

# Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

## Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

## Coach Steve Forbes

## Tyree Appleby

## Daivien Williamson

## Postgame Press Conference



Miami 73, Wake Forest 69

STEVE FORBES: I thought we played another outstanding game today, and credit to Miami for the win. Coach Larranaga has one of the best teams in the country. They're elite on offense. I don't think they get enough credit by the way they defend. Their guards are really fast. They can really move their feet. They're physical. They're handsy.

Then Miller and Omier are really good inside. They have an outstanding team.

I just thought that we had tremendous effort, fight, resiliency, no quit. I thought we represented our team and our school to the highest level today. Had a chance to win it. It would have been a hell of a story if we could have made it, back-to-back buzzer beaters would have been something else, but it wasn't in the cards.

I thought that when they extended the lead, they hurt us on the offensive glass, transition D, and some of our turnovers. They were very opportunistic in that respect.

I thought we did a good job of really guarding them in the half court when we got them in the half court.

Only 7 for 14 from the free-throw line, and that probably ended up hurting us. We're a better free-throw shooting team than that for sure. So when it gets down to a narrow margin like that, it makes it harder.

Last thing, we played -- we've had 13 games decided by three points or less this year. 13. We're 6 of 7, so don't blame the players, blame me, if anybody is unhappy with

that.

That's how thin the margin of error is. That's how hard the league is. That's how tough the schedule is, when you have that many close games.

These guys have been unbelievable to coach, especially these two. Tremendous players and tremendous people.

I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Coach Forbes, down 16, 17 the second half, things looked fairly bleak for a while. What was the key to making the comeback? It seemed like a lot of that happened on the defensive end.**

STEVE FORBES: That was it. We stayed positive the whole time. You can ask them. Even me, which is hard, right, Ty?

You know, we just felt like we could string some stops together, we could score. I kept telling them, if we get it under 10, we've got a shot.

Then we got it to six, whatever, then we got it to the last media, and we're like, okay, we've just got to win this media and we win the game.

You've got to give them all the credit. They just kept fighting on the defensive end, got some blocked shots, got some rebounds, got some steals, made some tough shots.

I'm sure Miami probably -- sometimes that happens when you get the lead, you play to -- maybe you slow down a little bit. You're not trying to win the game -- maybe you're just trying to win the game and not score. I don't know. I thought we did a good job guarding them. I thought we did a good job guarding them really the whole game in the half court.

**Q. Going into year three, what's the next step for this program to continue to evolve and grow?**

STEVE FORBES: Yeah, I'm glad you said year three because that's correct. A lot of people think this is year



four coming up, and it's not. I can promise you that.

I think the next step is to play -- to finish in the top four in the league, to play on Friday and Saturday here. We got to Thursday, now we've got to get to Friday and Saturday, and to have a good seed in the NCAA Tournament and win some games in the NCAA Tournament. That's always been the plan every year.

We've got some good young players that have got to get better. Cameron and Demari made tremendous strides this year as players, Matthew Marsh. Bobi showed what he can do late in the year. I think we're in a good place, we've just got to continue to add good players and continue to work hard, and I think we're definitely on the upswing with this program.

**Q. Ty, you got a standing ovation when you checked out of the game with your fifth foul. You've played basically every minute for the last three months. What has this school and this journey meant to you over the last three months?**

TYREE APPLEBY: Everything. You know, I felt like when I got here, I got a fresh start. Been grinding in the gym since the summer.

We took the foreign trip, and I felt like we really bonded and came together as a team. Then the support from the community, coaches, the staff, players, even the workers on campus, it's just been outstanding, amazing. I couldn't be more appreciative.

STEVE FORBES: He had a historical season, guys. He led the league in scoring and assists and was second in steals, so come on. That's unheard of.

Man, what a great player. What a great guy.

**Q. Coach, after having to sign nine a couple years ago and six last summer, how confident are you that many of the same guys we saw today are going to be back on your roster next year, and what might that mean, that continuity moving forward?**

STEVE FORBES: I mean, who knows. In this day and age -- we'll have our meetings here shortly and talk about all that. But yeah, obviously we have some really good players that are young. They're going to get better, and they're going to work hard in the spring and the summer and have a little chip on their shoulder from this, to come back.

I'm not going to put a number on it because everybody does what's best for them in this day and age, so I don't

know. I mean, I feel pretty confident in what I know, but until it happens, I think that it would be the wrong thing to say right now.

We'll give them some time and have our meetings and kind of see where it's at. Hopefully we're not done playing. We'll see.

**Q. Daivien, after playing under Coach Forbes for five years and coming to the end of your final ACC Tournament, can you just talk about the journey that you've been through with this team and through the years of your college career?**

DAIVIEN WILLIAMSON: I'm just grateful for everything. The journey has been fun. It's just -- I just never forgot where I came from. At ETSU, I grew a lot there. Not only myself but just -- not only as a basketball player but as a person. This staff has a lot to do with that.

When he took the job here during COVID, it was just like a dream come true, to be able to finish my career not only in the ACC but under guys that I know that I can trust and that love me not only as a basketball player but as a person.

The journey has been great and I'm extremely appreciative for everything that I've been through, the ups and the downs, because it made me into the person that I am today.

**Q. You fought, the whole team fought until the end. What was in you when the game was 17 down to get you to come back and put this thing down to the wire?**

TYREE APPLEBY: You know, in every huddle, even if I was down, anything like that, even our coaches, they weren't even too worried about the score. Even if we was down 18, 17, 16, they weren't worried about the score. They told us, we come in, win the media, we're down by nine. Come in, win the next media, we win and then we tie it up, and then it's the last media.

I felt like we had the confidence even when we were down, so I wasn't really too worried.

STEVE FORBES: I didn't know we were down that many, to be honest. I had no idea.

**Q. Daivien, I know it's a long shot, it's a half-court heave, but from your eyes did you think it had any chance of going in?**

DAIVIEN WILLIAMSON: Every time I shoot it, I think it's going in. It just didn't fall for me today.

**Q. Steve, you said hopefully we expect to be playing. How confident are you that you're going to get an NIT bid?**

STEVE FORBES: I'm not very confident in anything when it comes to postseason play where I sit. I don't think we always get what we deserve.

I always tell the players that you get what you deserve. In this game of basketball, what you put into it usually you get out of it, so I'm not -- it doesn't matter what I think.

Unfortunately, what you do in the league really doesn't have anything to do with postseason play or anything like that. It's just metrics. So I don't know what our metrics will look like today.

I just know that our last three wins, we went down -- or two of our wins we went down and the opponent that we beat went up more. And then last night's win we stayed the same. So I don't know, you guys seen us play. I think we're pretty good.

Someone told me last night that somebody said that Wisconsin only had one bad loss, and that was to us. That's embarrassing for somebody to say that, to be quite honest with you. That's kind of where we're at with this stuff. That's an embarrassing statement. I actually think one of our best wins was at Wisconsin. It's a tough place to play.

These guys have fought hard all year long. I wouldn't want to play us.

**Q. For all three of you, Steve, you mentioned that you guys played 13 games decided by three points. You lost Demari for the season. It's been an emotionally exhausting season. What lessons do you want to instill for the next year's team, whether who's here or not here for now?**

DAIVIEN WILLIAMSON: I'd just tell them to stay resilient like we did this year. Even though there was times a lot where we was down this year, not even just in the score but just being healthy, we continued to just come together as a team. So I would just tell them next year to just continue to do that and just listen to the coaching staff and try to execute the game plan because they're not going to steer us in the wrong direction. I'd just tell them that.

TYREE APPLEBY: Yeah, I'd just piggy-back off what D-Will said. Everybody has to trust each other. I feel like you have that trust within everybody on the team, I think anybody can go a long way.

STEVE FORBES: I mean, for me personally, I think it just comes down to when you have these really close games, you have to execute both on offense and defense at the end of the game. Sometimes we did, sometimes we didn't. That's no reflection on the players. It's just how it went.

I think we've got to give -- we got better defensively over the week, this week, played pretty good defense. I think that we definitely -- that's a scenario we need to improve on. I don't think it's a scheme thing. I think it's just physicality, length and size.

We need more length on the perimeter. These guys are small guys. We need more physicality and rim protection at the basket. We've got to get more depth.

I didn't start the season thinking we'd be down to this many players. It started with Jake going pro, and then Jao getting hurt and Demari getting hurt, and it just kind of dwindled. No excuses, but I think that's something we've got to shore up in recruiting.

**Q. I've covered the league for 35 years, and it's pretty rare for somebody who was a good player at his previous school but maybe not an elite player to come to the ACC and then become the ACC Player of the Year or win one of the awards. You've now done that two years in a row with two different players. What goes into that? What did you see that made such a good fit?**

And Ty, what was it about Wake or Coach Forbes' system that somehow brought out an even better version of you than what you showed in the SEC, for example?

STEVE FORBES: Well, for me, I worked at McDonald's -- in 1979, I think I started, and they had the secret sauce for the Big Mac. It's called secret sauce, so I'm not telling you.

I don't know, I ain't got no secret sauce. I think it's the player, not the coach. You put him in position -- I've always believed that being a coach is just putting your players in position to be successful. How do you do that? Sometimes you've got to change as a coach, too. We've got to tweak some things and run different offenses -- we didn't run the same things this year we ran last year.

But I do think we have a system of play that is a good way to play, and I think he came and took advantage of that situation.

I think in recruiting, you have to tell the truth. If you're going to say you're going to do something, then you've got to do it. There's responsibility for them, but there's also

responsibility for me to say, okay, you're going to have the ball in your hands, you're going to do this, you're going to be the point guard, you can still score. But whatever it is, you've got to do it. Sometimes I don't think that happens, and then you've got a tough situation.

DAIVIEN WILLIAMSON: Yeah, you're right.

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On my part, that's what I would -- I would take no credit for that as far as being the Player of the Year. I think that's something -- I know he's going to tell you that I'm the best coach he's ever had (laughter), but you can finish it.

TYREE APPLEBY: Yeah, he is the best coach I ever had right here.

STEVE FORBES: There you go.

TYREE APPLEBY: But you know, coming to Wake, one of my old teammates, he knew D-Will. So I hit DWill up before I committed and everything like that. And then Coach had came to Florida, out there to my house to come see me, so I thought that was really genuine. When I came to Wake, the team, the community, the coaching staff, it felt like I had been here already for a year. Just coming here, it felt like it was the easiest choice for me.

And then the basketball aspect, getting in the gym early in the mornings when I didn't have class or anything like that and just working my game and my teammates helped me a lot this year. I'm just really proud of the way we battled this year.

STEVE FORBES: I think for somebody like Ty, he loves to play. He loves to practice. He's very competitive.

When your best player is your hardest worker in practice, then you've got a really good chance to have a great team. I would give him all that credit. Not that he's not the only guy that works hard on the team, that's not true. But if he didn't, then the other guys probably would not, and they gravitate to that.

I think he was special in that. Sometimes you just don't have good leadership just because guys aren't very -- don't have good communication skills. He's got unbelievable communication skills. He's like having a coach on the floor.

It's not always that way. I give him all the credit. Daivien is a perfect example. Daivien is not very talkative, but he's become more and more over five years. He made a hell of a defensive play today at the end of the game. He stole it on a roll, he would have never done that four years ago. He have been out there hugging his man in the corner. He's come a long way in that respect. Am I right about that? Tell the truth.

