

NCAA Media Conference

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Ray Tanner

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Everyone, thank you for joining us today after the selections for the 2019 NCAA Division I baseball championship. I know it's a holiday, and everybody wants to get out and enjoy the sun and hopefully hamburgers and hot dogs, and we'll get started with Ray Tanner, the chair of the Division I baseball championship and also the director of athletics at the University of South Carolina. Mr. Tanner?

RAY TANNER: Thank you, J.D. I'll be glad to address any questions that you have. Before I begin, I would like to say thank you all for participating today. I certainly appreciate your coverage of our great sport at the collegiate level. I've been in the game for a long, long time, and we didn't have this kind of attention and exposure many years ago, so I'm grateful for your support of our teams and baseball in general.

Q. Ray, I wanted to talk to you about conference tournaments and how teams either helped or hurt themselves. I know in years past it's kind of been a mixed bag. Sometimes you can help yourself but not really hurt yourself. It looks like in certain cases some teams really seemed to help their status this week.

RAY TANNER: Well, I think that you made a comment that kind of has been out there for many, many years, back from the times that I coached until now, but the bottom line is if you play the game, we count it. The body of work is important, so if you play two or three or four games in your tournament, does it carry as much weight as your first 30? Well, not so much because there's a percentage. But all games count. So that's -- at the end of the day, I think it has to be viewed that way, and I know coaches have reached out to me and they ask how important are these games late. Well, they could affect you, they might not affect you, but if you play a game, it counts. There are not exhibitions of games.

Q. Ray, did you guys discuss how teams set up their pitching, and maybe it wasn't as much, I don't know, they didn't try to manage the games the same way they did two weeks ago?

RAY TANNER: Well, I think you can recognize we've been here -- we're in Indy still, and we were here when the tournament started and we were able to watch all of the different tournaments across the country, and there are certain situations that you would recognize that maybe they're holding a guy, resting a guy, maybe a guy wasn't 100 percent, which you would hold him for that reason. But sometimes teams do not approach it the same way, which can be a mistake at times.

But like I said, all games count.

Q. Question about Georgia Tech: They went from 8 in the RPI to a 3, and that's kind of a jump. I'm curious what you saw in them that caused you guys to move them up.

RAY TANNER: Well, Georgia Tech, they were a team that as I mentioned earlier on the telecast of ESPNU

today, they had 22 aggregate wins in the ACC, and they played in the conference championship. They also won their division. They were 9-1 in their 10 regular series against ACC competition.

I'm not sure that when they were down -- they never have been that low. I'm not sure they were getting as much respect as they might have deserved, as we recognized by the committee. So we felt that a series win against Georgia was also important in that equation, but a very good team with 22 wins aggregate in that league. So a lot of things stood out there, winning nine of ten series.

Q. Of course they've had some injuries to their pitching staff. Do you take that into consideration at all as you evaluate their potential in the tournament?

RAY TANNER: Well, we always try to get the information. We ask schools to provide information in our rack committees where we have coaches during the season that we confer with every other week. We try to get as much information as we can, whether it becomes an asset at the end of the year or if you lose a player. But despite that, Georgia Tech is in a position that they have a very good team. They won nine of ten series and certainly can be very explosive offensively.

Q. I wanted to ask you specifically about bubble teams, those last four out, specifically Houston, and what the discussion was there at the end about them. They had an RPI in the 40s but I think they were 1-5 down the stretch and had a quick exit from the AAC tournament, how much that factored into the decision not to include them?

RAY TANNER: Well, Houston is a team that we had a lot of conversations about. They're a very good team, have been perennially, and it was difficult leaving them out of the field. They did go 0-2 as you mentioned in the conference tournament. That factored in. TCU had beaten them head-to-head, but it was a team that we had a lot of respect for. They didn't finish as well as they would have liked to have hoped, and in conference series, they did not -- won, what, two or three conference series, too. That was also a factor.

Q. The American I believe had three bids: UConn, East Carolina and Cincinnati. I think they were fifth rated conference overall, and I guess it showed because you had two of those teams on the bubble last four out. Did it come down to where they could have made a case to get that fourth team in just based on how the streak was, or is it kind of like a Houston situation with Central Florida?

RAY TANNER: It's a very good conference and has been for a number of years. As you mentioned, those two teams and the teams that got in, they got a lot of conversation, and there was continual metric measurement with those teams. At the end of the day, a couple of things were left out. Maybe they didn't finish as high in the conference and didn't have a great finish to the regular season.

Q. I had a quick question for you about TCU. I think it's safe to say it's kind of a historic resume for a team with a No. 59 RPI and a losing record to get in, losing records against all the tiers, top 25, top 50, top 100. What carried them in? Is it just because they're in a good conference?

RAY TANNER: Well, I think they are in a good conference, but there's a lot of really good conferences in baseball now. It's not just one or two anymore. You can probably point your finger to five or six conferences that really stand out and that are really well represented in the NCAA field. I think with TCU, and I mentioned this earlier probably five or six weeks ago, they were not in a position that they were going to be a postseason team.

It appears at this point that they're very healthy. As you know, they've got some outstanding players. They got a couple pitchers back that are doing extremely well. They'll get their top hitter back next week. But they were 4-4 in their conference series, which is not bad. They had a big series win against

West Virginia recently. And two other notes, that they had 12 top-50 wins, which is a good number, and they made a pretty deep run in the Big 12 tournament. You can look at them and you can say, well, maybe they should be in, they shouldn't be in. Yes, they were in the last group, there's no question about it, but they're also a team, as you well know, that can be very difficult to beat if they're clicking on all cylinders, and we felt that they might be in the best position they've been all year.

Q. I want to ask you about BYU. I know it's tough to measure those mid-major teams that maybe don't have the top-50 opponents. I know Irvine falls into that category, as well, and Texas State to a degree, but those teams in that RPI tier that won their conference regular season championship, Texas State, BYU, how much weight does that hold, and what can those teams do to get in if they don't have a good weekend in a conference tournament?

RAY TANNER: Well, I think it's important to note that this is my fourth year on the committee and my last year, and one of the things that's always been important personally that I think the committee has shared is how did you do in your conference. Forget what your conference was rated; how did you do? Did you finish first or second? And BYU did finish first. They had a good run.

The one glaring problem is they went 0-2 in the conference tournament, and they only played two top-50 teams, and they lost both of those. So I think you have to recognize as a coach that you've got to do your schedule accordingly. If you're not in one of those conferences where you'll get tremendous protection, I think you have to recognize, hey, if I don't win it or I finish second, am I going to have a good enough resume, and I think that was one thing that hurt BYU. Did we give them consideration for winning the league? We absolutely did. But the metrics that I mentioned to you were the reasons that they probably didn't make the field.

Q. A question about West Virginia. It's the first time the Mountaineers have hosted NCAA baseball tournament games in a long time. Just curious, what was it about them and their resume this year that put them over the top for one of those top-16 seeds?

RAY TANNER: Well, West Virginia was a team that appeared to be strong the entire season. Coach Mazey has done a wonderful job up there. It's an opportunity that we go to a venue that we haven't been before. Is that a deciding factor? Absolutely not. It was based on merit of their program. But they were 6-2 in their conference series, and that included wins over two really good programs in Oklahoma State, who won the Big 12 tournament, and Texas Tech, who won the regular season. So they put themselves in a position to be one of the strongest teams in the country, and as a result of that, they ended up getting the opportunity to host.

The strength of schedule played a factor in that, as well. But a team that certainly can make some noise in the postseason.

Q. Also three teams from the Big 12 serving as hosts. Just tell me a little bit about how strong that conference was this year in the committee's eyes?

RAY TANNER: Well, it's an extremely strong conference. I think it had a little bit of ebb and flow to it as far as anybody dominating. It changed courses a little bit. But the Big 12 had a great run. I think Kansas didn't make the field, but they stayed on the board for a long, long time, and you talk about Texas Tech and Oklahoma State and West Virginia and the teams there, and then TCU played their way in toward the last two or three weeks of the season.

It's an outstanding conference, and it has been that way for a number of years.

Q. Ray, I know with different parts of the country scheduling, it's certainly unbalanced. When you look at a program like Santa Barbara who had no top-50 games and then compare them to say an Ole Miss, who basically the majority of their games are top 50, how do you guys evaluate the two when you're going through and trying to decide who's going to host or maybe next year it's on the bubble, those kinds of situations?

RAY TANNER: Well, it's not easy, but we did try to take into consideration the challenges that you have in different parts the country and different conferences that you play in and the opportunity that you have. You know, it's not perfect, and with our sport, even though a lot of schools are supporting baseball at a high level, you have charter airplanes going here and there, it's hard to do that in midweek, which will build a really good resume.

So we take that into consideration. So those teams sometimes have a lot of pressure on them to win their conference and be in a position to get into postseason, and it's a challenge, and it's not the same for everybody, but we try to take that into consideration.

One thing that's really important as we go through the season, we have regional advisory calls with coaches, with each -- with a committee member every other week as we go down the back stretch of the season, and coaches give us a lot of input about who the good teams are. And we don't necessarily base it on metrics, although you can, but we talk to coaches who are out in the field and they're playing and who they've played -- even if it's not in their league, they give us a good feeling about who the good teams are, who you don't want to play if you have a the postseason opportunity.

Q. Ray, I just wondered, this is the second year of seeding the hosts 1 to 16. I just wondered was it any easier for you guys this year, and what are your thoughts on that process so far?

RAY TANNER: (Laughs.) Well, I'll just summarize it this way. We were here until the wee hours of the morning, and we came back in the wee hours of the morning. You know, you go through periods of time you think it's going to sort out pretty easily, but this committee is very diligent in trying to get it right, and we scrubbed these teams time and time again to try to get the top 16 where they need to be based on merit, and it's not just one shot through.

We did our very best to try to get it right. It was mentioned earlier that you got a chance to have five different regionals, the top seeds match up from the same conference. That's just part of it. That's the integrity of seeding, and you can have those matchups. But I wouldn't say that it's any easier.

What is good in this day and age is the opportunity to get data on teams. We get a chance to watch teams throughout the season. We get a chance to talk to our coaches. We get a chance to come to Indy, watch all the tournaments, and the staff here at the NCAA can provide metrics and data on anything you can possibly want to know, and that gives us the best information possible to try to make the right decisions for the 64-team field.

As you know, I've been on both sides of the things. I've been left out, I've been in it, and now I sit on the committee. It's something that's been very important, and we've done our best to try to get the right teams playing in the postseason.