

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

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Moda Center

NC State Wolfpack

Wes Moore

Saniya Rivers

Madison Hayes

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to the women's basketball Portland regional. With us now for NC State is head coach Wes Moore.

Coach, if you want to start with an opening statement and then we'll open the room to questions.

WES MOORE: Yeah.

Excited to be here and to advance and proud of our team, again, overcoming a first-half deficit against a really great Stanford team. So really proud of that.

And now it's kind of like being at the beach and the ocean and the waves just keep coming.

So now here comes Texas, and they're a talented team as well.

But, again, we're excited about the preparation and having the opportunity to keep advancing.

THE MODERATOR: Let's start in front.

Q. Coach, the last time this team was in the Final Four was in 1998. What would it mean for the program to return to the Final Four?

WES MOORE: Yeah. I mean, obviously, that's what everybody works for. You know, it's been just a couple of years ago we were in this same position in the Elite 8, lost in double overtime. So, you know, I think our program expects to be in a position to compete for this every year. And, obviously, it doesn't work out every year.



But, you know, this is our goal, and I think we're locked in and focused and, again, excited about the opportunity.

Q. I know it was a quick turnaround, but what so far has stuck out to you in Texas or going through film?

WES MOORE: Yeah, Vic Schaefer is known for his defense. His teams play aggressive, denial defense.

Really get in the passing lanes, pressure the ball, try to turn you over. So that's what stands out.

And then, obviously, they do pick you up full court, similar type of strategy of denying the inbounds pass and really trying to apply pressure for 94 feet.

So we're going to have to be able to handle that.

And the last few games we've been very good at taking care of the ball. And that's going to be really critical and important and quite honestly tougher in this game.

But, you know, that's going to be a big part of what we do.

Q. Madison Booker struggled a little bit yesterday with foul trouble and some turnovers.

But just generally what you've seen from her this year.

I know you've had an impressive freshman, but what has impressed you about her?

WES MOORE: Are you talking about Booker?

Q. Yeah.

WES MOORE: Again, first of all, you've got to give Coach Schaefer and their team a lot of credit for overcoming the loss of their point guard, Harmon, and again, great player. But to do what Booker's done to move to the point guard as a freshman in this situation is really impressive.

And you can tell she's a big-time player already, and she's going to be one of the best in the country, especially as



she continues to gain experience.

So, yeah. I mean, it's a tough matchup.

Because of her length, she can get her shot off. You know, those jump shots are hard to defend because of her length and her ability to get it off.

So, yeah. Can't say enough about her.

Q. Coach, what's been the biggest change with Aziaha from last year to this year? Like, what has prepared her for this much bigger role on your team?

WES MOORE: Yeah. I mean, first of all, she's put in a lot of work this summer, both her and Saniya.

You know, I'm a big believer in, you know, the harder I work, the luckier I get. So she's put in the work to get here.

And then I think confidence and knowing that she's going to be out there. She's going to be the key position, the key role for us. And I think that's given her a lot of confidence to be able to grow her game and maybe not worry quite as much about making a mistake.

I know she's hard on herself but, again, she's able to bounce back from a little bit easier. But, yeah...

I think hard work and the confidence that that brings. And she's had success. You know, when you've done what she's done in the ACC, and your fellow coaches vote you All ACC First Team, that ought to give you a little bit of confidence too.

Q. When you look at Texas' film, why do you think they're effective with the style of defense they play?

WES MOORE: Well, I think you don't see everyone playing it, you know. Duke in our conference is very similar as far as bringing the heat. But, you know, they really try to take you out of what you want to do.

You know, when you're trying to run a set or get the ball to a certain player, they make it tough. And if you're not careful, you'll end up continuing to retreat to get the ball, and now you're catching it near half court. And you don't score near half court.

So you've got to really make sure you're doing backdoor cuts and you're attacking the pressure.

But, again, I think it's just you don't see it every day.

It reminds me a lot of Pat Summitt's defense.

I grew up in my coaching career near her in Knoxville and all. Very similar type defense.

Again, I think we'd all like to play it, but maybe we don't have all the ability. But, again, they do a great job with it.

Q. It's been two years since you've been on this Elite 8 stage. I was just wondering if over the past year since the program's been through a lot in that time, if you've learned anything about yourself as a coach, if you feel like you've grown as a coach in any way over the last couple years since that UConn game?

WES MOORE: Yeah. I need to quit eating such a big lunch, and maybe I wouldn't grow so much as a coach. [Laughter]

You know, I think you always are looking in the mirror and reflecting and, you know, I've got things -- again, you lose in double overtime to go to the Final Four, it sticks with you. I mean, it haunts you. I mean, no doubt. But you've got to move on.

This is a new year, new team and all those things.

And, you know, I'm proud of what this program's done.

I didn't even realize.

When it went across the ticker last weekend after we won the regional or whatever that we've gone to the Sweet 16 five out of the last six years.

So I think, again, our program has the confidence, has the culture and feels like we belong on this stage. But no doubt, we need to take another step. And that's what's in front of us.

It will be tough against a great team, but we're excited about the chance.

Q. They've got another NC State team on an Elite 8 run right now. You've talked in the past about your bond with coach. What's been that synergy like in this march with both teams on a big run?

WES MOORE: Unbelievable. Again, I was blessed to be in D.C. when they finished off the ACC tournament. And then, obviously, being able to follow them as much as possible.

Last night I caught myself looking up, checking the score a couple of times. Probably not a good idea.

Just super excited for Coach Keatts and for those guys, man. They've grown so much as a team, and they're playing so well together. They've just got a lot of momentum.

You know, I think Coach Keatts and I share, you know, how hard this is. And so I think that's why we have a little bit of a bond in that respect. This is tough. I mean, you're in the ACC. There's 14 other great teams that want to win it. They've got scholarships, too. It's tough. So, yeah.

I mean, I'm super excited for Coach Keatts. He's a great guy. He's worked for everything. And it's exciting for our university, for our students, for our fans. It's just a lot of fun.

I talked to our A.D. this morning. He said, if I accepted every free beer that's been offered me here in Dallas, you know, I'd probably be in a gutter somewhere or something. He's had to turn those down. But, yeah.

I think everyone involved with NC State's really, really on a high right now and enjoying the ride.

Q. Aziaha mentioned last night that she practices that low go. What's your confidence level in that shot for her?

WES MOORE: Well, again, I thought it might have been a little early, might could have got another step or two in. But, you know, it's ironic. When I was at Chattanooga, we played Rutgers in the NCAA tournament and got a big, big upset. And I instantly thought -- in fact, the young lady that hit it just came over from Tennessee last weekend to see us play in the regional.

She hit a shot just like that, end of the shot clock, way out of the low go. And when Aziaha made that, I thought, that's good karma right there. I like this. Because it's a very similar situation, and I think it gave us a lot of momentum to finish that game out.

Young lady at the time named Katie Galloway, now Katie Burrows. And we were fortunate, we knocked off Rutgers in that game.

They had Cappie Poindexter, Chelsea Newton, Vivian Stringer, the coach. So instantly I thought about those two shots.

Q. Wes, I know Madison Hayes was here on that last Elite 8 run. I know River Baldwin's been in the tournament. How significant is it to have players who, even if they haven't won the Elite 8 or they haven't gotten here, just to have that big-game tournament

experience?

WES MOORE: Yeah. You know, I think, really, at this point they've all had a lot of big-game experience, you know? Again, we played UConn earlier.

We played Colorado early.

Now, you know, just what we've gone through, you know, Tennessee, a Stanford, to get here to this point.

I think they all have felt that big-game experience. So it's always nice to have it, no doubt.

But I think really what's relevant is this team has been through a lot of big games.

Q. Coach, down 10 at halftime, what did you say in the locker room to the team to spark them in the second half?

WES MOORE: Yeah. Y'all are going to be disappointed. You know, Jim Valvano was the best at it. You know, I've heard so many stories, and you know firsthand, and players, you know, running through the wall to go out to the court. Really, it was just more about, Hey, y'all, we're 10 down. A couple of stops, a couple of buckets, and we're right back in this. You know, we've been here before.

So I really was just kind of calm and matter of fact. We had two of our better players sitting on the bench in the first half in foul trouble. Now we got them back, and we've overcome that. But, yeah...

I've had people text me, you know, whatever that was, you need to bottle it, sell it, whatever. Sorry, I can't take credit. The players went out and made plays.

Q. Wes, when you were talking about wanting your program to be able to take that next step, what qualities do you think this team has, either intangibly or tangibly that, you know, this could be the group that helps you get there?

WES MOORE: Well, I think we've got unbelievable chemistry. And don't get me wrong, that team we had two years ago got beat in the Elite 8 in double overtime in the state of Connecticut against Connecticut. They had it, too.

And, you know, unfortunately we got sent up there, and unfortunately I didn't help them maybe make one more bucket in regulation to win that thing.

But, again, I think this team maybe is a little closer than maybe a year ago. I think they really pull for each other.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

It helps when -- to be honest, most of our role players coming in are freshmen, and so maybe they accept the role a little bit better, knowing that, Hey, I've got a few years left.

But it's just been a good mesh. Last year we probably had, you know, more talent because we had all these players and several other really good ones. But this team just seemed to gel. And no doubt, winning against those teams early in the year gave them confidence. And I just think right now we're in a good place. We're enjoying it.

You know, we don't want to see it end.

And I think that's, you know, when your players feel like that, I think that definitely helps.

THE MODERATOR: All right, coach. Thank you very much.

WES MOORE: Thank y'all. Hopefully Elvis will make another appearance tomorrow, maybe.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us from NC State student-athletes Madison Hayes and Saniya Rivers. We'll take the first question over here, please.

Q. Madison, I wanted to see how much you remembered about the time with Coach Schaefer recruiting you and what that was all about and what he was like back then.

MADISON HAYES: He was a really great coach. I mean, I committed to him for a reason. My freshmen year, we had a great two-year relationship in my recruitment. And, obviously, it sucked that he went to go to Texas. But I love him. He loves my family. I love his family.

You know, every time we see each other, in the Virgin Islands when we saw each other, we always said hello and hugged each other. And it was amazing.

Q. This question is for Saniya Rivers. A couple of years ago you won a national championship with another team with South Carolina. What would it mean for you and the team to reach the Final Four with another program, with the Wolf Pack?

SANIYA RIVERS: Man, that would be amazing to add another ring to the collection. That would be nice. Especially just to feel like I'm more a part of a Final Four championship this year would be amazing.

Of course, I got the opportunity. Most freshmen don't get

the opportunity, most people don't get the opportunity to win a national championship. Actually feel like I'm playing more and being a part and contributing to a Final Four and a championship would feel amazing.

Q. Madison, having been on the team that played in the Elite 8 for NC State two years ago, I know you have such a new team this year, but is there anything you took from that experience you think can help being on the stage this time around? We heard Coach saying, like, it kind of haunted him to not be able to get that program to the next step. And do you feel like the program as a whole has really just been able to learn from that experience but also keep trying to push to get back to that level?

MADISON HAYES: Yeah. Obviously, for my sophomore year, being in the Elite 8, they had to get over that hump of being in the Sweet 16 for so long the past three years. And then that year we went to the Elite 8. I mean, it was just amazing, obviously.

But I think just learning from that experience, just like how locked in and focused the players were and how we all were as a whole and just the goal that we had.

I feel like this year that's what we had, the mentality of just wanting to get to a national championship, not just to the Final Four but just do that national championship. I feel like we had that type of caliber team.

Q. This is for Madison. When River and Mimi had to sit because of foul trouble yesterday, I know rebounding is something you always care a lot about. But last night were you kind of, like, Oh, man, I need to take even more responsibility in that area?

MADISON HAYES: I mean, yeah, of course. I mean, rebounding is a part of my game. Just I did whatever I could do to help my team. That's what I always do every game. It's nothing that, Oh, I've got to do it now. I know I need to. That's just me naturally.

So I think, you know, obviously getting those rebounds were really crucial for the game the other day.

Q. For either player, what stands out about this Texas team?

MADISON HAYES: You can go ahead.

SANIYA RIVERS: What stands out? So we watched a little bit of film this morning, of course, go over their scout, practicing a little bit. So, yeah, watched a little film this morning obviously with scout, see how we're going to play



them better.

But I think their bigs are stronger. I think if we limit their second-chance opportunities, crashing the boards, I think we'll be fine. They have some shooters. I think if we can contest those, make them put it on the floor and attack the basket, we'll have more of a chance.

THE MODERATOR: Madison?

MADISON HAYES: I agree with that Niya said. They have a couple of shooters. Obviously, they are athletic. We've got to make sure they are pretty deep. We've got to make sure we don't foul as much, obviously as you saw yesterday.

But, you know, I feel we'll be fine. We've just got to do what we did yesterday the first half and second half. We've got to keep it going for the whole game.

Q. This is for either player. It seems like a pretty good time to be a part of the Wolf Pack with both y'all and the men's team now in the Elite 8. What's been that kind of synergy like between both teams on a run here?

MADISON HAYES: I mean, it's just amazing. You know, the men's team, everybody's been doubting them since they went into the ACC tournament. You obviously saw that they won five games in a row.

Coach Moore obviously talked about that's just energy and competitiveness, urgency. I mean, it's just hard. They're doing a great job. And I commend them for how far they've gone.

And it doesn't stop there for them and not for us either. We can go even farther for us, too, so yeah. Saniya and I don't think we just look at them as just our men's team, they're like our brothers. We've been supporting them when everyone was doubting them. They're still going.

They started, 'Why Not Us'. Now we're Saying 'Why Not the Pack' in general. Why not us either? So, yeah. You like that? You like that one?

[Laughter]

Q. Hey, this is for either player. But Coach Moore said during halftime of last night, he didn't necessarily deliver some, like, incredible motivational speech. He just let you know that you've been here before. You obviously responded to that. What do you both appreciate about his approach to in-game coaching?

SANIYA RIVERS: I think what I appreciate the most about Coach Moore is when he knows that we're down, he's not going to put us down more. You know, he's going to motivate us. He's going to say some things that we need to do differently going into the second half. He just really motivates us all in all, whether he says something, whether he taps us on the back, whatever the case may be. I think that's what I commend most about him.

MADISON HAYES: I think also that he just trusts us to talk to each other and just hold each other accountable when it comes to smaller mistakes, mental mistakes. I feel like obviously going into the second half, we pulled it together and did what we were supposed to do.

Q. Saniya, is there anybody you've modeled your game after? Is that just sort of how you've always played?

SANIYA RIVERS: Well, when I was in high school, a lot of people compared me to Michael Jordan. I don't know if that was just because or because I went to his old high school. Either way, you know, I'll take it as a big compliment.

As I got a little older, I started modeling my game to K.D. just because I was so much longer than the people I played against in high school. So I really took that.

I don't know. People compare me to a lot of people. But I think I just play my game. Whoever they compare me to, they compare me to, so, yeah.

Q. Talking to Coach Moore, he was talking about Texas plays a high-press similar to Duke in the ACC. How is that seeing that style of play early in the season?

MADISON HAYES: I feel like it kind of helps us that we've already played somebody that, obviously, pressures the ball a lot, especially on the wings. And, obviously, denying our post. That will help us especially going into this game.

Just making sure that we utilize our fundamentals going backdoor, doing a bunch of things that will help us get some easy points.

Obviously, our transition game will be a lot easier for us as well. So, yeah.

SANIYA RIVERS: Just to touch on the transition piece. I think if we can get into that early, that that will help us. I feel like transition, it's our bread and butter. I feel like we're a really fast team. We can get it out. Anybody can push. Anybody can score. I think that's definitely going to be the

key tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you both very much.
Appreciate your time and best of luck tomorrow.

MADISON HAYES: Thank you.

SANIYA RIVERS: Thank you, guys.

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