

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Four - Samford vs Southern U

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Colonial Life Arena

## Samford Bulldogs Coach Matt Wise

Media Conference



MATT WISE: I mean, she finished the year first in three point makes in the country, and a lot of our games what I don't think people appreciate about the way she shot it at our level, right? Second playing I think right now is Fudd from UConn.

She's out there with Sarah Strong and these other unbelievable players, and so, yeah, she gets open cracks.

Well, for Bri, a lot of her looks are tough to come by. She gets denied night in and night out. For her to still produce at that level, what it does is not only does it help us scoring, obviously with her shooting ability, but it also creates this unbelievable gravity on the court where constantly people are hugging her, and so it's creating opportunities for other players.

There is a reason that nine other players had career highs this year in scoring. It's because of her being out there and what she brings to the table.

Now, you mix that and the shooting ability, and what that creates from a scheme-wise to also go with her competitive demeanor and her competitive attitude, which is something that we're trying to build this thing with, is a level of IQ and toughness and competition and also love.

She's a phenomenal teammate. I don't think it gets talked about enough. She cheers for people when she's out like she was never going to go back in the game. She cheers so unbelievably well for her teammates. Supports them when they miss shots, when they turn the ball over.

So when you have a positive attitude, competitive as all get-out and you bring it the table, yeah, it becomes real hard to get her off the floor.

**Q. You talk about that story arc, the ups and downs of the year, peaking in March. Being here, being in this setting, winning that title, how real did that seem throughout that story arc, and especially this your first year on the job?**

MATT WISE: I don't think we can ever control the timeline, right? As fast as you want it to go or as long as you think it

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back. This is our last press conference for the day. We have the head coach of the Samford Bulldogs.

Coach, just a brief opening statement and we'll take some questions.

MATT WISE: Yeah, I think for us in our program, we are so unbelievably excited about the opportunity. We're unbelievably blessed for the journey that got us here.

It came with some we'll call them ups and downs. You know, we had a hard non-conference, not too dissimilar to Southern's path. We had a rash of different injuries where we were without players for weeks on end.

All of that led to maybe a slower story arc than we would've liked, but the final result was us peaking in March, whatever peaking looked like for us.

And so for us to finish our season, our conference tournament playing the three teams that tied for first in our conference and to find a way to come out of that with the championship, I mean, we couldn't are more excited.

This group is such an unbelievable joy to coach. They're connected. They're driven. They're hard working. They're bought into the culture, bought into both sides of the floor, so it just makes every day that we get to practice a great day.

THE MODERATOR: Questions from the floor.

**Q. Coach, Brianna has started every single game or played every single game for you. She has almost 200 minutes more than the next player on the list. How is she a foundational player for you?**



might go, certainly when I was coaching on the men's side the last time I was in the NCAA tournament or even before that, I started as a grad assistant for Billy Donovan. We went both years to the Elite 8.

Then my third season at Wyoming we win the conference tournament and go to the NCAA tournament.

So at that point, three out of my five years in coaching I've been to the NCAA tournament. I thought it happened every year at that point.

Then it was a 10-year drought. My wife and I and our kids at one point lived in six different cities in six consecutive years.

So I don't know that you can predict the timeline of it happening. What I do know is when you do the right things with the right people, it will work.

I don't know the timeline. I don't know how fast. I don't know if it will happen as fast as everybody wants it to happen, but I know it'll happen.

So we got the right people on the bus. Got them in the right seats on the bus. Got them all moving in the right direction on the bus.

So, yeah, we had to change a couple tires along the way along that path, but I thought it would happen. I absolutely did. Year one, maybe not, but I absolutely thought this is the direction we were heading.

I told our administration who have supported us to the nth degree when I interviewed with them. I said I'm not asking for stuff to help us win, but we're going to win, and when we do, don't be caught off guard. It's coming.

So for it to happen in year one is a blessing, but I think that on some level it was inevitable.

**Q. As a coach how do you sort of guide your players through the quick highs of a tournament setting? Obviously had it in the conference tournament having to play back to back days and keep winning. Now you have, okay, win to get in then possibly South Carolina on the other side. How do you enjoy the moment but also keep a quick focus on what's ahead?**

MATT WISE: Well, we have the benefit of our messaging throughout the year matching what the messaging in a tournament setting needs to be.

So we've talked about not getting too high or too low. For a lot of the season for this group it was battling the too

lows, right? The non-conference losses to the big power 4s; the 1-6 start to conference play, battling through the injuries; we had a lot of lows.

So we talked about not playing with emotion but with passion. We talked about not playing too emotional with swings but rather playing one possession at a time to the best of your ability.

So that's the way that we approached two weeks ago in our conference tournament and the way we'll approach the next 48 hours or however long we're still playing. We'll go one possession at a time. That's one practice rep at a time. That's one team meeting and one film session at a time.

You can't get out past the moment that you're in. That's where our focus will be. If we can continue to be in the present moment and give the present moment the best of our abilities, then we have a good chance I think.

#### **Q. Couple keys against Southern.**

MATT WISE: Southern is unbelievably great at winning the shot total battle and the free throw total battle. Part of that is because they force a lot of turnovers. Part of that because they crash the offensive glass.

They do a great job of making you feel uncomfortable. So if you're uncomfortable in the shots you're getting and they're getting X amount more shots and free throw attempts than you, that's a recipe for success for them.

For us, we are going to have to take care of the basketball, keep them off the glass, keep attacking them, and then be able to read whether we have open finishes at the rim or kick outs or what our open looks will be.

If we can keep the shot total battle in the somewhat same range, then I like our chances with the way we have the ability to shoot the ball.

But if they're crushing us on the glass and we're turning it over like crazy, it could be a long night for us. So it's a good challenge.

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