

Men's College Basketball

Coaches: Carolina Final Four advantage to fade after tipoff

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press



Oregon coach Dana Altman cuts down the net after the team's Midwest Regional final against Kansas in the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, Saturday, March 25, 2017, in Kansas City, Mo.

AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

Coaches for Oregon, South Carolina and Gonzaga concede Roy Williams and his North Carolina players have an advantage when it comes to knowing how to deal with the spotlight during Final Four week.

They also don't think it will matter once the games begin.

"You can play in the national championship game nine years in a row. If you go the 10th time, you're nervous before that ball goes up in the air. There's no such thing as not being nervous for a big game," South Carolina's Frank Martin said Monday during a teleconference with reporters.

"What I do think is a huge advantage for Roy, his players, staff members, everyone at the university, is having been through it as recently as last year. They're fresh on the preparation, on the things to expect, what's coming. That way they can better manage their times, their days, to eliminate any distractions that can prevent them from being prepared for the game itself."

South Carolina (26-10) and Gonzaga (36-1) will be making their Final Four

debut when they meet in the first national semifinal Saturday at University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. Oregon is as much a first-timer as those two. The Ducks haven't made it this far since winning the 1939 title.

Williams will be coaching in the Final Four for the ninth time, including five appearances with Carolina. The Tar Heels (31-7) play Oregon (33-5) in the second semifinal.

North Carolina lost to Villanova in last year's championship game in Houston. Three of its starters from that 77-74 loss are back, and so

are seven other players.

Basketball is only part of the Final Four experience. There are team activities, lots of media commitments and constant attention.

Oregon coach Dana Altman said he spoke on the phone with old coaching friends Lon Kruger and Mike Montgomery to gain some insight on how to balance basketball with everything else.

"We want to try to help our players as much as possible and make them as comfortable as possible, try to get the routine the same," Altman said. "This is a bigger stage. Our guys are aware of that."

Williams said he wouldn't expect players from any of the teams to have difficulty adjusting to the environment.

"Kids nowadays are so much more experienced, they're so much more worldly," he said. "All the teams have high-profile players who have been very successful and were recruited really hard by several schools. People will play (experience) up if they choose to. Once you get there, you have to play the game. Yes, I think it helps for me and some our guys who were there last year to know the hoopla around it. Each coach is good enough

to get their guys to focus on the games, and that's what is important."

Gonzaga coach Mark Few said "everything is going to get ratcheted up 300 percent now with the media, the demands, the time."

"The general distraction meter is going to go out the roof," he said. "All four of these teams have shown they're ferocious competitors and have the ability to focus on the task at hand."

Other comments from the teleconference:

BERRY'S ANKLES

There was no update on North Carolina point guard Joel Berry II, who played on two injured ankles against Kentucky in the regional final. Williams said the travel itinerary might help. The Tar Heels fly to Phoenix on Tuesday night rather than on Wednesday.

"I thought it was smarter for us to go out Tuesday because some people's feet do swell when they go on the airplane," Williams said. "If that's going to happen to Joel, I would rather have that happen Tuesday night as opposed to Wednesday night. Hopefully by the time we get to Thursday or Friday he'll do some things in practice."

I'm scared to death right now because I just don't know."

WHY NOT VEGAS?

On the day the Oakland Raiders' move to Las Vegas was announced, Altman and Few said they would be in favor of NCAA Tournament first- and second-round games and regionals being played in Vegas. The Pac-12 Tournament was played at Vegas' 18,000-seat T-Mobile Arena earlier this month. The NCAA has had a long-standing policy of not holding events in cities where betting is legal.

"Gambling's everywhere," Few said. "So we need to quit punishing poor Vegas when it's in our own backyard, front yard, side yard, too."

NOT IMPRESSED WITH HIMSELF

Altman has turned out to be a much better coach than player. He transferred from a Nebraska junior college to Eastern New Mexico in 1978. He averaged 3.7 points and 1.4 rebounds his first season. The school couldn't find statistics from his second season.

"I didn't have many highlights as a player," Altman said. "I was awful. I would have sure hated to coach me."

NFL

NFL owners approve Raiders' move

By BARRY WILNER
Associated Press

PHOENIX — NFL owners approved the Oakland Raiders' move to Las Vegas at the league meetings on Monday.

The vote was a foregone conclusion after the league and Raiders were not satisfied with Oakland's proposals for a new stadium, and Las Vegas stepped up with \$750 million in public money. Bank of America also is giving Raiders owner Mark Davis a \$650 million loan, further helping convince the owners to allow the third team relocation in just over a year.

Owners voted 31-1 to approve the move. The dissenting vote wasn't immediately announced.

The Rams moved from St. Louis to Los Angeles in 2016, and in January the Chargers relocated from San Diego to LA. The Raiders likely will play two or three more years in the Bay Area before their \$1.7 billion stadium near the Las Vegas strip is ready.

Las Vegas, long taboo to the NFL because of its legalized gambling, also is getting an NHL team this fall, the Golden Knights.



John P. Kelleher holds up a sign outside the Oakland Coliseum before the start of a rally to keep the Oakland Raiders from moving Saturday, March 25, 2017, in Oakland, Calif.

AP Photo/Eric Risberg

"Today will forever change the landscape of Las Vegas and UNLV football," said Steve Sisolak, chairman of the Clark County Commission and a former member of a panel appointed by the Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval to study the stadium tax funding plan.

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf and a group trying to keep the team in Oakland, made a last-ditch presentation

to the NFL last week. But that letter was "filled with uncertainty," according to Commissioner Roger Goodell.

Monday, she asked the owners to delay the vote, wanting to give her city a chance to negotiate with a small group of owners to complete a stadium deal at the Coliseum site.

"Never that we know of has the NFL voted to displace a team from its established market when there is a fully financed option before them with all the issues addressed," Mayor Libby Schaaf said in a statement. "I'd be remiss if I didn't do

everything in my power to make the case for Oakland up until the very end."

Schaaf said the city has presented a \$1.3 billion plan for a stadium at the Coliseum site that would be ready by 2021. She says the existing Coliseum would be demolished by 2024, with the Oakland Athletics baseball team either moving to a new stadium at the Coliseum site or somewhere else in the city.

The Raiders' move became more certain earlier this month when Bank of America offered the loan. That replaced the same amount the Raiders lost when the league balked at having casino owner Sheldon Adelson involved and he was dropped from the team's plans.

Leaving the Bay Area is not something new with the Raiders, who played in Los Angeles from 1982-94 before heading back to Oakland. Davis was passed over last year in an attempt to move to a stadium in the LA area that would have been jointly financed with the Chargers. Instead, the owners approved the Rams' relocation and gave the Chargers an option to join them, which they exercised this winter.

From Saturday



AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

Oregon forward Jordan Bell, right, tries to block a shot by Kansas guard Josh Jackson (11) during the second half of the Midwest Regional final of the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, Saturday in Kansas City, Mo.

Oregon beats Kansas to keep dancing

By DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Oregon lost one of its best players to an injury just before the NCAA Tournament, had to survive two nail-biters to reach the Midwest Regional finals, and then faced a top-seeded Kansas team that had romped to the brink of the Final Four.

Of course, the Ducks would rise to the occasion.

With swagger and verve and downright prolific shooting, the plucky team that everybody wanted to count out rolled to a 74-60 victory over the Jayhawks on Saturday night, earning the Ducks their first trip to the national semifinals in nearly 80 years.

"You feel so good for so many people," said Ducks coach Dana Altman, who is headed to his first Final Four after 13 trips to the NCAA Tournament. "It's a team effort. You feel good for a lot of people."

Indeed, a whole lot of people had a hand in it.

Tyler Dorsey hit six 3s and poured in 27 points, Dillon Brooks added 17 and Jordan Bell finished with 11 points, 13 rebounds and eight blocks in a virtuoso performance for the Ducks (33-5), who seized the lead with 16 minutes left in the first half and never trailed the rest of the way.

Now, they'll face North Carolina in the Final Four in Glendale, Arizona. It will be their first trip since 1939, when the Tall Firs won it all.

Player of the year candidate Frank Mason III had 21 points in his final game for the Jayhawks (31-5), but the offensive fireworks and steady poise that had carried them to a 13th straight Big 12 title fizzled just 40 minutes from campus on a night where very little went right. Star freshman Josh Jackson

was mired in early foul trouble. Sharpshooting guard Devonte Graham never got on track. And the swagger the Jayhawks showed in humiliating Purdue in the Sweet 16 simply evaporated for a team that rolled to the Elite Eight by an average margin of 30 points.

"I'm disappointed for them more than I am for me," said Kansas coach Bill Self, who fell to 2-7 in Elite Eight games. "But the one thing that happened today, and it's hard to admit, the best team did win today."

The Ducks knew everything was stacked against them, but the point was only driven home when their bus passed the Power and Light District in downtown Kansas City on the way to the arena. Thousands of fans in red and blue were rallying hours before the tipoff, turning it into a de facto road game.

But the torrid shooting of Brooks, Ennis and Dorsey quickly deflated the sold-out Sprint Center, and sent a warning shot to the Jayhawks that they were in for a fight.

"You've got to give them credit," Graham said. "They hit some big shots."

Foul trouble sent Jackson to the bench for much of the first half, allowing the Ducks carve to out a comfortable lead. Then Dorsey finished the half with back-to-back 3s, including a deep bank shot at the buzzer, as the Ducks pranced to their locker room relishing in a 44-33 advantage.

"When you play hard throughout the whole game," Brooks said, "you catch some breaks."

The Ducks' lead swelled to 55-37 when Brooks drilled another shot from the perimeter, and frustration began to creep into the Kansas bench. Jackson didn't score until midway through the second half, and Graham was 0 for 7 from the field, missing all six of his 3s.

UCONN ADVANCES: Future looks bright for Ducks

Continued from 1B

The Huskies' 11th consecutive victory moved Auriemma past Pat Summitt for the most NCAA Tournament wins. Auriemma now has 113 and counting.

Next up for top-seeded UConn (36-0) is Mississippi State on Friday night in Dallas. It is just two wins away from a fifth consecutive title and 12th overall.

"It means a whole lot, especially with this group because no one thought we'd be here and we worked so hard this year," said Collier, who earned most outstanding player of the region honors.

The Huskies jumped all over 10th-seeded Oregon (23-14), stopping its impressive run through the tourney.

Leading 6-4, UConn scored 17 straight points. Saniya Chong got the game-changing burst started with consecutive 3-pointers. Nearly 4 1/2 minutes later she capped the burst with a layup that made it 23-4.

Oregon closed to 34-21 midway through the second quarter, but UConn put the game away by scoring 15 of the final 18 points of the half.

"They've owned the whole month of March, they weren't just along for the ride," Auriemma said. "It's theirs and that's a huge



Oregon's Sierra Campisano, right, fouls Connecticut's Gabby Williams during the regional final game in the NCAA women's college basketball tournament Monday in Bridgeport, Conn.

AP Photo/Jessica Hill

step. That's a big step to go from riding in the backseat on a trip you're going to, to all of a sudden you're in charge of driving the bus you're responsible for getting us there."

With Breanna Stewart, Morgan Tuck and Moriah Jefferson gone to the WNBA, UConn has a new trio leading the way. Collier and fellow sophomore Katie Lou Samuelson were honored as AP All-Americans on Monday, with Williams, a junior, making the second team.

Oregon also has a bright future. Coach Kelly Graves' team is led by outstanding freshmen Sabrina Ionescu, Ruthy Hebard and Mallory

McGwire. The trio averaged 36.8 points combined this season. Ionescu led the way against UConn with 15 points.

The Ducklings upset seventh-seeded Temple, No. 2 Duke and No. 3 Maryland to get to the Elite Eight for the first time in program history.

"I just think all of it is part of the process," Graves said. "A run like this will make it easier to motivate our team in the offseason. Our goal is to host the first and second round and not to make two trips across the country. Those things will really help us and give these guys confidence that they can win in the tournament."

BIG PICTURE

Oregon: The Ducks were trying to become the first double-digit seed ever to reach the Final Four. Only 10th-seeded Lamar and 11th-seeded Gonzaga had made it this far. The Zags were also coached by Graves. ... Oregon took advantage of Bridgeport's proximity to New York and visited the Freedom Tower and Times Square on Sunday after practice.

UConn: The win was UConn's 135th straight against an unranked opponent. The Huskies have won 310 of past 311 against non-Top 25 teams. The lone loss came against St. John's in 2012. Since the 1993-94 season, UConn is 587-9 against unranked teams. ... The victory gave Chong and Tierney Lawlor 152 wins at UConn, the most in the history of the NCAA for a senior class. They only have one loss.

MISCUES

Oregon had 22 turnovers, including 17 in the first half, that led to 38 points for the Huskies.

"The turnovers doomed us right from the get-go," Graves said. "That defensive pressure set the tone."

SELLOUT

While attendance struggled at the three other regional sites, Bridgeport sold out the arena on both Saturday and Monday.