

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Tennessee vs NC State

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Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Crisler Center

## NC State Wolfpack

## Zoe Brooks

## Khamil Pierre

## Wes Moore

### Media Conference

**Q. For both of you, share with us how this is an opportunity for your program and specifically how you'll be challenged against Tennessee tomorrow.**

**ZOE BROOKS:** We played Tennessee first game this season, as many may know, and it was a tough game. It was obviously a really hard battle, but we found a way to pull it through towards the end. I think we won by three.

I'm interested to see how tomorrow will go.

**KHAMIL PIERRE:** I think it just gives us another opportunity to show that we're a better team. I think just playing them before earlier this season gives us a better feel for the game. So I think we're pretty comfortable going into tomorrow.

**Q. Since you played Tennessee back in November, how has your team grown and changed?**

**KHAMIL PIERRE:** I think a lot of mistakes that we were making early on in the year we cleaned up. Also just having better team chemistry, a better feel for the game. I think we've just come a long way. Individually, yeah, but also as a team.

**Q. Zoe, this is your third year in the tournament, your first year you were in the Final Four, then you went to a Sweet 16. What is your expectations in this tournament as a leader, one of the leaders of the Wolfpack?**

**ZOE BROOKS:** Obviously going to a Final Four my freshman year is something I never really could have



imagined. It's going to be hard to top that. Obviously the next best thing is a National Championship.

I'm excited to see where we go my third year round. Obviously, as you said, Sweet 16 and Final Four a big deal. So pretty excited for this year.

**Q. This question is for Ms. Pierre. What are your expectations of going into this tournament? You've been off for two weeks, and you had an ACC Tournament recently. Is this a new season for you moving forward in this tournament?**

**KHAMIL PIERRE:** I think it's a new season, but also just like building on the one we already had. I think it is postseason, so just being prepared for a hard fight. It's going to be one team's last game. But overall I think we're more than ready.

**Q. This question is for both of you. Tennessee plays a really unique style. Do you feel like it benefits you that you've kind of seen the chaotic style that they play? And how do you think that might play into this matchup?**

**ZOE BROOKS:** First game of the season being pressed for 40 minutes obviously was very tough. I don't think in my three years of college we've been pressed for 40 minutes. So it definitely makes us change our play style a little bit.

But for the bigs, they're going to get layups all day. We're just going to throw the ball at the floor and the goal is to just get layups.

**KHAMIL PIERRE:** I've played Tennessee probably more than I've played any team in college basketball, so just being familiar with their system and how fast of a pace they have.

**Q. Zoe, this one's for you. I wanted to ask you particularly, this is obviously your third time being back in the NCAA Tournament, but this time being more of a leader for this team, you've gotten a chance to do that throughout this season. What does it mean**



**for you and how different is it to be back in this NCAA Tournament as a bigger leader of this team at this point?**

ZOE BROOKS: The role is definitely different. We had pretty great leaders in the past like Madison, Aziaha, Saniya, Mimi, River. This year I have to be more vocal. I have to be more of a leader and lead in multiple examples and just kind of follow what the past seniors did to me.

**Q. Coach, going into the tournament, what do you like most about your team, and what concerns you most about Tennessee?**

WES MOORE: Again, we've been a little streaky. I do like the fact we're capable of playing, I think, with anyone at a high level. We're excited about the opportunity.

Tennessee's a big challenge, obviously very long, athletic team that does a lot of things well. So I think you have to try to slow down transition game, you have to handle their press and take care of the ball because they pretty much do that the entire game. You've got to try to keep them off the offensive boards. Like I said, long and athletic.

As I mentioned the press, we've got to take care of the ball and make sure we get shots. Again, play with some toughness. Again, they're a physical, aggressive team, and we're going to have to play with a lot of physical and mental toughness.

**Q. Coach, you guys suffered a tough loss in the ACC Tournament a couple weeks back. How have you been able to make adjustments in the two weeks off since? How are you feeling heading into this matchup?**

WES MOORE: Again, it was great to have quite a bit of time where obviously not knowing who we were going to play, we were able to focus on us. So I think a lot of that, you start -- I know it's coach talk, but you've got to defend, and you've got to rebound. So just really tried to focus on those things, doing a better job, playing with a little more urgency, helping each other and getting in the gaps sort of thing.

Then like I said, rebounding both ends of the floor, trying to get an extra possession, trying to limit them to one-and-done.

Again, it was good for us to be able to focus on us most of the time and then have a week still to get prepared for this game. We're excited about getting another opportunity.

That's the thing that's tough, when you get a double bye in the conference tournament, you're playing somebody really

good right out of the gate. You have to play well, and we didn't play as well as we would have liked. But it's a whole new season. None of that matters now. It's survive and advance.

**Q. Coach, you've had the luxury of the last few years of being at home, this time on the road for a neutral site and then possibly a second round game against a home team. You're experienced. You've done this. How do you help your team in these situations for this neutral site and then a possible visiting game in the second round?**

WES MOORE: I think our nonconference schedule was very challenging. We went to some tough places. Then obviously in the ACC we had nine road games, and a lot of those were against high caliber teams.

Again, right now we're focused on obviously tomorrow night. So can't look down the road. It's a neutral site game. Again, got to focus on what's going on on the court and not worry too much about outside stuff.

That will be our focus is going to be on defending Tennessee and playing our game. Right now at this point, one game at a time.

**Q. I wanted to ask you specifically -- actually, I was going to ask you about the fact that you're on the road, but I will ask a slightly different question. How much did this time off allow you to reset? And what types of things did you guys focus on to improve that you weren't doing as well near the end of the season?**

WES MOORE: Like I said earlier, you start with defending. You've got to try to defend better. In the ACC Tournament, we faced a team that shot the ball really well. On one hand you say, okay, that's a bad day, right? But on the other hand, we weren't playing horse. We had an opportunity to guard them. So we've just got to guard better. So that was a big focus.

Obviously trying to look at how we defend certain actions and can we improve those and do a better job? Then like I said, with Tennessee, once we found them out, you know you've got to work on the press offense and dealing with that, things like that.

I think it's stuff you worked on all year. You just try to fine tune it and improve it. It's one game. You don't want to get crazy. We finished, what, 13-5 in the ACC, a really tough conference and top four. It's not like you want to throw everything out the window. You want to try to do the things you're doing better. So that's what we tried to focus on.

**Q. People talk about guard play in the tournament, and the way that Tennessee kind of plays hectic defense and presses. How important is your ball play and ball control in this game to get a good result?**

WES MOORE: Yeah, it's going to be real important. Against the press, you want to try to clear people out of there. I'm one -- I'm an advocate of the fewer people up in the front of the court the better, rather than getting a crowd up there where people can rotate easier.

Then once you see the double happening, you've got to come back and meet the ball. If it's your person going to double, obviously you come back. If they rotate up and your person is the one rotating up, now you've got to flash to the ball. We've got to help our guards. Obviously we're fortunate to have some guards with experience that handle the ball well. So I think from that standpoint we like what we do and where we're at with it.

Really it falls on everybody. You've got to recognize when somebody's in trouble. When they're trapped, you can't stand down there and just wave at them. You've got to come help them.

Again, Tennessee is super quick, athletic. Barker, with all those steals, makes a lot of plays on D, Pauldo as well. Even their post, Barker, she can do everything on the court. They've got a lot of people that are long and athletic and make it a challenge.

We've seen it before, and hopefully we handle it well. I think you've got to try to -- once they press, you've got to try to make them pay for pressing, and hopefully you can score out of that some.

**Q. I was just kind of curious what the energy has sort of been like in the locker room sort of the last couple weeks since the season kind of came to a close? Then especially what you've kind of been able to do to kind of boost morale and keep your team focused on the task at hand rather than dwelling on what happened in the ACC Tournament?**

WES MOORE: Like I said, I haven't pounded a lot on that ACC Tournament. Obviously I was disappointed with the way we played, very disappointed in the way we played. Felt like we kind of got challenged. If you want to say hit in the mouth early, and probably didn't respond as well as I would like. I thought our energy in practice early the next week was good.

As we got towards the end of that week and you still don't know who you're playing, it was a little tougher. They're

probably ready to, okay, let's move on.

But yeah, I think our energy has been pretty good. Hopefully our confidence is good as well. Again, it happens. Some of these scores in games are amazing to see the flip side. You lose by 25 in one week, and two weeks later you win by 25 against the same team. I just don't think you can look back on that any more. We've got to move on. We know we're playing a great team. We're going to have to play really well, and we're going to have to play with a lot of energy.

We're going to have to handle adversity. They talked about playing here, not at home, whatever. You're going to have adversity, and you've got to be able to handle that and overcome it. Like I said, that's where not only physical toughness, you're going to have to have some mental toughness and not blink.

**Q. Coach, your two schools, NC State and Tennessee, both connected to legendary coaches. You coached under Coach Yow. You were in Tennessee for a long time. I know you had to have a relationship with Pat Summitt. What did those two teach you about basketball?**

WES MOORE: I've been very blessed. I went to a small college outside of Knoxville as a student-athlete, so I was around it some. Then my first six years of coaching I was at a D-III school, Maryville college, and Pat Summitt actually lived in Maryville, Tennessee, when she was coaching. I got to really see an inside look, go to practices all the time, work her camps.

When I got the job at UT Chattanooga that summer, she came up and said, Wes, let's play opening weekend every year, and that was great because they would come to us. It was home and home, so we alternated. We'd have over 11,000 at a home game, which was pretty special. Now, a lot of them might have been wearing orange, but we had our fair share.

Pat was great, and just her toughness, the way she demanded certain things, it was great.

Then working with Kay Yow from '93 to '95, another legendary coach. So I've been around two of the real trailblazers in our sport. Coach Yow, up tempo coach, wanted to run, took NC state to a Final Four, took -- coached USA team to a gold medal, so a high level coach in her own right and just an unbelievable person.

Yeah, I've been very blessed and was able to learn a lot from two legends.

**Q. We had a chance to chat with Zoe Brooks about her improved leadership as she takes on a larger role in leading this locker room. Could you talk about how her game has developed both on the court and her leadership skills off the court over the course of her NC State career?**

WES MOORE: Her first two years, she played with two guards that ended up being first round draft picks last year in the WNBA. So she had a great year a year ago, but she also had those players to deflect some of the stuff and make it a little bit easier for her.

So I think the start of the year she struggled with that some. It was just different being the focal point for opponents, being the focal point on your team in a leadership position. She's improved tremendously. You can see it's almost like a switch.

She wasn't having fun early in the year, I'll be honest with you. It's just all the stuff going on. Then it kicked in, she got her confidence, started playing at a really high level. When you do that, you have fun.

I met with each of my players individually a week or so ago, and almost every one of them said the most positive influence in our locker room is Zoe. So that makes you feel good when you hear that.

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