

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

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Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Reynolds Coliseum

NC State Wolfpack

Wes Moore

Media Conference



hosting is pretty amazing. It's a great accomplishment, makes it hard to get hotel rooms, things like that. Other than that, I think that's what it's about. March Madness, you know.

It's always exciting here in ACC country.

Q. You've been in the game for a long time. Is you've been in the game for 34 years. You've watched the game grow over the years. Is this where you envisioned women's basketball when you started coaching -- you know.

WES MOORE: I started at Maryville College right outside Knoxville, Tennessee. No, I probably didn't see this on the radar. Heck, I don't know if I saw this on the radar when I first got here to NC State. It's just exploded.

A lot of it has to do with the players. They're athletic. They're talented. They're skilled. They've worked really hard at their trade, and because of that, it's a great product. I think our Final Four maybe outgrew the men's Final Four viewership last year. That's impressive.

So it's an exciting time to be a part of it. I'm happy for our student-athletes, for the young ladies to get recognized and to get the attention I feel like they deserve. It's pretty awesome.

I don't know, you have to look back at Kay Yow, Pat Summitt, Tara Vanderveer, what Geno has done, some of the early trail blazers on the coaching side. But like I said, most of it goes back to the players and what they've been able to do to make it fun to watch.

Q. Wes, jumping on from there, over the years it's become more challenging for coaches to maybe keep players or players to stay or keep them from exploring other avenues. You've built up a team that's got some pretty good consistency in players like Aziaha and Saniya staying with the program for a long time. Where is the challenge in that and helping them to realize for themselves whether to stay or go? And what's the challenge as a coach to try and create that atmosphere for them to stay and build and grow and

THE MODERATOR: In case you need an introduction, this is NC State Coach Wes Moore entering his 12th season, coming off an ACC Coach of the Year performance for the Wolfpack, tied for the regular season for the ACC Championship.

Q. Coach, like we just heard, ACC Coach of the Year. You've had a few of those in your career, but it's a great conference for women's college basketball. Just what does it mean to you to be in that conversation for the best coach in one of the best leagues in the country?

WES MOORE: It's a great honor. Obviously it's a team award, let's face it. You've got to have great players that make great plays and then surround yourself with really good people, which I've been blessed to do with our staff.

I get it, it's a team award, but it is, it's a great honor when you look at the coaches in this league. It's always nice to be recognized by your peers and that sort of thing.

It's a great honor. I'm very proud of it. But I also realize it's a team award, and it's about our program.

Q. Wes, now that this week has arrived and there is all this hubbub in the triangle with the three women's teams and the men's regional. What's your take on that? Does it maybe take away a little bit from each program that everyone's getting a piece of the pie? How do you look at that?

WES MOORE: I don't think so. I think we're soldout, aren't we? There's not much more we can do than that.

I think it's awesome. This is ACC, Tobacco Road. This is what it's all about. To have eight men's teams and then have all three of the local teams on the women's side



keep climbing like you guys have been?

WES MOORE: We've been very blessed, as you mentioned, Saniya, Aziaha, Zoe, some of our high profile players have been happy and been loyal. I especially take a lot of, I don't know, just makes me feel good that like Aziaha James, who first year or two didn't probably play as much as she would like, and nowadays in this environment a lot of kids would have left, and she stuck it out and developed and is reaping the benefits of it now.

I think part of it too, our administration -- Boo, Stephanie -- they've given us the resources to give our student-athletes an unbelievable experience. We do everything first class. So I think that helps that they feel like they're treated well and put in a good position.

Then winning doesn't hurt any. As long as we can keep doing that, I think players still enjoy that, it's still important to them.

You're right, it's a little bit harder nowadays, a little bit different, but it is what it is. I'm happy. Again, I think the whole -- I shouldn't probably go off this way, but the whole NIL idea was, I think, a great idea. You come in, you play well, and a local dealership wants to let you use a car or a local company wants to sponsor you, whatever, I think that's great.

The recruiting process, I think's gotten out of hand a little bit, but other than that, I think it's great for the student-athletes, again, to be able to be rewarded for what they've -- the time and work they've put in.

But we have been blessed, there's no doubt about it. We didn't, as far as our top players, they all stayed with us, and we're very blessed to have them.

Q. I was just curious, because you touched on it earlier, can you think of an era that was similar to this one in terms of the level of skill being so high, the competition level being so high, the viewership being so high all at the same time? Whether it was like the 2000s, mid-'90s, late '80s, where things were peaking, or is this just a unique time for women's basketball?

WES MOORE: I just think it's really exploding right now like it never has. I hope I heard you and am answering correctly, but again, the game has taken leaps before, but I just think right now it's a rocket. It's taking off.

Again, you've got to remember now, in the late '80s I was a Division III coach, so we weren't getting a ton of viewership over there. It's still basketball. Going back to the first question, I had five or six, I guess six of our former players

that I coached 30 years ago in Division III come over and spend the weekend the last two years and see a game, and it's still basketball. These young ladies, they love the game.

It's just an added plus that now it's taking off and they're getting the recognition.

Q. Talk about players sticking around, we've had a few in this current, Aziaha, Saniya, Madison Hayes part of that group as well, that have really stuck around and grown in their time at NC State. What's it been like from your perspective to see them grow as basketball players and as people over the course of their time in Raleigh?

WES MOORE: Yeah, that's the most rewarding part of being a teacher and a coach. Sometimes they don't always appreciate you in the moment, and I understand that. You're trying to push them and challenge them and get them -- you maybe have higher expectations for them than they maybe even have for themselves.

Once they graduate and get out, a lot of times they will reach back out and appreciate maybe being pushed to be better. So to see the way some of them have grown, especially those kids that have been here a few years. Saniya's come a long way with her perimeter game. Aziaha and Saniya both handling adversity have gotten better. Madison Hayes does it all for us -- rebounding, shooting 3s, defending.

Even this year, to watch Tilda and Lorena, two freshmen to grow as much as they have, and they still have a little ways to go, but that's what you get in it for, to see kids develop, grow up, mature on the court, off the court. It's what makes you do this.

Q. Don't want to get my facts wrong here, this program has played 21 of its NCAA Tournament games here in Raleigh and is 19-2 in this contest. From a coach's perspective, how substantial is it to play here in Raleigh in your first weekend to open up the tournament?

WES MOORE: There's no doubt it's what you work for all year. That's probably why I put more pressure on myself for more than anything else is trying to make sure you're a top 16 seed and get the opportunity to host.

I've had Sirius Radio ask me this week in an interview how I feel about the team getting to host and all that. Well, when I was at Chattanooga, I didn't particularly care for it so much, but now when you're at an NC State, you want that opportunity to earn that.



Definitely, it's what you work for all year. It's why every game is so important because every game is going to be on that resume. Whether it's a big win or avoiding a bad loss, every night is a challenge.

It's exciting to be at home, but again it doesn't guarantee you anything. You've still got to go out and play well. We know it's going to -- this time of year, all these teams are good. If you don't play well, they'll bite you.

Q. You talk about it being a time like no other for women's basketball. Let's talk about the financial incentives and units. How overdue do you feel that is for women's basketball teams to get paid to play in the tournament, and what do you think that means?

WES MOORE: I think it's pretty neat. I'm a team player. I want to do everything I can to help NC State and to help NC State athletics. So it's great to have an opportunity to really contribute to that.

I think, again, a lot of it goes back to the viewership. Now they realize the value of women's basketball in advertising and all those areas, marketing. So now they're being rewarded for that.

I think it's great. It is something that coaches have strived for for a long time, so it's neat to finally reach that goal.

Q. You mentioned a little bit before Lorena and Tilda stepping up as freshmen. Zam Jones we've seen come up big as a freshman. This is their first March Madness. What's it been like preparing them for this stage? Obviously had another big stage in the conference tournament, but this is the Big Dance.

WES MOORE: Yeah, it is, but it's still basketball. I don't try to overstress it or whatever. I had a question early this week when we did a press conference about the mental health and all that, and yeah, we've got great resources for that. We've got plenty of people in sports psychologists, counselors, things like that, if that's needed.

But I want this to be a fun time. Like I said, I don't call it March Madness, I call it March Gladness. It's what you work for all year long. Let's go out and enjoy it.

So we really haven't talked a whole lot about that. Zamareya's won a state championship. She's been in big games, travel ball, things like that. Tilda's played internationally, Lorena -- I mean, it's basketball at the end of the day. You do worry when you've got freshmen, they're going to have ups and downs. That's just part of life.

But they've been good for us all year, and we expect them to be good this weekend.

Q. You brought up the March Gladness. I think you should put that on T-shirts and make some money off that.

WES MOORE: NIL deal (laughter).

Q. You've had some great teams here at NC State. What is it about this team that you love the most? What they have accomplished after making a Final Four last year.

WES MOORE: Yeah, I'm real proud of this group because, again, we really didn't have a lot of good answers up front for our interior game. Again, everyone says this time of year it's about guards. When you ask what I like about it, we've got some veteran guards that are really, really talented. Saniya and Aziaha and Zoe, those three in the starting lineup, I'd say you could stack them up with about anybody in the country.

Then like I said, you're able to bring Zamareya in, as well as some others, so that's big. I think our freshmen posts have come a long way. Are they there yet? No, but they're a lot better than they were two months ago. Hopefully they're going to continue to grow like that. So much potential in both of them.

Yeah, again, it's exciting to be back in this position. I wasn't sure we'd be hosting and things like that, but they've done an unbelievable job. I think we went through a stretch where we won 20 out of 22 games.

I love the consistency, showing up night in and night out, taking care of business, and finding a way to win on a night when maybe you don't play great.

I still think we've got room to grow. I'm very disappointed in the ACC Championship game. I think we can defend better. I think we can rebound better. We'd better do that if we want to be in this tournament standing for a while.

Q. Nikki West has been on your staff for so long. What have you noticed about her growth as a coach?

WES MOORE: Everyone talks about Geno and Chris Dailey, which again, Geno only has about 400 more wins than me. I don't know why he gets so much attention -- and 11 national titles. Anyway, Nikki is kind of my Chris Dailey. She's taken on more and more responsibility. I'm learning to let stuff go a little bit, especially the stuff I don't want to deal with, yeah, I let her handle that.



She's really good. She walks that fine line of the players love her and they know she's there for them and will do anything for them, but when they need to be told what's right, she don't mind stepping on some toes.

I think that's what coaching is about. I think that's what parenting is about. It's being able to be a friend, but also them understanding, hey, there's a little line here at some point. She's done a great job of that.

Extremely hard worker. You go back to loyalty. I know a couple years ago she had another school offer her quite a bit more money. She turned it down without even telling me. Of course then I went to Boo, and he made it right and helped us make it right, but that just tells you what kind of person.

So very blessed to have her with me. Again, she's taken on -- she oversees the whole staff pretty much. Like I said, she's really great with the players as far as helping them hear what they need to hear instead of what they want to hear all the time, things like that.

Q. Obviously you want to get back to the Final Four after the trip last year. Obviously that doesn't happen until you win this upcoming game. Vermont comes in as the American East champion. I believe they're fourth in the country in fewest points allowed per game. What stands out about them on tape?

WES MOORE: You heard it right there, they're fourth in the country in fewest points allowed, 52 points a game. They're hot. They've won 9 of their last 10, 16 of their last 18.

Probably concerns, their post play. They're going to have two bigs out there whereas we a lot of times have four guards. So matching up, their posts can really score the ball. So that's a concern, how do we guard them without getting in foul trouble?

Then maybe their best scorer from the perimeter standpoint, Hanson, comes in off the bench and can score from all three levels. I worry about -- she's shooting like 44 percent from 3 on the season. Conference play is right at 40 percent. So when she comes in, she gives them a little spark and gets them going.

Yeah, they've got a lot to be worried about. Like I said, we're going to have to defend better than we did in Greensboro. Hopefully we'll learn from that because, again, points are going to be hard to come by on the other end. So we'd better be defending on that end.

People are talking about, well, you do this next, you do that, no, we're worried about Vermont. We love the movie White Christmas too, so Vermont, it's a great place. Showing my age.

Q. Talking about the freshmen a little bit here too. You've seen them play more down the stretch of the season, freshmen, young players in general, and into the conference tournament. As opposed to last year when you had Aziaha and Saniya playing 40 minutes every night, how much does that help with the rotation to keep players fresh in the grind of March?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I'm probably still playing them too much, to be honest. I'm going to hopefully be able to rotate a little bit, keep them a little bit fresher. Conference tournament is tough because you play three games in three days. At least here you have a day off in between or a day to prepare in between.

I do, I'm excited about the freshmen we have. I'm going to include Devyn Quigley in there. We've got Laci Steele and Maddie Cox and Mallory, three sophomores. So I've got to look for opportunities to try to get them in there some.

Again, especially in the conference tournament, I probably should have tried too, but again, every game over there was tight. That opening game against Georgia Tech, we held on by one point. Then obviously against Carolina, hotly contested game.

I've got a habit of sticking with, as Darryl royal used to say again, showing my age, University of Texas football, we're going to dance with the one that brung us, but we still need to make sure we utilize the bench and try to keep people fresh.

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