

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Yale vs Texas A&M

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Buzz Williams

Wade Taylor IV

Henry Coleman III

Pharrel Payne

Media Conference



Q. I'm curious, when did you learn that Yale beat Auburn in the tournament last year, and what was your reaction, and did it influence the way y'all look at them?

WADE TAYLOR IV: No, I wouldn't say that. I learned that last year losing in the tournament, we played our game and just being a kid or being a person who watches ball, you keep up with all the scores.

Most of the upsets really get a lot of attention, so once Yale won, you seen it, but we had a game to focus on. I kind of learned about it then, but that didn't influence what we've got going on now.

Q. Henry, as you've studied their offense, what have you noticed that makes them so effective on that side of the ball?

HENRY COLEMAN III: They're a really good team, well-coached, very poised team, kind of like us, a very old team, have played a lot of basketball and are very experienced. I think that just speaks to when they play, they're not going to take a lot of bad shots. They're going to value each possession.

That just raises our awareness on the defensive end of how we have to be locked in the whole game and how we have to value each possession on our end, too.

Q. Pharrel, your size, they try to force feed you in the middle and you may have a little bit of a size

advantage. What is your mindset of maybe getting a heavy workload this week?

PHARREL PAYNE: I'd say my mindset going into it, just being aggressive, continue to play how I play in the post. The bigs come, spread it out to my teammates.

Q. Wade, Henry, this is kind of old hat for you guys, your third tournament here together. Pharrel, this is your first with the Aggies. How does it feel knowing this is the last run? And Pharrel, what's it like to be here on the big stage?

WADE TAYLOR IV: Yeah, I'm excited. Like you said, we done this three times in a row. That doesn't happen often. But we're thankful to be here. We're going to come out and give it our all knowing that the next game could be our last.

But we're just excited to be here. We're going to be where our feet are and take every day one day at a time.

PHARREL PAYNE: First time being here. I'm really excited to be here. My part in this is just helping these guys get some wins.

Q. Henry, with you guys, a lot of y'all being seniors, this being the last go-around, what do you feel like gives you confidence that you guys are built to potentially make a deep run in this NCAA Tournament?

HENRY COLEMAN III: I've alluded to it I think a couple weeks ago. Experience helps you in any field that you're in, whether that's journalism, whether that's working a 9:00 to 5:00, whether that's sports. Experience helps in all of them, and I think experience will hopefully help us.

We've been in games where we've been up a lot, and so I think it's just a mindset of being right where our feet are and not trying to take any of this for granted. We know we have a really good team coming up. The whole team knows that. The staff knows that. We'll just have to take it day by day.

Q. What has contributed to your rebounding prowess? You guys lead the nation in offensive rebounds. What is the key to your success in that area?



HENRY COLEMAN III: I would say it's a mindset. There's a lot of analytics that go into it. Everybody likes to talk about it. But it's just a mindset. It's you versus another guy. Somebody is going to get that ball, and hopefully it's yourself.

So I think it's a mindset, and I think it's us compounding habits from the summer over time that have been able to show the life throughout the games this season. I think it's truly a mindset.

Q. Wade, as y'all have studied Yale, what most impresses you about them?

WADE TAYLOR IV: That they made it back to the NCAA Tournament. They play in a pretty good league. They have a really good team. They play well together. Like Henry said, they're really experienced. That's what really impressed me, they play together and are really experienced. They can really shoot it.

Q. What kind of problem does Yale's three-point shooting pose for your defense, and how do you plan to contain that?

HENRY COLEMAN III: Throughout the SEC we played a number of teams who shoot the three ball at a high level, Missouri, Alabama, Auburn. So that's just something that we've been tested on before. We've done well against it, so we're going to keep our game plans.

We've learned from those, whether we've won or we've lost, how we're going to learn from it, we're going to build on it, we're going to continue to work on it so it comes to life tomorrow.

Q. How has SEC play helped prepare you for this tournament?

PHARREL PAYNE: I'd say it prepared us tremendously. Most of the teams that are in the tournament are from the SEC, so the harder games, night in, night out, is going to get us ready for tournament play.

Q. Wade, you guys definitely have a certain formula that helps y'all win. How much do y'all have to stake on that narrow path or can you deviate from it potentially a little bit to make a deep run in this tournament?

WADE TAYLOR IV: I think every game that you have to play in the tournament is a different game, but I think the foundation that you built from the beginning of the year is what you have to stand on, because once again, that's

what got you here.

I feel like you have to change based on the team you're playing, but I think the main things are the main things, and that's what gets you the win.

Q. Henry, obviously you guys have a style of play like you alluded to. You guys play tough and you guys play with a lot of emotion, and that comes from the coach down. Now you're playing a team that's considered an underdog and those type of teams play with a different type of fight. How do you weather that storm and how do you stay where your feet are and play your game?

HENRY COLEMAN III: Yeah, I wouldn't really consider us an underdog. Everybody has this to lose, this game basically. We've been an underdog all year. Our whole career we've been underdogs. Told Wade he was too small. Told a lot of guys on the team they weren't fast enough, couldn't shoot the ball well enough.

I think everybody throughout their entire life has been underdogs, so I don't think this poses any threat to us at all.

Q. You guys are really good at rebounding, but you look at Yale's numbers, they're really good, too. What makes them effective on the boards and just the challenge you're going to have on that?

PHARREL PAYNE: I would say what makes them so good is that mentality. I'd say they have a similar mentality to us and I'd say our mentality going into the game is just being more physical than they are.

Q. The air is thinner here; have you guys experienced any problems with that so far, or is it something that you're not concerned about?

HENRY COLEMAN III: I would say we're not really concerned about it.

WADE TAYLOR IV: Have you had any problems?

HENRY COLEMAN III: Yeah, we're all good. Mile high will be fine.

Q. Buzz, as you guys have had a few days to look at at Yale, what really stands out about the way they shoot and the way they rebound particularly?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think they're good at a lot of things. Think I they're one of six teams in the country that have only lost one game in 2025. Regardless of league, to

have that success, there's a lot of good things that they do, not just one.

They are really good on the glass on both ends of the floor. I think they're 22nd in the country in defensive rebounding. Very physical. Their defensive style of play creates opportunities for them to rebound at a very high rate.

Offensively I think that their plan is fairly succinct. No. 2 is three-time Defensive Player of the Year. He was the MVP of the Ivy League, is a power forward guard, plays with a high motor. 42 is the point guard when 2 doesn't have it. Both of those guys, 2 and 42, play with a really high usage rate.

42 scores differently obviously than 2, and then 4 is as good a shot maker as there is in the country. As you know, their team is top 10 in the country in three-point field goal percentage, not because they shoot a lot of them, but they make a very high percentage, and not exclusively is it because of 4, but a big part of it is because of 4.

I think their team is a little different. When 10 is on the floor versus when No. 8 is on the floor. I think 14 provides a unique ability that the other guys don't. Really like the composition of their team, and I've enjoyed watching them and studying them.

Q. Obviously you're big into being in sync with your team and how they feel and all that stuff. Have you seen a change -- obviously there are some seniors and some guys playing for the first time. Has there been an intensity change or maybe a switch flipped with these guys since you got here?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Well, I think that everybody is probably in a little different boat. We have a couple guys this is their first time playing in the tournament. A couple of guys this is their second back to back time. But we have a large percentage that have done it three times in a row.

I think everybody processes that opportunity a little differently. I think when you've never done it, there's a high level of excitement, of gratefulness. When you've done it two times in a row, there's a little bit of, I've done this before, I want to do it a little better.

But I think your third time in a row, that doesn't happen very often in someone's career. You process that at an even different level of maturity.

I think our entire organization understands the opportunity in front of us and how important it is. While being grateful, they also have a high level of understanding of what's at stake.

Q. You had mentioned your Colorado ties when we talked to you on Sunday. Thinking back to your time up the road in Fort Collins, how did those years impact you as a coach in your career, what you learned, how that maybe helped get you your first job at A&M?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I could probably talk too long about it, so I'll try to be succinct. It was 18 days before I got married. My two oldest children were born in Fort Collins. I was working for Coach Layer. That's a big reason why Coach and I have been connected for the last 25 years at every spot that we've been at, regardless of who has been in what chair.

It was the first school I'd ever been employed at that didn't have a hyphen or didn't have a direction in the name of the school. It was the first time I had been to the NCAA Tournament as a coach, as a Division I coach, in 2003 when we won the Mountain West.

So I remember all of it very distinctly. This is the first time that I've been back in Colorado since 2004 when I was hired as an assistant. So I remember all of it. I remember bringing Bubba here to watch Jordan play with the Wizards right before he retired, and he was a month and a half old. I remember the first house Corey and I ever bought in Fort Collins. I remember all of it.

Q. I was just curious, you've been in this business for a while. It's changed a lot for coaches, especially in the last three, four years. Do you still like your job as much as you did 15 years ago?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I have a completely different job. I think every coach would say that. I've tried to stay out of the nuances of the things that I can't control.

What I have learned is the skill set that was required to be a good coach 10 years ago, very little of that applies anymore, and the skill set of being a head coach is completely different than it was even when I was hired at Texas A&M.

I think the volatility of the players and the volatility of the coaches and the volatility of the administration is going to continue to be at a historic rate until there's some level of this is how we play, and I don't know that that's ever going to happen.

What I've tried to focus on is of the things that I can control, how can I get better at those things, and then of the things that I can't control, how can I continue to try to find ways to improve my skill set so that I can continue to lead.

I think this upcoming season is going to be different than this past season, and to your question, the last three seasons all have been different. Each conference has some maybe thoughts on the way it should go, but each institution also has thoughts on the way it should go, and that's going to be evident with each passing year, particularly after the House settlement, if it goes through in the next few weeks.

Q. Have you felt the need to have much discussion with your guys about, number one, reminding them that Yale beat Auburn last year, and number two, and I know you keep up with the history of basketball, just the history of success that Ivy League teams sometimes surprisingly have in the NCAA Tournament?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think some of our guys actually remembered that Auburn had played Yale when we were sitting in Reed Arena before I saw you. We have showed them some clips when we were teaching them Yale's style of play on both ends of the floor.

I think since the pandemic, Yale has been to the postseason every year. This is their second year of going to the NCAA Tournament. The year before I think they played in the NIT against Vanderbilt, and the year before that, they were in the NCAA Tournament.

So relative to the history of the Ivy League, we probably haven't addressed that. Specific to Yale, their personnel, that still applies. I know 42 that played for them last year now plays for Michigan. Their style of play is still very similar. Their roles have changed. Their style of play is similar.

But maybe not the history of the Ivy League, but for sure as it relates to this game and the success Yale has had, I think we've done a good job conveying that thus far.

Q. I read a story where you name your inbound passes after the nicknames of your children. Maybe fill me in on that.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yes, sir. We used to do that. All of our specials were named after my children. There's still some residue of that. Not quite that extreme as it once was. Some of that was just a lot of our offensive plays are more football calls in regards to the cadence and how we do it, and then anytime the official touched the ball, that was something different, and it started as my children's names and then it just kind of kept expanding.

Then when it was on the sides, it became family names of people associated with our program. Then it got a little out

of hand when it was who our barber was and things of that nature.

I've kind of let it go a little bit this year, but there's still residue of it.

Q. You guys don't have a rotational player that's taller than 6'9" yet. You lead the nation in offensive rebounding and top 5, top 6 in overall rebounding. What is the secret to you guys' success in that department?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think GOECH I is probably an inch taller than 6'9", but I receive what you're saying. We led the nation in offensive rebounding last year. We did it again this year.

What I would say without arrogance is during our time since the pandemic, we have realized that that was a way for us to create a niche at Texas A&M relative to our roster and our style of play, to create a competitive margin.

Last year we shot more balls than any team in Division I over the last seven years. A lot of that is because we don't make shots. A lot of that is because we rebound the shots that we miss.

We've created a category from a rebounding standpoint that's just as significant as offense and defense. This year, as of today, our defense is ranked seventh in the country. We do a lot of good things in my opinion in a unique way when the ball is on the ground, but the reason that we have progressed from an overall defensive standpoint is we have taken what we have learned, the language, how we grade it, the metrics, how we practice it, we've taken it to the defensive rebounding side of things in how we scout an opponent and how we teach defensive rebounding, how we've given language to it.

Our defensive numbers have improved, not because we've really done anything different prior to when the shot is attempted. Our defensive rebounding has improved on what we're doing once the shot has occurred.

That's what's -- we've been top 10 in the country in defense for the last 60 or 70 days, and a lot of it is a byproducts of our defensive rebounding, and that literally just came from what we have learned from an offensive rebounding standpoint.

It started very organically in how we went about it, and most people say, and I never object because I don't want to give all of our secrets, because we're not smarter than anybody, but they just play really hard. So when people say that, I just say, yes, sir, that's right.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

But there is a lot of specificity, specifics to what we do on the rise of the shot. Everybody in our organization knows what to do. I think the other thing that's helped us from a defensive standpoint is the pressure we put on the rim from an offensive rebounding standpoint has allowed us to give up less points in transition than we ever have in the last six years.

So all of that has correlated, and because we've had a lot of returning players, all of the language and how we grade it, we grade all five players on every single shot on offense and defense, specific to offensive rebounding and defensive rebounding. It's helped both offense and defense because of that.

Q. Following up with that big picture question about the coaching profession, when you look at the state of the game right now, the House case, the transfer portal, revolving door, potential employment, all the issues we know about, is college basketball in a healthy spot right now?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I don't know. I've tried to stay out of all of that discussion throughout the year just because I don't think that there's necessarily a right answer.

I would say at some point it probably will have to be streamlined in some sort of way. I don't know exactly who's going to do that or is it going to be Doolittle, is it going to be this new enforcement staff that's potentially on its way after the House settlement.

How are they going to process all of that. Is there going to be any enforcement. Are the leagues going to stay the same. Is the college football playoff going to change. How is that going to impact the NCAA Tournament. Where does the NCAA fit in relative to all of this.

I don't think that I know for sure. I'm not a part of any of those meetings. I'm not sure that the leaders know. I think they're still trying to process what is right and what is going to work.

I think the look-ins that the House settlement is going to have is just going to continue to morph, and it's going to continue to change. Similar to his question, I think initially, we didn't participate, men's basketball at Texas A&M, we didn't participate in NIL when it began. That was the year we played in the NIT championship, and I never said that.

So all of the quotes and all of the opinions that were shielded towards us, I never stood up and said, hey, guys, our kids are on full scholarship. I never said that to our local media. I never said it nationally.

Even since all of that has changed, I've never said anything specific to where we rank, our collective, how we're doing at -- I've just tried to stay away from that.

What I've tried to do is, public or private, a situation or people, I've tried to always tell the truth and do what I believed was right relative to that situation and those people.

I think the exposure that now has come with all of this, in the chair that we sit in, I don't know that having emotional diatribes solves anything, but I do think the accountability to the families on your staff, to the families of the young men on your team, I still think that that matters. Or it does to me, whether I'm employed or unemployed.

I want to know in my heart, not because I'm a good person, I want to know in my heart I did -- at that moment in time with the information that I had, regardless of the opinion of others, I did what I believed was right as if it was my children.

I think that's why we've had such a low transfer rate relative to -- I know what all of our numbers are. I'm very aware of all of our numbers, but I never say them.

But where is it going to be two years? Where is it going to be five years? Are the brands going to take over? Are the leagues going to go away? Are the leagues going to continue to change?

I don't think anybody knows that because nobody knows what the end point is.

Q. Yale has got the best defender in the Ivy League that they feel confident can guard anyone one-on-one. How much has it helped this year that if they focus on taking Wade out that you guys are constructed in a way where different guys have been able to step up at different times?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think that we have had a lot of reps of the best perimeter defender guarding 4, and 4 has seen every sort of ball screen coverage possible and every sort of how are we going to guard 4 on the weak side possible.

I think that we've tried to -- we've shot more shots at the rim than we have in previous years. Some of that is personnel based, and some of that is to your question.

I think that's also why 4 has shot less balls than he has since he was a freshman. Our roster has changed. How we're trying to distribute offense has changed.

We've tried to hold on to offensive rebounding as a big bucket for us. We've tried to hold on to we want to get fouled and make more than the opponent attempts. We've tried to hold on to some of those things, but it's morphed into other things.

Part of it is the ability that 4 has to win a game by himself, but part of that is our returning players and also our newcomers.

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