

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Buzz Williams

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: At this time we'll start with Coach Williams from Texas A&M. We'll go right into questions.

Q. In the past you've talked about in the process of building your team for a season, sometimes it takes sacrificing maybe a game in December to win a big game in September and March. I'm going to ask two questions, by the way. With that in mind, all the experience you have coming back, do you change that approach? Do you feel this year you don't have to do that?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Do you want to ask the second question or am I supposed to answer that one...

Q. If you'll do that one.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think we're always behind just because of our process, how we handle September, what we do in October, and to some degree, just to be transparent, I think some of that starts in the summer.

Every coach has a different philosophy on what they want to do with their team in the summer, what they want to do in September and October. I'm not saying ours is wrong, and I'm not judging others.

I just think we're always behind. I think we're behind for the right reasons relative to how we go about things. I do think that we probably win a game or two after Valentine's Day that maybe we wouldn't have expected to win based on the non-conference results.

Specific to this year, we do have a lot of returning players, but we're also arguably playing the toughest non-conference schedule that A&M has ever played. We don't have much wiggle room to give away possessions at any point. We play eight games in November, five of them are on the road.

Hopefully we're a little ahead of schedule because of the returners, but the process that we have followed this summer up until this point, it's been the same that we always do.

Q. Could you explain the process of a team you took over that was one of the bottom teams in the SEC, to a team that last year was in the tournament and this year is considered one of the favorites to win the conference.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I'm not sticking up for head coaches. There's a lot of head coaches out here now that have done it way better than people that you're going to interview today.

I think sometimes they receive too much blame and too much praise. So I would be foolish to think it has anything to do with me.

I think our staff has been phenomenal in identifying the right people. Our players are okay. I don't think we're necessarily the best players, but they're really good people. How they've been raised and who they have been mentored by, we want to make sure that translates to our program.

I think in this model of college athletics, I think the character piece is really important to have any sustainability. Are we good? I don't know. Are we bad? I don't know. But to your point, every year that I've been here, I think it's pre-season 12th, pre-season 11th, pre-season 12th, pre-season 6th, going into today.

I can't take any of the credit. I have to give credit to our staff, and I have to give credit to the parents of our players because I think it's been a slow build. In truth, we haven't won an NCAA tournament game. That's probably what they talk about on your website. Bad coaching, I understand.

I think our staff has done a really good job of finding the right people for all of us to coach.



Q. The number of freshmen in Power Five conferences has gone down like 25% over the last four or five years. Part of that is COVID year, transfer portal. Is that a concern that there are some high school prospects not getting chances? Is it cyclical because of COVID?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Good question.

I'm not sure what the article is you're writing, but I think there's a lot of layers to that. Every coach would probably have a little bit of a different answer. To your point, I don't know that any of the data will be conclusive until all of the COVID seniors are done, which I believe will be this year.

Is any of the evidence since COVID, since the portal, are those numbers real or not? It's hard to say. But I can tell you that there are less freshmen playing Division I, not Power Five, less freshmen playing Division I than ever before. I personally don't see those numbers changing too much, but I do think if you were to think of it in easy math, 20% of the current population in college athletics are COVID seniors, they're not, but if they were, how is that 20% going to be regenerated relative to the portal or to high school seniors?

I think those numbers, five years from today, will probably make more sense. It's a low number, and it's been an increasingly lower number with each passing year.

Q. Was there a time that you could put your finger maybe not an individual game but a part of the season where Wade took that step from being a good player to one of the best players in the SEC, potential All-American?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, I didn't think IV was very good in non-conference play last year, but it was just IV. Texas A&M wasn't very good in non-conference play.

If you look at any of the games at Myrtle Beach, we were awful. IV was awful. Boots was awful. Buzz was awful.

I don't know that I feel like it was a game. I think there was a lot of embarrassment at Christmas last year to be 6-5. I'm not saying we should have been 11-0, but I do think the competitive spirit of the character of our players, it was a gradual thing.

Winning at home and having the environments that we had over the last whatever it was, 8 to 10 games at Reed, I think that accentuates it all.

I don't know that I would think of IV, like it was this game that it turned. I think his turnover rate continued to

decrease. He began to get fouled at a very high clip. I think those two things were intertwined.

Normally if he wasn't getting fouled and he wasn't turning it over, we were getting a shot. So we can't shoot, but it gave us a chance to get fouled, it gave us a chance to get an offensive rebound.

I think those things were kind of the things he probably paid attention to the most. Don't turn it over, get fouled, then it kind of became a team thing. Hey, let's get a shot. If we can't get a shot, let's get fouled.

I think he led the charge in that regard. But I don't know that I necessarily thought it was a game. I mean, we came out of Christmas like, Can we win one of these two before 2023 starts? Almost lost to Northwestern State. So yeah...

Q. As someone who retained a lot of his roster, in this portal era, how important is roster retention? As a coach and staff, how do you have to think about that and manage all year long keeping the guys you've already gotten once?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yeah, that's the question (smiling).

I think in how we operate, we have a better chance for success if we lead the league in the lowest number of transfers. That's my opinion.

We have to find categories that are not statted and try to turn them into competitive advantages. We want to recruit the right players. There's not an exact science to doing that. Most importantly, we want to recruit the right people.

I think our staff recruiting the right people over time gives us a better chance to have the lowest transfer rate. Then I think what we do every day, I think our players over time get incrementally better, then hopefully our team gets incrementally better.

I understand it's a rarity to have this many returning players, but I also think that's why maybe we have a chance to be good, is because we have so many coming back. Not because we have the best ones, we just have so many that everybody's familiar with, and that helps in 2023.

I actually think it helped in 1983, even though I wasn't coaching. So it is a new category that we spend an inordinate amount of time on in our facility of how can we grow and develop our staff and our players. I want to have the lowest transfer rate among coaches, too. I want to hire the right coaches and have the lowest portal rate among

assistants, and I want to have the lowest portal rate among players.

Thank you, guys.

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