

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Spectrum Center

Wake Forest Demon Deacons Steve Forbes Hunter Sallis

Postgame Press Conference

North Carolina 68, Wake Forest 59

STEVE FORBES: I thought a big turning point in the game was I think right around the three-minute mark, we were down one, came down the court, Hunter ran a little quick hitter. He got a great drive to the basket, he slipped a little bit. I thought he was going to dunk it. Then Lubin made a really nice play to block it, and then we got mismatched in transition because Hunter was under the basket, so Trey got matched up on RJ Davis, and then they ran a play that they've been running since Dean Smith. I don't mean that in a disrespectful way; it's just the Carolina way.

He got open for a three, and he nailed it, so that put them up four.

Then down the stretch offensively, we just struggled to score and execute. Had a couple turnovers. Just we needed to match -- when they scored, we needed to score.

It's hard to win games in March when you only make two threes and go 2 for 22. But the defensive effort was off the charts. I called time-out, I think, in the first four minutes of the second half. I think it was 15-24 and I called time-out. They didn't score a field goal until 4:44 to go in the game.

I mean, I'm really proud of my team, how hard they played. They have nothing to be ashamed of. It was a hard-fought game. Credit to Carolina.

It's going to be hard not to be able to have Hunter and Cameron and Efton. Those guys are really good players and really good people. I'll open it up to questions.

Q. I know this isn't how you wanted to end your season or your time at Wake Forest, but if you could



talk about or if you could sum up your time at Wake Forest, how would you sum it up?

HUNTER SALLIS: Yeah, I mean, after the game, it was just a lot of emotions. Just thinking about just the little things that we did, just being up in the clubhouse at our facility, just chilling with our guys, going into practices every day. I'll just miss joking around with my teammates and different stuff like that.

But overall, the thing that I'll miss is just the family that we've built the past two years. That's something that I feel like has been huge for us and huge for me. Coach Forbes bringing me in and being able to create these relationships with these wonderful people, that's been huge, and definitely will miss that for sure.

Q. You talked about the family aspect of being at Wake Forest the last couple of years. How tough was the up and down for this season for you guys? You guys went on a run and then offense wasn't working, but you guys leaned on defense. What did you learn about yourself, Wake Forest and this team that the guys that come back next year can take and make that next step?

HUNTER SALLIS: Yeah, we battled. Starting off from the summer, if you've seen us in the summer, you would never think offense would be a problem. Then going into it, we struggled offensively, but we were really good defensively.

I mean, the biggest thing that I took away from us and the coaching within this program is we figured it out. We're battle tested.

Definitely that for sure.

Q. Hunter, Coach Forbes referenced getting down a little bit early in the second half, calling a time-out. He had a pretty spirited conversation with the team. His face was a little red, but you guys responded excellently. What was that time-out like, and how good did it feel to put together that run to get the Deacs back in the game?



HUNTER SALLIS: Yeah, it was good. The time-out was really just to calm us down and get us back in the rhythm, and then also just -- the message was just doing whatever it takes to win. Down the stretch, we definitely showed that we wanted to do whatever it took to win. Ultimately, we came up short, but I'm definitely extremely proud of my team for sure.

Q. Hunter, you talked about these connections that you made with players and coaches. Who would you say you're tightest with and how would you describe the relationship?

HUNTER SALLIS: I'm roommates with Efton, so I'd definitely say him. But I'm close with my team if you go all the way from our starting five to our walk-ons. I feel like that's also a testament to Wake Forest in general. The managers, you know, walk-ons, GMs, all of that. I'm close to them all.

Q. Hunter, it seemed like you had a lot of emotion on the court tonight. You kind of took charge at times and got your shot. Has it kind of set in from an emotional perspective that this is the last time you're going to be suited up and that it's done, and what do you look at as your legacy as a Demon Deacon?

HUNTER SALLIS: Yeah, I definitely have. That was the biggest thing I was thinking about in the locker room, just how much I'm going to miss playing with these guys, how much I'm going to miss playing for Coach Forbes and the rest of the coaching staff, and just the little things that you take for granted in the moment, and just looking back at it. I remember after the game, I was taking off my tape, and I handed Mark the tape cutters and I was like, this is the last time I'm going to give Mark the tape cutters, and that made me emotional because it's just how much I genuinely love these guys. Definitely, yeah, that for sure.

Q. Hunter, what is the biggest lesson that you've learned from the man right next to you through the highs and lows of the season, throughout your career, on and off the court, whether it's progressing your career after Wake Forest? What's the biggest lesson you've learned from coach Forbes?

HUNTER SALLIS: How you do one thing is how you do everything. He says it all the time and that's something that's resonated with me a lot, and I do that, whether it's me listening, whether it's me showing up to get treatment, whether it's me doing little things like that. That goes a long way, so definitely that.

Q. Steve, you mentioned the three-point disparity. That's been something you guys have fought all year.

When you're going now into the portal season, when it comes to roster building, what's top of mind for you going into next year?

STEVE FORBES: Well, you always want to get a really good player. But I've said for the most part of my career, we've always looked at recruiting offense. Yeah, you want to find people that can not only shoot it, but pass it, too. I think that was an issue for our team this year. I don't think we were a great overall passing team. I don't think we were a selfish team at all. I just think sometimes we just couldn't make the play passing the ball.

So that's why the ball probably didn't move as much sometimes.

But also, too, we had two elite guys with the ball in their hands, Cameron and Hunter, and that's the way we had to play to win.

Yeah, I think that's definitely something that we need to improve upon is finding guys that can stretch the defense, maybe, you know, finding, not only guards, but a big that can step out and stretch it. Trey got better at it. It's something he can continue to get better at. Omaha can. We just didn't have him all year, pretty much. Marcus has improved tremendously.

We've just got to add, probably, a player in that area and then a couple, three guys on the perimeter that can not only handle and pass, but that can shoot it.

Q. To follow up on that a little bit, I'm remembering back to a September preseason event we had with you, and you said if you had a game the next day you'd go 10 or 11 deep. What happened to this team's depth over the last course of the season? I know some of the injury stuff you can talk about, but what happened with playable guys that were kind of lost down the end of the bench?

STEVE FORBES: Well, I think injuries were a big part of it for Cosby and Billew, and then you either play your way in or you play your way out. Just because you say something in October doesn't mean it's going to be that way in March.

Yeah, I would have liked to have been able to play more guys, but we became very limited in what we could do. We had some guys early on that just -- we didn't really play well, so we had to shorten the rotation and had to play a different way.

Credit to them for -- because you heard what he said, Hunter said. If you watched us practice, you would have said this team can really score, but it just didn't go that

way. So a credit to the players for changing the way we played and finding ways to win.

I mean, we all start the season with depth. We all want to play the guys we recruited. But ultimately, it comes down to how you play. Those things go into it. Plus -- let's be honest, not having Omaha -- I'm not making excuses, but I counted on him to play. I thought he could be a starter in the fall. He can stretch the defense.

He had some moments today I thought he did pretty good.

It's a combination of all those things, and I think it's hard to -- in this day and age, just full disclosure, it's harder to recruit depth because it comes down to a money game, and so you have to figure out where to -- how you spend your money, how to invest your money. Those are things that you have to adapt and evolve as the market changes.

But we'll continue to try to do the very best we can to only recruit really good starters, but really good depth and have competition.

Q. Y'all were the fourth seed in the ACC Tournament and likely not going to make the NCAA Tournament. Historically, the 4 seed would be in the tournament. What does the ACC need to do as a whole where they're getting the four, five, six teams in like in the past?

STEVE FORBES: Well, obviously, we're not the ACC of old. We've had a lot of change-over with coaches. And then since I've took over, we've had this new era of the predictive and the resume metrics.

I think it's pretty apparent to me that we need to do better in November because a lot is put into November, and in my opinion, I think once the league play starts, it's hard to move, especially in our league this year because if you look at my schedule, we played 20 league games, and 10 of those were either Quad 3 or Quad 4 games.

How do you get to the tournament? You have to win. You have to win all those Quad 1, Quad 2s for sure. But you just don't have as many opportunities. So how do we fix that? Well, we have to be creative.

How do you do that? Well, it's time to be a little more innovative. Maybe we move the Big Ten -- Big Ten, there I go. The SEC challenge to maybe do that in February. I don't know. I'm so old, I played in bracket busters. None of you guys probably remember that. But we matched up really good mid-major teams in February and played, and maybe you do something like that.

We've tried to go to 18 games, but the league doesn't want to do it. I think it gives us more non-conference opportunities.

So we'll see. But we have to be creative in what we're doing. Some of it is change-over. We've lost a bunch of Hall of Fame coaches. We've got some really good young coaches that are going to be really good and they're recruiting at a high level. We've got to continue to recruit really good players.

Duke has got -- I looked at a draft board today -- not that those mean anything, but they had three first-rounders in the top 10. Jon is doing it, and the rest of us got to continue to get better.

We've got to continue to improve the program from where we've started out winning -- in the last four years, '23, '19, '20, '21, we've got to continue to raise the bar. It's our responsibility to do that to improve the league.

Q. Have you been able to pinpoint kind of where this team went awry in the last two or three weeks of the season, and are there any lessons that will apply as you build the roster for 2025-26, or is it a complete wash because it'll be a whole new group of players anyway?

STEVE FORBES: I don't think so. I think it's pretty obvious that besides the three-point shooting, one of the things that we just weren't a very good rebounding team, and that got us in the first half. They had seven offensive rebounds in the first half and had seven second-chance points.

Now, we did better in the second half, but I think they had four, but I promise you, two of those were late where they got stick-backs that we just had to have those plays.

That's one thing for me that, thinking about the end of the season, I would say rebounding and three-point shooting, those things were something that we definitely have to go and improve.

I really haven't sat down to study from, I guess, Florida State on. I really haven't had time for that. But every year when the season is over, we do a deep evaluation of the entire program, and so we'll get on that and figure that out.

Now, the portal comes quick, and so we've got to be ready to recruit, and we will. I don't think the portal has ever really been a problem for us.

Last year, we just didn't have any starting positions to offer when the portal came open. We had five returners, and

Andrew took three weeks to make a decision to leave. Boopie was pretty quick in there, but the rest of them, it's -- when you don't have the starting position or the dollars to do that, then you have to recruit as quality a depth as you can get. I really believe Omaha is a really good player. But he got hurt.

We'll continue to recruit the portal and see what we can get.

Q. It looked like today's game was two teams that were literally battling for their playoff lives. Do you think that added extra to the physicality because neither team wanted to give an inch in that game today?

STEVE FORBES: Oh, probably. Everybody knows what's on the line. Two prideful programs. What a great environment to have Duke, Carolina, Wake in the afternoon session. Great fans, a lot on the line, two teams playing their tails off.

Then the added of getting in the tournament. You know, there was probably a time not that long ago when that wasn't have been the case. Maybe you'd have already been in, and you'd just be fighting for some seeding. But obviously, they're still fighting. We were fighting. A credit to both teams for -- and I think it was a hard-fought, well-played game.

Now, maybe offense went awry sometimes, but I thought we defended at a really high level. So I think it's a credit to both teams, but I think that probably added to it, and I think they let us play. They let us play. I'm appreciative of that.

Q. You spoke about the three seniors, Efton, Cam and Hunt. Will it be hard to replicate their leadership and character in the transfer portal?

STEVE FORBES: Yeah, I don't know. Honest truth is they came in to Wake Forest, at least Efton, with high character. That's something we always look for, besides being a really good player that can play in the ACC.

But yeah, when you have three seniors like that who mean that much to you, and not just as players, but as leaders, and they all lead in a different way, Efton verbally, Hunt by the way he plays, his quiet demeanor, and Cam being probably one of the hardest playing -- maybe the hardest playing player I've ever coached, and competitive.

But you've got opportunities for other people to step up and do those -- every team is different. That's the hard part in the portal. I shouldn't say in the portal. That's the hard part in this day and age where you don't have a lot of

continuity. So every year is just different. It's a new team. It's a new challenge. It's a new journey.

So you never know who's going to step up and be that person, and so I'm excited to get out there and get some new players and work really hard in the spring to raise our program to another level.

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