

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Longwood vs Houston

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FedExForum

Longwood Lancers Coach Griff Aldrich

Jesper Granlund

Walyn Napper

Media Conference

Houston - 86, Longwood - 46

GRIFF ALDRICH: Well, first off, hats off to Houston. It's really hard to simulate that level of physicality and speed and just how hard they play. What's so impressive is their consistency throughout the game. Almost every possession it's relentless.

And so make things very difficult, obviously, offensively, and that's why they're such a good team and ranked so highly defensively.

But obviously tonight was certainly not the Lancers' night, but extremely proud of our guys to get to the tournament, and the resilience and the character that they've shown throughout the year to battle the ups and downs. And their genuine love for one another is really why we're here.

So extremely proud of this team and what they've accomplished. And tonight obviously not excited about it, but it doesn't diminish what these guys did.

Q. Walyn, what was it about their defense that is so smothering to go against them?

WALYN NAPPER: They're just very aggressive. It's obvious that they work on defense a lot. They earned my respect tonight. That's the reason why they're one of the best teams in the nation, if not the best team in the nation.

They're just really good at defense. And their offense was clicking as well. Just wasn't our night, like Coach said. But hats off to them. Like I said, they earned my respect.



Q. Walyn, two seasons here with Coach Aldrich. What's this program meant to you in two years here, and now being able to play for them in the NCAA Tournament?

WALYN NAPPER: I just want to thank God for guiding me to Longwood, playing for Coach Griff for the past two years. It's been good. It's been a great experience.

This being my last year as a senior, not going out the way we wanted to go out but still being able to have a championship in the Big South was a goal of ours, to make it to the NCAA Tournament.

Just being at Longwood, playing with this team. Especially this year, the brotherhood we made since the summer, since we took the trip overseas, I love this team. I love the group of guys. I love the coaches. They took a chance on me.

I don't know how I can repay them, but I'm just very thankful just to be in this moment, live out the dream that we all had as kids.

Q. How significant do you think it is that you got this program to a second NCAA appearance? Obviously the first one was really exciting a couple years ago. But to do it again so close seems to give you guys some more credibility?

JESPER GRANLUND: I think it shows growth inside the program where -- when I got here four years ago, and where we're at right now, it shows positive growth. I think in five years, they'll be great. What do you think, bro?

WALYN NAPPER: I think Coach Griff and the coaching staff have built a program that people always will remember now. They didn't have the success that they wanted when he first got here.

But now Longwood is a powerhouse. The target's on our back. Like I said, it's a great program. Help you on and off the court. It's not all about basketball. It's about growing as a man.



And Coach Griff has helped us all grow as young men. And he's helping us to prepare for the real world. And did a great job with this program. He's going to continue to do a great job.

Q. In terms of what's coming back, what you know in this program -- I know the roster can always change. But how do you feel about the strength of this team kind of going forward? What do you see kind of coming up in the ranks there?

JESPER GRANLUND: I think our freshmen, as today we saw Emanuel Richards, amazing game, the growth he's had through the whole season. Amazing to see, same with Szymon and Elijah. Where they've started out this season to where they are now, it's amazing to see.

WALYN NAPPER: This is my last year. I'll be gone, but I just know the team we had this year and that's coming back, they'll be the same team and they'll be even better in the second year because this year was a little growing pains coming into a new program, not knowing what to expect, being transfers.

They did a really good job this year. As you see we won the Big South. Many people didn't think we would do it. But at the end of the day we accomplished a lot this year.

Didn't come out and play the way we wanted to play today, but you've got to look at the positive things we did. Next year the team will be better.

Q. What is the significance of being here again? I know you wanted to play better tonight, but so close to your last appearance to be back here?

GRIFF ALDRICH: Well, I think the vision that was cast for me when I first interviewed at Longwood was really to build -- I think, really from the president down -- was to build a program that would be a championship-caliber program and to really dream big, not just have a good team every couple of years, but one that would be a perennial contender in the Big South and that would get to the NCAA on a regular occasion.

And I think three 20-win seasons in a row is a huge accomplishment. Really it's a big testament to the institution at large, not just the program, but I really think the institution. Their commitment to helping build a program, to recruiting Tim Hall who is a distinguished AD with a lot of experience, knows how to help grow basketball programs in particular.

And all of the extra support. As a result of that, we're able to recruit talented players. We're able to attract quality

staff. We're able to enhance the student-athlete experience.

And I think all of that, we always talk about pouring into the root. I think pouring in that investment, pouring in that commitment -- it's not all just about money. There's a lot of different facets.

But I think as a result of that, you're seeing the growth in the program. And it's exciting, it's exciting to see. And I think we're just on the front end.

Q. What does Houston do with its defensive rotations to have so much success and create turnovers? And how does it compare to other college teams you've seen?

GRIFF ALDRICH: I hadn't seen what I saw tonight all year. I think, first off, they're all about the same, within about 4 or 5 inches of one another, but they're flying around. The pace at which they play is really remarkable. The thing that I was really curious about was would they really be able to sustain it. They've got such a short bench and yet it just didn't stop.

So what I believed they're really good at is scrambling. You just don't get an open shot. And you may shot fake and get by somebody and then, boom, somebody's there. You may kick it to somebody else, boom, somebody's right there.

And then also their physicality. It's really hard to get by them because they're big and strong. They know how to defend without getting fouls called.

So I really think a lot of it starts with they play with purpose and they're not going to let anything be easy. They were up 30, and I think DA Houston made a 3 in front of our bench, and I thought he barely got the shot off. And Sampson's screaming at Wilson, I think, like that's an emergency, get out there. It's like, damn. (Laughter).

I thought he was out there. But anyway, that's what I thought.

Q. I know we just talked about Houston defensively, but offensively you guys were able to stick with them a little bit defensively at the beginning of the game, and then their offense kind of took off. Was it that they wore down your defense or how did that work out?

GRIFF ALDRICH: I honestly thought -- I'm always transparent -- I thought we broke. I thought we broke. Yeah, we were playing with them a little bit. I think it was a 10-point game, but they hadn't scored a ton. And they

were getting offensive rebounds.

But I think what happened was we couldn't get an easy look on the offensive end, and then we're turning it over. And then that so often you dip with your defensive intensity. And then you're a little sloppy on a switch. You're late on a closeout. And then, bang, 10 goes to 20 pretty quickly.

Q. Having just listened to you describe the way U of H plays defense, the U of H defense you saw in the first half of this game, if they continue to play like that, what is their ceiling in this tournament?

GRIFF ALDRICH: I do think defense wins championships. So I think they're going to be able to go as far as that will take them. I've been impressed because I'm shocked at their lack of depth being able to play at that pace.

Usually when you're playing like that, you usually go nine, 10 deep even. And obviously they didn't have to play their guys that long tonight.

But that would be my question. My guess is, I haven't asked Coach Sampson, but my guess is, the Iowa State game they got beat, probably three games in three days, they just ran out of gas, is my guess. And the way this is all set up, you're able to play two games and then get a break. That probably helps them quite a bit.

I thought they shot the ball better than what they normally do. Maybe we didn't defend it well. But if they're shooting the ball that way and defending that way, they're going to be really hard.

Q. Other than Walyn, everybody is eligible to come back. I know in this era you probably have no idea what your roster is going to look like. But what is your sense of what kind of a position you're in going forward?

GRIFF ALDRICH: I think it's really strong. I mean, you're always surprised at this time of year who will leave and who will stay. I would expect we'll have a very strong team coming back.

And the two here, I think, will both be, Jesper could come back, but he's been here for four years, and he's been far away from home, and I think he's ready to move on. But I think there's a great chance we could have almost everybody back from this squad, and that could be exciting.

Q. (Off microphone), what's he meant to you guys this year and the whole time he's been with you?

GRIFF ALDRICH: Walyn is a -- Walyn is a true testament to what can happen when you really want to fight for change. And Walyn came to us two years ago and was a young man who really wanted to grow.

If you told me a year ago that I'd be sitting on this stage telling you that Walyn had done what he's done the past month, I'm not sure I would have believed you.

But the growth that that young man has had, it's a true testament. I thought actually tonight was an interesting example. He knows I didn't love his first half. But then you saw his second half. He was committed and played hard the entire time. We went from 14 turnovers in the first half to about two or three in the second half. Now, I know that the personnel were different.

But Walyn has grown so much. And to see him come in as a guy who fought for just trying to do things the right way, consistently, to then being our clear leader and clearly leading us to a championship and being the MVP, it's the joy of coaching. It's the joy of seeing transformed lives through athletics.

And I think Walyn will leave Longwood a different person than the young man that came to Longwood. And I think we can all hold our heads high as a result.

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