

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Maryland vs Florida

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

San Francisco, California, USA

Chase Center

Maryland Terrapins

Coach Kevin Willard

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



KEVIN WILLARD: Extremely excited to be here. Been a good couple of days in San Francisco. Glad we didn't have to travel back to Maryland and travel back out. So staying out here, I think, it's been a lot of fun being with the guys and kind of touring San Francisco a little bit and seeing some sights.

Q. Right after Derik hits that shot, he gives a shout out to Baltimore. Wanted to get your thoughts on why he felt compelled to mention his hometown and how important that is to him?

KEVIN WILLARD: The more time you spend in Baltimore, you know, it gets a really bad rap sometimes. And it's a phenomenal city, with great people that really love where they come from. They love their sports.

So I think -- and Derik said it; it's not easy getting out of Baltimore. So when you see someone coming out of Baltimore, having the success that he has had, Baltimore kids take a lot of pride in where they come from, as they should because it's a great city with great people.

Q. And the relationship between him and Ju the other Baltimore guy how has that developed and Ju taken him under his wing?

KEVIN WILLARD: Ju has been a big brother all year. On the court he's helped Derik develop tremendously with physicality getting used to it in the Big Ten. I think Derik conversely has been a great little brother because he's always joking around and smiling. I think it's really helped Ju enjoy his senior year and really relax.

Q. Florida is a team that plays about eight or nine deep. I'm just curious -- and you've relied heavily on

your starters for minutes. I'm curious about that aspect of the match-up and what's going to be required of your starters stamina-wise to deal with Florida?

KEVIN WILLARD: We'll have to play all four bigs, for sure. They remind me a lot of the way they run Michigan State and how Michigan State brings four big guys in and just tries to wear you down. I think Florida does the same thing.

They shoot the basketball much better than Michigan State team does. I think it's the biggest difference.

But we're going to have to play all four bigs. There's just no way Derik and Ju are going to be allotted 36 minutes against this team. They run consistently. They're fresh. They're as good a basketball team as I've seen on film all year.

Q. What makes Ju a good rebounder besides the fact that it runs in the family?

KEVIN WILLARD: I don't know. To be perfectly honest with you, I think you'd have to ask him that.

Q. I did. [Inaudible]?

KEVIN WILLARD: He did. I don't know. I would probably say playing one-on-one with Angel all those years. They both have tremendous motors and they're both highly competitive.

Ju is really strong. And I think being a big guy, especially going through AAU now and high school basketball, the really only way you get to basketball is if you set a pick and roll or get a rebound. And for me, he's always just been, he's always had a good feel for where the ball's going to go. I think that would be the sexy answer.

He has a really good feel for where shots are going to miss. He just doesn't run to the same spot every time. He kind of understands who is shooting it, where it's going. Like, Rodney shoots it a little flatter than Kobi. Kobi's misses are a little bit bouncier. Rod's are a little bit harder. He kind of understands that a little bit.

Q. Florida is one of the best offensive rebounding teams in the country, particularly their guards. And that's something you've mentioned that's been a struggle the past couple of games. How do you expect to kind of combat them on the glass?

KEVIN WILLARD: We're not going to switch as much nearly as we have. The switching -- I went back and watched our last three games -- the switching has really hurt us tremendously. And I think we're going to try to switch a whole lot less than we have. They remind me of Illinois in the fact that Illinois rebounds from the guard spot tremendously, big guards.

So try to switch it and just really make it a factor. I think they score something crazy, like 20 -- 32 percent of their points come from offensive rebounds. I've never seen anything like that in my life. It's an unbelievable stat.

As good as they are, as they shoot it, as good as they are in transition, you get a stop and then they punish you on the offensive glass. And I think that's why they're so good and they've had so much success; they beat you in so many different ways.

Q. What is your recollection of how the Crab Five got started and what do you think of how that's taken off?

KEVIN WILLARD: The guy that runs our collective actually called me and said, have you seen this Crab Five thing? I hadn't seen it. I'm not so much on social media anymore.

So he trademarked it right away and made the T-shirts. Obviously they just got -- those guys are going to be paid; they just got paid the royalties from the T-shirts.

I think a student started it. It just took over and I think it was really cool. I don't know how it started, I don't know who started it. But I'm glad that these guys are making some money off of it because it's really cool.

Q. (Off microphone)?

KEVIN WILLARD: I think things like that are true NIL. I actually think is originally what the rule was kind of -- I think it's really cool when you make money off your name, image and likeness instead of us just paying them. I think it's great. You've got to look for opportunities to do that, yes.

Q. Obviously you've been very open the last week about trying to get greater NIL share, revenue share. I'm sure you saw Mike Locksley yesterday said he would prefer to keep some of these issues in-house. Why have you felt like kind of bringing this discussion in the open has been the best way to advocate for your

program?

KEVIN WILLARD: The biggest thing is we've got to stop Payton. He's really good. He shoots the basketball going left 48 percent. He shoots it right going at, like, 38 percent. So really the last couple of days trying to come up with a game plan to stop Clayton because I think he's one of the best guards in the country that we've seen.

And really obviously trying to fix our rebounding woes have been at the top of my mind, too. It's a big problem.

Q. I was going to ask you about Clayton. Let's roll off that. Hurley said last week that one thing that stood out to him was how quick Clayton's release is, which is impressive considering how small he is. He really understands how he needs to get the ball up. Does that jump out to you? Is there a player that he reminds you of?

KEVIN WILLARD: I mean, one of them is sitting right there holding a trophy. He reminds me of Steph a little bit of how good he is off the dribble.

It really is amazing that he shoots -- like we get a scouting report done by our analytical company. And he grades better than any player they've ever had analytically shooting the basketball off the dribble going right off the dribble, going left -- if you go under pick-and-rolls, what he shoots.

It's almost an amazing stat of how good he is. When you watch him on film, what I love about him, if he misses three in a row, his body language, it don't matter. A lot of kids get sensitive when they miss two or three in a row. He's just going to keep coming right at you. I think that's what makes him such a great shooter is he has so much confidence in himself that he's going to make the next one.

Q. You went on the radio last night or yesterday and talked about kind of working with somebody in the athletic department. Were there any updates you had for us about it?

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, we're playing Florida. We're playing Florida. It's a big match-up for us. This is all about the Sweet 16 and these guys enjoying it as much as possible. I've enjoy it tremendously.

I do love this town. It's a great town. Great food. Got to have dinner with P.J. Carlesimo last night, which is always a lot of fun, the stories we get to tell about Seton Hall. And Chris Mullin and Coach Van Gundy joined us. We had a great time last night.

Q. You mentioned how many guys have not played in the NCAA Tournament. This being the first time being in the Sweet 16, is that an area of concern for you, or is it more liberating that these guys are unfamiliar with the stage and maybe can play more freely?

KEVIN WILLARD: I'm hoping -- the first five minutes of Grand Canyon I was nervous because these guys were all a little nervous besides Ju. And I thought, the Colorado State game I thought it was a regular good basketball game but I thought the nerves had gone away.

I'm sure they're going to be nervous. I hope they're nervous. It's a great opportunity. Part of life is having opportunities. You're going to be a little nervous. You're going to be a little excited. I think that's great.

I think that's part of what makes this tournament so unbelievable. They're going to remember being nervous when the tip comes tomorrow at 4:10.

Q. I think you've talked about the analytics company or the analytics guy. Could you share who that is, what that is and big takeaways about how it's kind of shaped your thinking about modern offense, the way you guys want to play?

KEVIN WILLARD: I don't think I can comment on the company, but -- so I've always been a data guy -- the KenPom stuff, all that stuff. Anything you can get an edge helps. In the last two years, it's dramatically changed. It's all AI. His company has 50 computers in downtown Washington, D.C. There's no human bias whatsoever. It's not, like, well, Clayton might go this way.

The computer grades the games. It's not a person typing. It's not -- like, synergy is graded by someone goes in and grades it with synergy. This is all done by AI.

So when you get these reports -- and we get the reports on the portal kids, it's amazing how accurate they are. I go watch film on Clayton, I grade it myself and I have my notes. Then I go back and I get his reports. They're so spot on, it's scary.

So it's gotten so advanced that if you don't use it, I think you're falling behind.

And for us, like it grades our offense, what plays, what plays I need to run for guys going to the right, what guys I should run early in the game, who plays better at the end of the game.

It's deep. And I think it's been a great investment by -- and Damon was awesome. It was a great investment. He met

with them, loved them. I think he's helped Locks with the football. He's helped women basketball too.

I think it's something that we've invested in. It's helped us tremendously.

Q. With all this Crab Five stuff, you mentioned you had a nice dinner in San Francisco. Do you like crab, do the kids like crab? We're known for crab around here. Just curious about that.

KEVIN WILLARD: JuJu loves crabs. Coach Cox loves crabs. I like crab cake. I feel the whole process of going through cracking the crab and peeling the crab and doing all that just to get, like, it's not that much crab. It's a lot of work.

No one's ever done it -- it's really cool to have a couple of beers with friends and do it down by the harbor, it's really good. But I prefer someone just make me a nice crab cake and I love crab cake.

So you're into this Crab Five, I like it. No, I love it. I think it's awesome. I'm glad someone's concentrating on the game and the team.

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