

March 3, 2011



An Interview With:

COACH MARTIN KYLE WEEMS WILL CREEKMORE

COACH MARTIN: We're glad to be here and look forward to having some fun, watching the game tonight and getting ready to go tomorrow.

Q. Will, what's it been like this week as far as getting refocused and coming back down from that emotional high from last weekend?

WILL CREEKMORE: Well, after the game Saturday we clinched the championship and we had fun Saturday night, celebrated Sunday, and then it was back to work on Monday. We've had our eyes set on this weekend. We haven't looked back to the regular season championship, and we've just been preparing like usual. It's been all eyes on this weekend.

Q. Kyle, you got a big trophy today, the guys got the plaque for the regular season championship, but if you guys can't perform this weekend, none of that will really matter. Tell me about that mindset going through?

KYLE WEEMS: Just like Will said, our eyes have been set on this weekend for a long, long time because that's the only for sure way that you're in the NCAA Tournament, and we know that. But like Will said, we enjoyed Saturday, it was one of the best days of my life, if not the best, and you know, we got our awards today. Coach got his award, well deserved.

But like Will said, we're ready to get back to work and start working on our second goal, and that's a tournament championship.

Q. I'm just kind of curious, from a coaching standpoint, how do you deliver that

message to these guys about the sense of urgency that nothing really is promised to you regardless of the fact that you've won the conference championship?

COACH MARTIN: Well, it's just the same day-to-day things that we do. We practice hard, we compete at a high level, work on the things necessary to try to win the most important game, and that's either Southern Illinois or Illinois State. That's the most important thing for us, not forgetting that we're trying to win that game, then we move forward to Saturday.

As players you made history, did something very special, so you're supposed to be overjoyed, rejoice in the moment; that's part of it. I don't want it any other way. Sunday you bring yourselves back down, back to the study table, study hall, Monday back to work; that was our game plan.

But for us it's one game at a time. We've never won a Missouri Valley Championship, so as a staff we didn't talk about let's win this first one, let's win this first one. One game at a time; this next game is the most important game, so for us we're doing everything in our power to try to win the game tomorrow, then we move forward to Saturday.

Q. I know you guys prepare the same, it's another game, nothing is going to change in your routine. But you do come here as the Valley champions, the No. 1 seed and the great turnaround. Just how different does that feel even as you prepare? Is there more bounce in your step?

KYLE WEEMS: It's very different. I mean, for me and Will, we've played only on Thursdays, and that's nothing to be proud of, no knock to the teams that are there this year. But it was tough times, and in order to get to this spot today, I think you kind of had to go through that, and Coach Martin has done such a good job of just putting us in a position to be successful, and you know, it's kind of a credit to his hard work and our hard work,

just a mixture, because it's not just one person, it's a whole program. But for us to be here today is a big step.

But like Coach said, our eyes are focused on the first game either against Southern Illinois or Illinois State. Like he said, that's our first step to our next goal.

WILL CREEKMORE: It's a nice feeling coming here as the 1 seed obviously, and like he said, we've been used to doing pregame during the banquet and playing tonight and just hoping we can advance. Now we're the No. 1 seed and we're excited to get a chance to prove that we're at the top of this conference.

Q. Does it mean a little more to you that this tournament is held so close to your hometown, and have you given thought to trying to raise that trophy on Sunday here in St. Louis?

COACH MARTIN: Well, you know, I'm happy to be at home. It's probably a tie, dinner with tickets. But it's just, I'm the coach of this ball club; whether I was in New York or Idaho, I'm trying to do everything in my power to win a ballgame. I'm no less a man or a son to my mom if we win or lose. I'm still the same guy, just if we hold the trophy up, we won it; if we lose it, on to the next day.

Q. Will, Monday at practice and yesterday at practice, you're one of the leaders on this team, did you have to go to some of the young guys and say, hey, I've been up there on Thursdays and haven't been that successful. Have you had to kind of be the captain of the team during practice for some of these guys that haven't been here before?

WILL CREEKMORE: Honestly, no. We've got guys that they're mature guys. They're freshmen, but they've all had a growing-up experience playing for this team with so much experience and playing for Coach Martin, so they know what's at stake. They're done celebrating just like everyone else. We want this as bad as anything, and we know what's on the table, and we've had a really good two days of practice.

Q. Kyle, at the lunch Coach Zo said when he first met you, you weren't quite ready to be a player yet. Was there a particular event or discussion sometime in the time period with him that the light went on?

KYLE WEEMS: Every workout. Every workout and every practice. It was a little bit of a culture shock for me, the work ethic and the mental focus, mental toughness that Coach Martin demanded. But I thank God every day that I'm blessed to have him as a coach because it's done nothing but made me better and help our team get to this point where we are now because he's built this program basically from the ground up. The first day there we were doing passing drills like we were middle schoolers, but we had to do that in order to get where we are today.

But just every day, I had to take the next step and grow up and know that I had to get my body right to be able to stay out of foul trouble and move my feet better. I think I've done a pretty good job of that to this point, but you've got to give credit to Coach Martin and the rest of the coaching staff.

Q. Coach, this is a first for you that you don't have a specific opponent to prepare for for a first game, so how does that change your preparation going into that game?

COACH MARTIN: Well, what we've done, what we've practiced, we had Sunday off like a normal schedule. We practiced on but Monday but it was more about jump stops, ball handling, shooting shots, defensive breakdown, just the principles, like you were starting your first week of practice. And we took off Wednesday so we practiced yesterday, and it was -- the practice was geared more toward Illinois State ball screening and somewhat Southern Illinois because we just played Southern Illinois so we're more familiar with them and what they'll do, so we have to do walk-through so we understand it.

But Illinois State is several games ago so we kind of went through some of their ball screen actions because it's a little different, elbow ball screens, so we focused on those, so now when you go into a game if it happens like that, at least you're somewhat ready for it as opposed to, okay, whatever happens happens because they're very similar in how they rebound and how they defend, but they run their ball screens a little different with a lot of elbow action, and Southern Illinois kind of like isolates Mamadou Seck. So we kind of catered toward how they work their offense. So I guess we leaned toward Illinois State, we don't know who's going to win the game, but just because it's been so long since we played them.

Q. You guys win the league outright and yet any time you turn on the television and see the people talking about the postseason, who's on the bubble and off, you guys are not on any of those lists, but Wichita State, whom you beat for the title, is. Does that bother you, and do you feel that having this league outright earns you the respect that you ought to be included in that discussion?

COACH MARTIN: Well, I guess I don't really look at how they go about it. So you're saying that they don't have Missouri State in the tournament but they have Wichita State on the bubble? So we've got to win the tournament. Well, you know, I guess we've got to win the tournament.

KYLE WEEMS: None of that really matters honestly. To know for sure that you get into the tournament is by winning on Friday, moving onto Saturday, winning Saturday, moving onto Sunday and winning that game, and that's the only for sure way, and that's all we're focused about and that's all we're trying to do. I think Coach Martin put it best earlier this week; you don't want to have your fate lie in another man's hands, and I think that's just the simplest and best way to put it, and for us to go on about that is just taking care of our own business and playing ball the way that we know how to play.

WILL CREEKMORE: I think whether or not the experts have us in as an at-large team or not doesn't change how we are going to prepare for this tournament. We're going to go about it the same way whether we need to win to get in it or not. This is our goal. It's always been our goal to win this championship, and we're going to go about it the same way.

Q. Coach, our local guy Nathan Scheer seems to be making some nice contributions. Can you tell us what he's been able to do for you guys this season?

COACH MARTIN: He's done a great job for us as a freshman. He's a very intelligent young man. He came into college with 30 credit hours out of the gates. He's smart on both ends of the floor. He's very physical, very tough. He can shoot the ball, he can score the ball. He's a better shooter right now than he is a scorer. He's getting to that level where he's able to score the ball, but we have so many weapons, but he does a tremendous job of accepting his role. Plays with energy, plays with a high level of passion, just one

of those guys you have to have in your program in order to move forward because he's so intelligent; he's a complete player. In a late-game situation he has to be on the floor for us, whether it is offense, making free throws, getting the pass in, rebounding, defending. He's a good ball player.

Q. Tomorrow when you play you step on the court as the reigning Valley Player of the Year. I would imagine especially being a junior that takes a certain amount of maturity to handle that and not put too much pressure on yourself to feel like you have to prove it to everybody here, and of course you've got Will probably to keep in line in practice, as well. But just thinking about the mental part of that and putting that aside tomorrow.

KYLE WEEMS: You know, I'll start off, it's an extreme honor to get that award, and I've always given credit to my teammates and obviously Coach Martin and the rest of the staff and also my parents. But you know, I plan on just letting the game come to me like I have for the whole season. I just have such a great coaching staff and great supporting cast around me that I have no choice but to just go out there and play ball. There's no pressure on my shoulders, and like I said, I have such a great supporting cast that it makes my job easy.

Q. In your mind what is the No. 1 attribute for Coach Martin?

KYLE WEEMS: Toughness. Toughness is I think his best one, but there's so many from him, just toughness, his mental focus, his preparation I think separates him from -- I'm not going to say from the rest of the coaches, but definitely separates him and puts him up there in the upper half of the coaches because he takes so much pride in the game of basketball and he absolutely loves what he does, and he brings so much enthusiasm and energy every day that as a player you have no choice but to just hop on and let's go, you know, let's just hit it head on.

WILL CREEKMORE: I'd say refusal to quit and refusal to back down. I remember early on in my career with Coach Martin, he said -- this always stood out with me. He said, "Missouri State will be at the top of the Valley, it's just a matter of how soon." I wanted to take it upon myself and I know the other seniors did, to get that for him. You know, Coach does it in a way that makes us want

to fight for him. We're going to do everything we can to get this second championship.

Q. With the toughness image and the focus image, over the last three years, where have you enjoyed and what have you enjoyed about this process?

COACH MARTIN: Really my true enjoyment, first and foremost, it's been a true blessing. I'm grateful to be here. But this profession has its ups and downs, highs and lows, and the bottom line is being successful or the University has to make a decision, and I'm well aware of that. I know that as a coach because I choose to get into this. But for me this is enjoyment, not only these two guys but the other guys; I mean, the guys that come off the bench, the guys that don't play but they come back with the same level of energy in practice because they want to be successful; our freshmen not playing at all but don't transfer the next season; Kyle Weems struggling, Will Creekmore struggling as freshman, and I'm driving them and driving them but they don't quit after the semester is up, they keep coming. And also they're very successful, Academic All-American, Kyle will graduate in August.

So for me that's where I get my worth at the end of the day because you win some, you lose some. There's a lot of great coaches in this league. I'm just blessed to be the Coach of the Year. But it never stops. When these guys are gone, there has to be a couple other guys sitting up here. The train keeps going. As long as I'm here, that's what my worth is, because these guys, if they're not successful 20 years from now I didn't do a very good job as a coach because I've got to push these guys along 20 years down the road.

So for me that's it. You're going to win some, you're going to lose some. I had a lot of success as a basketball player in high school, college, all across the board. But I think that's what my money is worth, when these guys are successful ten years down the road.

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