lead was built on really controlling those guards, trying our best to keep Shumate off the glass. That was probably one of the challenges we didn't do a great job of meeting.

Up until the last five minutes or so, got a little ratty, we took great care of the ball. They feed off turnovers and get out and run, score a lot of their points in transition.

I thought we did a really, really nice job of taking care of the ball against a really handsy, anticipatory-type defense that does a good job of turning teams over.

**Q. First half I'm not sure they had a three. Dribble-drive penetration you were worried about, how were you affected?**

MARK FEW: We hit our coverages really, really well. Guys, I was after them all week, even at shootaround I had to get after them to really echo our communication, be forceful about it.

I thought we did a great job of vertically contesting. That's

been kind of hit or miss all year. We told 'em and showed 'em stuff about that 2017 team that made the national championship game. They were great at vertically contesting, really protecting the rim. I thought our guys bought in. Graham had some good ones. Dusty had some good ones. B. Huff had some good ones.

**Q. There was a moment in the game where they had the Oakland-Kentucky game on the Jumbotron. Your thoughts on that? Seemed like the crowd was reacting. It looked like maybe you went to the scorer's table to talk to them about it. Or what happened in that conversation?**

MARK FEW: I appreciate you saying "talked" to them about it. Let's go with that description 'cause, yeah, I just thought -- I know, I guess, it's protocol. We don't need that. It's the NCAA tournament. These kids are involved. It's the biggest game of their lives. Those officials, you know, it's a big moment for them.

Everybody just needs to enjoy the game at hand. It doesn't need to be like the Few house where we're flipping channels every 15 seconds and not watching the show we're supposed to be watching.

I mean, I really think that needs to change. It was impacting the game. Again, I mean, the McNeese people were there to watch McNeese; Gonzaga people were there to watch Gonzaga. It's the NCAA tournament. If you can't get entertained, then get out and let's get somebody else in your seat. Plain and simple.

**Q. At the start you mentioned you beat a really good team. What was kind of the key for you guys coming into tonight?**

MARK FEW: To your point, I think one of the biggest keys was they had our full attention. I mean full attention. Will has done a great job. I mean, they have just put it on people all year.

I think our guys really got that message and bought into that message. I mean, that was a huge part of this, was just the respect we had for McNeese, respect we had for Coach.

That helped us. Statistically they posted some awesome numbers this year. We showed the guys that. Showed them what they were capable of doing, especially from threes, Wells with his right hand and obviously Shumate.

I think the respect our guys had for them was as big a part of this as anything.

**Q. You mentioned McNeese likes to pressure, get up into you. How important is it to have guys like Ryan and Nolan who have been here before?**

MARK FEW: I mean, it's huge. It's huge. Especially last year, we weren't operating really with a full-time pure point guard. Ryan had great control of that game all night. Did a great job handling everything.

Also, they press and trap a lot in the post. We ran a lot of stuff through Anton. Anton is terrific at it. I don't know if there's a better guy in the country at passing and solving things. Anton brought the ball up the floor a lot.

That's the luxury you have when you have somebody with his skill set, you can initiate offense, break presses, invite a post double, we can make plays and get threes out of it. He was phenomenal tonight.

**Q. We saw Ben with his ankle taped, some ice on it. Do you know how that happened?**

MARK FEW: He hurt it in the Saint Mary's game. It's been bothering him kind of all week. We've been trying to give him time off and monitor it as best we can. It kind of gets aggravated every time we play a game or have a real hard practice.

**Q. You had six of your first seven threes when they were doubling down deep. How much do you think that changed what they were doing?**

MARK FEW: It's huge. As I told the staff once we got in the coach's locker room, when you make shots, everything looks good. To come out of the gates like that, everybody was kind of on fire. Quite frankly, that hasn't always been the case for us this year.

It was nice to see. Again, part of the game plan was we knew they were going to double. Those guys were going to be open. We always say hands and feet ready, let her rip. That's what we did.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

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