

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Cincinnati Bearcats

Wes Miller

Media Day Press Conference



WES MILLER: First off, guys, we're thrilled to be a part of this league. Look at this and the job that the Big 12 has done just with this event. It's exciting. I'm so glad three of our players are here to participate and see this. It just kind of shows you we're in a first -- this is a first-class league in every facet. That's been obvious from the first moment we joined, any interaction I've had. I'm so excited about our commissioner and the things that he's doing to take this league even further.

He thinks about it differently. He's ahead of the curve. So I'm excited about that.

From a basketball standpoint, guys, as coaches, we're competitors. Listen, this is the best college basketball league in America. It's undisputed in recent history.

It's neat and exciting to be a part of that. We haven't experienced this yet, so will there be some adjustment? Absolutely. But like we talk about freshmen all the time, freshmen have adjustments to college basketball. There's no way around it. Some make the adjustment quicker than others, and I believe I have a group and a team that can make the adjustment quickly. I hope we do.

But I think you have to recognize when you're entering a league of this caliber that we haven't experienced, there's going to be some things that we just don't understand yet and we're going to have to learn and adjust on the fly.

I say that because I have such respect for the programs and the coaches in this league.

Q. You had an update or a lack of an update for us two weeks ago about Aziz and Jamille and I was wondering if there's been any movement on either side in the waiver process.

WES MILLER: Yeah, Aziz and Jamille, Aziz Bandaogo, Jamille Reynolds, two second-time transfers that have waivers with the NCAA, they were denied on the first round

last week. We got the news last week. I can't remember the exact day now.

But they were denied at the staff level. I think I've learned more about this process than I thought I ever would or cared to, but now it'll go to -- we submitted an appeal, and it goes to the appeal committee in the NCAA.

Listen, we're very discouraged by the news last week. I think the issue at hand is not -- I don't want it to get lumped together. The issue at hand isn't whether we should have restrictions for second-time transfers. That's not the issue with this situation. That's a totally different subject.

The issue at hand here is that we have two players, and there's others out there in America, that were given guidance when they were making life decisions last spring to transfer, and they were given guidance and guidelines by the NCAA as a path to play. They felt that they met those guidelines. They made life decisions based on that.

At the University of Cincinnati, we feel as strongly as you can possibly express that they meet the guidelines and standards that were laid out directly by the NCAA.

I expect them to be cleared to play because they meet those guidelines. Out of respect for these two young men, I won't talk about their personal business, but I know the situation with both of them deeply. I know their waivers deeply. I understand the guidelines laid out. They meet those. It's undeniable.

I have hope that through the appeals process they'll be cleared. I expect them to be cleared.

But I'm concerned. I'm concerned about how that'll affect them -- certainly it'll affect our team, but how will that affect young people that were led to believe something based on guidelines by a massive institution if they're not cleared. How will that affect their mental health? That concerns me on a much deeper level.

We'll keep you up to date, but I'm hopeful that they'll be cleared through the next round of appeals.

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Q. Outside of Aziz and Jamille, you had a secret scrimmage. I don't know how much you're allowed to say. I know some of the results, some of the numbers, but can you just give a general opinion of how the team played, and then also the Nike Jump Man uniforms came out last night and that seemed to get everyone fired up.

WES MILLER: You called it a secret scrimmage and then asked a question about it --

Q. Well, they're not so secret if you haven't heard.

WES MILLER: No, I really believe -- I was talking to Mike Boynton about this earlier. Being able to get out and play against another opponent really early in the preseason, I believe that's best for our program, because it just allows us to address some things that you just don't get to see when you're playing against yourselves every day in practice, and it gives us a little bit more time to deal with some of those things that we learn.

I'm not going to talk in detail because that's the agreement that I had with the other program that we scrimmaged. But there's some things that were really exciting. Obviously Jamille and Aziz couldn't play, which was discouraging, but there were some things that were really exciting that we were able to see that give us hope, not just myself but our staff, our players. I think we all feel we can be a really good basketball team.

Then there's some things that we need to address right away, but the cool thing was it wasn't the type of stuff you can't fix, it's the stuff you have control over, and a lot of it was the stuff we spent time practicing on, the details and the focus staff that you practice every day.

I do think it was successful in terms of what we were trying to get out of it.

Going back to the Jordan brand at Cincinnati, it's special to me. It's special to our fans. It's special to our players. It's special to the kids we're recruiting, not just because, let's face it, this is the best brand there is in sports, but there's also some nostalgia, Cincinnati being one of the original Jordan brand schools in college basketball back in the '90s. For many reasons, it's really exciting to be back in the brand, and our program will do everything we can to represent the brand the right way.

Q. You added seven new additions to this year's roster. How does the positional versatility that you have allow you to continue to develop the identity of your program?

WES MILLER: Yeah, you know, the additions were important. The first thing we're entering this league -- as I've said, I'd be foolish to say I understand a league I haven't coached in, but from what we can see from a distance, this is a league of talented kids, talented coaches, and mature players, experienced players. So it was important when added players, we added guys with some experience, you look at Simas Lukošius in the couple years he played in the Big East, he's played in some big-time environments and big-time games. CJ Fredrick, maybe more than anybody, four NCAA Tournament teams, and he's been a part of great teams at Iowa and Kentucky. So we wanted to add some experience. Aziz and Jamille both have played a ton of college basketball. That was really important.

As you mentioned, depth is really important. Like we love the returning guys. I think sometimes this time of year you talk so much about the guys coming into the program because people don't know them yet, especially your fan base. We lose sight of the most important thing is the guys that you retain, and that's why Ody and Vik and John are here with me today because it's harder and harder in college basketball and the landscape we have now to retain guys. You can be really different when you get guys year after year after year. We have a number of guys that returned, but we have three guys that are here with me today that have been with us the last two years, the two years that I've been at Cincinnati. That's meant a lot to our team because they're really good players. They've had success at Cincinnati. But they also understand not just what we do but how we do it and the standard at which we do it, and they want to hold others to that standard.

There's so much value in the retention piece.

But yeah, we have depth now. We have talent across the board. I do think we have lineup and positional versatility for sure.

Q. You mentioned in your opening statement that you felt like Commissioner Yormark was continuing to build the Big 12 brand. I'm curious as a coach when you're looking for from a conference to help lead the way and keep the Big 12 as the premier college basketball conference in America.

WES MILLER: Yeah, I'll twist it around on you a little bit, but I think from our perspective we have to do our job at Cincinnati, and our job is to put the best program that we can possibly put together game after game, year after year at the most competitive possible level but doing it within the values of this league, within the values of our institution and our community.



I think if we do that, we'll follow the lead of Commissioner Yormark and the league of the ways that we can evolve within the league.

But we've got to do our job here, and we're working hard every day to do that.

Q. You talked about a guy in John Newman who missed last season due to an injury. Talk about what you were able to see from him this summer and in the off-season following the injury.

WES MILLER: Well, you know, John is so important to our program. He was honestly -- it was a massive loss last year. He probably had the best preseason of any player on our team last year, so in our secret scrimmages and things of that nature, nobody performed better than John. He was kind of the glue going into last year, so when we lost him the first week of the season, it had a massive effect on our team.

We figured out how to adjust and evolve. It took a while, but we obviously had had less of a ceiling without John. So getting him back is a big deal.

He's had a really healthy summer, a really healthy fall. We've limited his reps and limited some of his practice time just to protect him a little bit. He doesn't like that because he's ready to go. He's 100 percent.

But I think we're just trying to be smart with him because he's such an important part to our program and our team. As people that have followed him, whether it was in his time at Clemson or his first year here playing for us at Cincinnati, I think he's one of the best defensive players in the country at his position and is a guy that does all the little stuff to make a team a team and has evolved his skill set over the last year, as well.

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