

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - NC State vs Texas

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Moda Center

NC State Wolfpack
Coach Wes Moore
River Baldwin
Madison Hayes

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from NC State is Wes Moore.

Coach, if you want to open it up with an opening statement.

WES MOORE: Yeah, obviously we're excited to be here, excited about being in the Sweet 16. I didn't realize it till the other day it came across the ticker, I think five out of the last six years we've been in the Sweet 16.

I'm real proud of this group for maintaining that level of success. Obviously we got a great challenge ahead of us. Somebody was joking, between Tara and myself, we have 2000 wins. I think she's more than carrying her side of that (smiling).

No, obviously a legend in our game. Unbelievable players. So we know we've got a big challenge.

We're excited being here. We're excited to be in Portland. It's a beautiful place. Hadn't been here in a long time. It's a neat, neat spot. All the way around excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Wes, obviously the story with Stanford is Cam and Kiki on the inside, in the paint. Is there a team that you played that you can compare them to? Does anyone have that kind of 1-2 punch in the ACC? Can you stop 'em, or is it more about we have to make the guards beat us?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, obviously there's a combination of posts like that. I don't know if we've seen



that this year or not. A lot of teams will have a two-man game, a guard and a post, whatever. But to have two posts that are averaging close to 20 a game is kind of rare.

Yeah, it's going to be a big challenge. We've worked on a whole lot of different stuff. You hope that something sticks. You hope something works. No doubt, big challenge for us.

I don't think you're going to stop 'em, but you hope you can maybe slow 'em down a little bit.

Q. What are you most proud of of this team, the growth throughout the year?

WES MOORE: Yeah, talking about a team that pre-season wasn't ranked top 25. I think we were picked eighth in the ACC. Just real proud of the fact that they've just kept working and working.

I think our chemistry's really good. I always think culture is a big factor in the success of a team. So I think they've really gotten along great. They've been unselfish. They pull for each other.

Whenever somebody needs to step up, that's what's great, we don't rely on one player on a given night. We've had probably everybody in our lineup, our starting five, six, top six or seven players have put up 25 points on a given night. It's good when you can have that kind of balance, not have to live and die with one player. I think that's probably the biggest thing: the team, the way as a unit they have continued to get better.

Q. If the performance units program for the tournament came to the women's side, what could that mean for the sport?

WES MOORE: One more time?

Q. If the performance units program, like the men's side have, where you get rewarded for each win financially, comes to the women's side in the near future, what could that mean for the women's game?



WES MOORE: Yeah, I mean, I think right now the game is so popular. I mean, I think our numbers, our TV ratings, things, are right now comparable with men, with the NBA. It's just an exciting time for our sport.

Obviously we'd love to see that happen. I think now with our new TV contract, the emphasis that ESPN has made on women's basketball, I think you're going to continue to see it take leaps.

A lot of this is due to the talent. You've got some great players right now. Now you have it where people are going to see a particular player. That just tells you how far our game has come.

I think also, I hate to admit it, the portal has probably caused for parity. Right now I think this thing's pretty wide open. I know South Carolina has definitely separated themselves during the regular season. But I do think there's a lot of parity in our game. I think that makes it exciting for people, as well.

Q. When Tara was up here, she said she thought in some ways the sport has grown so fast that the landscape hasn't kept up with every single change. One of the ways she brought that up was she was in favor of going to four regional sites. Do you agree with her? Do you see areas where maybe the growth of the sport has out-paced some of the infrastructure?

WES MOORE: Well, I'll be honest, unfortunately last year we didn't make it to this one. This is my first experience with eight teams in one site. So far I like it. We'll see.

Like I said, I'm excited to be in Portland. I do like the fact that people don't have a home-court advantage. We ran into that a couple of years ago. We were a double-overtime loss away from going to the Final Four. From that standpoint, I've noticed that Oregon State is in Albany. UConn is in Portland. I think they've made an effort to kind of even the playing surface.

From that standpoint, I like it. Who knows? She's been around a lot longer than I have. Probably has a better feel for it. But I'm excited to be in Portland.

Q. Obviously the Wolfpack men's team has used the "Why not us" as a rallying cry for their team based on the lack of expectation. For you and this team, do y'all have something similar?

WES MOORE: No, I just remind 'em from time to time that we have probably been several times picked to end our season, and we're still here, so... We're still alive.

So just kind of expounding on that a little bit, I'm so happy for our men, Coach Keatts, that program, what they've done. Yeah, I love the saying "Why not us," but we can't copy that, so...

We'll just keep hanging in here. Yeah, I mean, I think both our teams have maybe overachieved from what people on the outside thought. What people think on the inside is what matters.

Our kids, they're feeling good right now. They're confident. They're excited about the next step.

Q. With Stanford coming into your conference next year, do you look at this game as a preview of what the regular season is going to be like for you next year in conference play?

WES MOORE: Well, two things on that subject.

First of all, I thought, Oh, boy, Cameron Brinks is going to the WNBA, we won't have to play against her. Then the bracket comes out, we win a couple of games, I get to meet her (smiling).

Then the other thing is, I'm going to try to talk to Tara and them and see, because we're supposed to come out here next year. I'm going to see if this can count against our game out here against Stanford and we'll just count it double (smiling).

No, I think it's exciting to have them coming in. Again, all three teams. I grew up in Dallas. I'm excited about SMU. I grew up watching them. I'm glad they're in a Power Five now. Then Cal and Stanford, it's exciting to expand our conference out to the West Coast. I think that's good.

So, yeah, I think it's all good. Right now, I'm not really looking at it as a conference game. We'll just focus on where we are.

Q. Lindsay Edmonds has emerged as a candidate, Virginia Tech. She's had a lot of success at Rice, took them to the tournament. Do you think she's ready to be a Power Five head coach? What qualities does she have that will eventually make her a Power Five coach?

WES MOORE: Lindsay is definitely ready to be a Power Five coach. She has all the qualities you look for. What amazes me, she's got three daughters. When she was with us, she had two daughters. I don't know how you do it. But she juggled it. She didn't cut corners on our side, on the professional side. Obviously it helps having a great husband to kind of cover things for her, as well.

Lindsay can evaluate. She can recruit. She's great with people. She knows the game. She works hard. I mean, she texts me at 1:00 in the morning and said, Hey, Ulrick is telling me to go to bed, and I'm telling him Coach Moore wouldn't go to bed.

She's working her tail off. It's exciting to see the fast track she's on. Yeah, she's definitely ready whenever opportunity is there.

Q. I was honestly surprised to see that Stanford and NC State haven't played since the '90s. From afar, what do you admire about their program, what you've seen from coach Tara over the years?

WES MOORE: Admire about Stanford's program?

Q. Yes.

WES MOORE: Is that what it was? I'm old, y'all. I have trouble sometimes (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, again, this is my 35th year as a head coach. I've been around a while. I was fortunate to be around Pat Summitt and Kay Yow. Obviously Tara, I kind of put her in that same group. Obviously she has kept winning and winning and winning and has passed everybody.

But, yeah, it's amazing what she's done. The culture, the top program. Not only the winning, but the way they handle and carry themselves is impressive. I think UConn, Tennessee, Stanford are some of the schools that started this path for all of us. Obviously Connecticut, throw them in there. Now South Carolina is kind of carrying it, as well.

Yeah, Stanford, when you think of the top two or three programs in the country, they instantly come to mind. That's because of Tara and the job she's done.

Q. I'm sure you know a lot of the great, outstanding true freshmen that are playing in the NCAA tournament. You have one of them in Zoe. Can you talk to her contributions not only in the tournament, but throughout the season and some of the things you've thrown at her to see what she can handle.

WES MOORE: Zoe has continued to get better and better. It's tough, y'all. To be playing in a high school a year ago, now to be on this stage and playing the elite players in the country that are fixing to go to the WNBA, that's a big jump for an 18-year-old kid.

She's handled it great. Obviously we knew we were getting somebody special. We've really needed her to play

the point, play off the ball a little bit, to be able to move Saniya Rivers off the ball some. Just from a standpoint she's played a lot of minutes, played a big role for us.

She's still a freshman. There's still things -- luckily my hair is not gray yet, but she's probably contributed to that at times. At the same time she's been special, and she's got a great future ahead of her. I think she's handled things extremely well, especially in the ACC and now in this NCAA tournament run. Handled it really well.

Q. Stanford is joining the ACC next season. It's already a deep league. How do you feel like the depth and the strength of the ACC has prepared your team for the post-season?

WES MOORE: I told our team last night, we have five wins against teams that are still playing, that are here in the Sweet 16. I mean, there's 15 teams other than ourselves. We've got five wins against those teams.

I think our non-conference schedule and then obviously the ACC schedule, I mean, now I think we've got three teams left in the Sweet 16 from our conference. I think that's impressive. No doubt those things, you can convince your players, Hey, you've played against the best, you're built for this, we know we can compete with anybody in the country.

So it's definitely a big factor. That's why we schedule the way we do. Hopefully by playing those kind of games early, now you're not overwhelmed or overly concerned about whoever you might play at this point.

Q. Thinking about people who have out-performed outside expectations, Aziaha James comes to mind. What has been the key to her success in leading you in scoring?

WES MOORE: I think a couple things. First of all, she and Saniya, after we had a disappointing ending last year, they got in the gym. All summer long they put the work in. I love the saying: the harder our work, the luckier I get. They've put the time in. I think that also breeds confidence when you've put that time in.

I think confidence is a big factor. Aziaha still has times where she wants to help our team win so badly that if she makes a mistake or whatever, she's pretty hard on herself. I think she's gotten better at that. That's what you'll try to see grow even the next year or so, because she obviously is one of the elite players in the country. We wouldn't be where we are without her and the performance she had just the other day against Tennessee. I thought it helped us get off to a great start.

But she's capable of making plays on both ends of the floor and doing a lot of things for us. Again, I'm proud of her and happy that she's enjoying the fruits of her labor a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much. Best of luck tomorrow.

WES MOORE: Thank y'all. Thank y'all.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now from NC State, our student-athletes.

We'll open it up for questions.

Q. River, how do you assess your play and your development since leaving Florida State and coming to NC State? Did you anticipate having the year you've had so far?

RIVER BALDWIN: Honestly, I thank Coach Moore just for giving me a new opportunity. I think that I was underestimated coming in to NC State. Just to have the opportunity and his open mind to allowing me to be more than a screen-and-roll post player, to even have confidence in me and rely on me to score back to the basket in the post, and expand my range to 15 feet, has given me confidence. I'm grateful for the opportunity.

Q. With Stanford coming into your conference next year, are you kind of looking at this game as almost a preview of what's to come next year with conference play?

MADISON HAYES: Yeah, you know, when we found out that Stanford is coming into our conference, it's different obviously. A couple of other teams are coming from that West Coast. But we're really excited, expanding the ACC. I feel like it's a good thing for us to see different styles of play, too, as well.

I think getting this early in the Sweet 16 will be good for us.

Q. Madison, River, you're obviously the team's leading rebounders. What is going to be the key to winning that battle against Stanford?

RIVER BALDWIN: I think the key is just the physicality, just making sure that we're locked in every box-out. The post players are going to have their work cut out, so making sure the guards come in and clean that up.

MADISON HAYES: I agree. Just making sure that on the defensive end we're having all five people go, then just making sure on the offensive end we're getting as much

boards as possible and easy points.

Q. Madison, talk about your leadership in regards to this team. After last year, what happened, that season, talk about your development and your leadership of this ballclub.

MADISON HAYES: I think coming into this year, especially after last year's devastation of not making it after the first round in Utah, I think we had all of us, seniors and veterans, came together and really know we really want this bad as we want it, and let the freshmen know that we want it, too. We're all on the same page.

I feel like our chemistry has really gotten better. Making sure keeping us all together, it's not just a one-man effort. All of us veterans are pretty much leaders in their own way. I feel like that's how we lead our team, so...

Q. NC State didn't make it this far last year. Madison, what does it mean to get NC State back to a Sweet 16 level and have a chance to play another storied program like Stanford?

MADISON HAYES: It's exciting. Being my sophomore year when I first got here, I was part of Sweet 16, Elite 8 team. Just being able to watch and really learn from the veterans that year, it was astounding to watch. It was extraordinary to see how far we could go.

Really being a part of it really impacting the Sweet 16. I feel like as long as we play like we've been playing, we can really go as far as we want to go.

RIVER BALDWIN: Yeah, I think it's even bigger in my mind. I've made it to the NCAA tournament every year I've been in college, but I've never made it past the first round. When we made it to the round of 32, even this is a new experience for me.

To be such a big part of a team that can accomplish so much, this has been such a great opportunity and a new experience for me. I'm a fifth-year, so it's crazy (smiling).

Q. River, we all saw you and Mimi with the big hug after the Tennessee game. How much does it mean to you in your last run with NC State to extend that run and get the program back to this stage?

RIVER BALDWIN: Yeah, it means a lot just to be a part of a program that has such a great legacy and reputation. To be a part of that is an honor.

In that video, clearly emotional, I feel emotional right now, to have the opportunity to play part of the NCAA



tournament in front of your home crowd that's so supportive, shows love day in and day out, every time we're in Reynolds, it's amazing. I got emotional having to leave that place and those people, but I know they're supporting us from afar.

Q. What has stood out about Stanford when looking at the scouting report?

MADISON HAYES: I feel like just with the scouting report that we have to box out and rebound. They got two really great posts, Kiki and Cameron. They're really amazing at the post. I feel like our matchups for our bigs, it will be big for them.

Also I feel like they can match up with them perfectly. I feel like they'll be fine. They just got to do their job. Then us guards have to help as well, get to shooters. No. 33, Jump, she can really shoot the ball. We have to make sure we get to our shooters quickly but also help our posts down low.

RIVER BALDWIN: As she said, very post-heavy scoring, averaging 18 and 19 points a game. The key is to make everybody else score, try to shut down that post play. They're combining for about 40 points a game. If we shut that down, make somebody else score, hopefully it will benefit us.

THE MODERATOR: Madison, River, thank you very much.

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