

**March 15, 2009**



An interview with:

## **MIKE SLIVE**

DAVE WORLOCK: We appreciate everyone's patience as we get settled here as we begin a long evening of interviews with various media outlets around the country to talk about the selection, seeding and bracketing process that just completed with the Division I Men's Basketball Committee. We understand there are a lot of people waiting to get questions in to Commissioner Slive. Let's go ahead and turn it right over to the callers and we'll get started.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Virginia Tech. If you could look at their résumé and tell me which parts of it was lacking.**

MIKE SLIVE: You know, when I look at these teams, it's about two things. It's about the team, but it's also about the other teams that are in the tournament. And, you know, in analyzing it, we took a look at Virginia Tech. We took a look at a lot of other teams. As you look at their body of work, they were 3 and 11 against the field, and they lost 8 of their last 10.

One of the things about Virginia Tech, such a great job there, is they had a lot of close losses. That's the kind of discussion that the committee has. They played in some tremendous games. I saw a lot of their games. They lost a lot of heartbreakers, and they had a lot of close wins, too.

But in the final analysis, taking all that into consideration, and, again, comparing it to others, it isn't necessarily about what a team didn't do, it's also about what other teams did do.

**Q. Last year there were a certain number of losses, certain number of wins in**

**the top 50s. Is that stuff you looked at again that didn't measure up?**

MIKE SLIVE: You know, what I've said all along from day one, since at least I succeeded Tom, who did a tremendous job for this committee last year, it's about the whole body of work. It's about who you play, where you play, and how did you do. Then there is a lot of data that each member of the committee has to work with. Then each member of the committee takes that data and uses it as he or she sees fit and puts emphasis on whatever that particular committee member feels.

So obviously, at the end of the day, given the field, obviously Virginia Tech didn't make the field.

**Q. Could you do the same thing for Penn State. They had a very strange résumé with six top-50 wins.**

MIKE SLIVE: They had a tremendous year. I mean, they really had a tremendous year. And they were in the conversation right down to the last day.

But, again, it's the whole body of work. Their strength of schedule was about 119. Their non-conference strength of schedule was 312.

Now, they did have some very good wins in the top 150. They beat Michigan State. They beat Illinois twice. They beat Purdue, Minnesota, Michigan. So within the league, but they had no non-conference wins in the top 100.

So if you subscribe to the theory that it's about the whole body of work, again, then the committee looks at that. Again, it isn't one school standing alone and what it didn't do. It really stacks up against what other people did.

**Q. I saw you just say on CBS about how important November and December have become to the committee, the early-season games, losses like Auburn to Mercer, the schedule that Penn State wasn't able to get or play. How important has the entire season, November and December, become, almost like**

## college football?

MIKE SLIVE: Well, I think every time I say that, I certainly speak for myself. Each member of the committee can take the body of work and emphasize whatever that committee member thinks is the most important.

What I was saying for me, it's the whole season. I think I said on a prior call that, you know, November and December are not exhibitions. It's not an exhibition season. It's part of the body of work. And that also gives teams opportunities, depending on the configuration therein, to be able to differentiate themselves from other teams because they can get outside of their own neighborhood.

**Q. There's examples where Arizona did have a strong non-conference. Penn State did not. I think there are examples in this bracket of why the body of work for this committee certainly mattered from November until March. Can you expand on how that is true.**

MIKE SLIVE: Well, I want to try to be helpful here. I'm not sure if I know how to answer your question.

**Q. When you guys discussed, I'm wondering how much it came up, for example, Arizona, good wins in November and December. Maybe they struggled at the end of March. Penn State didn't have those wins. Auburn didn't have those kinds of wins. How much was that actually discussed, where you talked about what they did specifically in November and December as compared to doing all their work in the Big-10 or the SEC?**

MIKE SLIVE: You know, you're exactly right. I want to be sure I understood.

That's what we've been talking about, non-conference schedules. We've been talking about this for several years, that non-conference games are important. And maybe this year being the chair, I articulate it as 'the whole body of work'.

So when you look at Arizona, I mean, if you look back in the early part of the season, they beat Kansas, they beat Washington, they beat Gonzaga, they beat San Diego State, they beat Southern California, they beat UCLA.

What we did, we discussed it a lot. We obviously were aware that they lost several games coming down the stretch. They were only 7-5 in their last 12 games. The end result was, after a lot of deliberation, the committee, you know how it works, each member voting, obviously it meant a

lot to the committee that this team had a very strong résumé with that number of wins, six wins in the top 50. So it was important. Particularly it helped Arizona offset the bottom of their schedule. And also their losses were to pretty good teams: California, Arizona State twice, Washington, so teams that were in the field.

I hope that's helpful.

**Q. For the second year in a row, Texas A&M plays Brigham Young in the first round. Is that something that was discussed and is that something that you try to avoid?**

MIKE SLIVE: We discussed it a lot. It's not a principle procedure, but it's a consideration, because we don't want the rematches.

Given the complexity of this year's bracket, with three conferences having seven teams, another conference having six teams. As we worked our way down the bracket, trying to follow those principles, we got to a point, and we talked a lot about it, we just got to a point where we just couldn't keep the consideration, which has lesser standing than the principles and procedures.

We caught it. It was unfortunate. We tried to get out of it, but we just couldn't do it.

**Q. I was wondering how much the committee talked about putting Ohio State in Daytona and if there was consideration to maybe move them outside of that site. The reason I'm asking is obviously Louisville being the No. 1 seed, it almost seems like playing Ohio State in Daytona would be more advantageous to the Buckeyes.**

MIKE SLIVE: We protect teams in the first-round game. I want to be sure I answer your question properly. Is that what you were asking?

**Q. You said you protect teams in the first-round games?**

MIKE SLIVE: Only in the first-round games. We don't project who's going to win games. That's not what we do. Once we set the field, we go through the principles, we only protect in the first game.

**Q. When you were having discussions about the No. 1 seed line and the No. 2 line, did you discuss any evenness to the teams on those lines? There seems to be some parity, almost like you could have had Memphis as a**

**No. 1, but you went with UConn. What were those discussions like, if you can say?**

MIKE SLIVE: The teams on the first two lines caused us a lot of concern. They're very fine teams. We spent a lot of time seeding.

As a matter of fact, we probably spent more time seeding this year than we have in my five years on the committee. And a lot of that time was spent dealing with the first two lines.

Every team has positives and negatives. As a matter of fact, every day we started out by reviewing the top teams, every morning, for several hours. In the final analysis, you know, it's not just about what a team in the second line doesn't have, it's about what other teams in the first line have. So it's never a decision in pure isolation where you're taking a team and you're saying, Does this team in a vacuum belong on which line? It has to do with a lot of other people who are involved.

In the final analysis, the committee felt that the teams they put on the first line were the teams that deserved to be on the first line.

**Q. As far as the No. 2 seed, with Oklahoma, what kind of consideration did they get for No. 1? Also with Blake Griffin missing two games with an injury, how did that factor into how the committee took a look at Oklahoma?**

MIKE SLIVE: I mean, Oklahoma was definitely in the conversation throughout. We really didn't complete our final decision on the first line until very, very late this morning. And actually we started talking about it as early as 9:00. We went through a scrub, we came back, and we came back again.

The conversation included Oklahoma. It included everybody else on those lines. We were very, very aware of the losses that Oklahoma suffered when Blake Griffin wasn't playing. You know, the injuries are clearly factored into everything that we do.

I mean, they've had a great year. They got a great player there. So, you know, as a matter of fact, they've got 17 top-100 wins. That's a lot. So looking at the body of work, again, it was looking at them and looking at them in conjunction with the other teams. The committee felt they placed them where they should be. But it's a very, very fine basketball team.

**Q. Their first-round loss, how much of an impact might that have had on the discussion of them being a No. 1 seed?**



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**There's a lot of speculation that if they could win the Big 12 tournament, that would push them to the No. 1 seed line.**

MIKE SLIVE: I've said this all along, you know, that it's a full season body of work. No single game gets a team in; no single game keeps a team out. It's a part of their overall résumé.

I don't remember that being a particularly significant focus point of the conversation.

**Q. I was wondering if Arizona was the last at-large team in the field and how did you evaluate their road record? Did that make it any more confusing?**

MIKE SLIVE: We really don't think about teams standing alone. Though there's no way I can really answer that other than to say that they were in a grouping of teams in the conversation.

**Q. I know you talked about this a little bit on CBS, the issue of the non-power conference schools. Can you talk more about that.**

MIKE SLIVE: Just going back to the beginning, we look at teams, we don't look at conferences. Those are labels that are put on by people outside the committee. So we just look at teams.

We understand that teams play in different configurations, and some have a more traditional configuration of teams that are successful. So by talking about the full body of work, that November and December games count, we do understand the beginning of these games is not easy, so a lot of them turn out to be neutral-site games.

The fact is that by providing that window, to say those games count, just like the conversation we had about Arizona, then you're giving every team in Division I an opportunity to play a game that is notable and to get a result that is notable.

You know, there are several teams, you could take a Gonzaga, you could take a Butler, you can take Xavier, that at some point in time we're not doing that. They've gone out and they've found a way to play games and to create a résumé that resonates with the committee.

So I think in the final analysis, it's enough to give the committee some insight as to the quality of that team so that we can evaluate that team in the context of the tournament where they're going to be playing quality teams.

So I think that what we are trying to do is to open that window even wider and give people a chance to play a schedule that can get them those kinds of games.

**Q. Is there a concern from them going from 12 down to 4?**

MIKE SLIVE: Every year is a different year. It's not like we're looking at a continuum. What we're looking at is the teams in a given year. If there were 12 in a certain year, then that would be that year, those were very, very good teams. The average each year is 26 or 27 teams from major conferences.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about how much impact, there seems to be a flurry of injuries that came into play during the conference tournaments, talk about how much that impacted the seeding.**

MIKE SLIVE: You're asking about one of the most difficult issues that the committee has to deal with. We had lots of injuries this year. Some of them have taken care of themselves. Some will move into the tournament.

All the committee can do is try to evaluate the impact of those injuries on those games in which a particular player does not play. If the player comes back, it's a little easier because then you can measure before, then when a player's gone, then when he came back.

But we had injuries at Illinois, Purdue, Saint Mary's, UConn, North Carolina and Marquette, all which the committee thought about and analyzed during the selection and seeding process.

**Q. How difficult does that make the discussion? Does it make it more difficult?**

MIKE SLIVE: Oh, it makes it very difficult. Anytime you have an injury, it makes it difficult. I think this year there were certain injuries that it made it even more difficult.

**Q. You've addressed the first couple lines and the last couple lines. Can you talk about what other issues concerned the committee most during the process of discussion and selection.**

MIKE SLIVE: Issues, per se, don't come to my mind. I mean, what comes to my mind is a lot of basketball teams that had good records, but all of them have blemishes. The committee spent a lot of time analyzing each team, the pros and

cons for each team. Then you go through the selection process. Then when you're seeding, you're seeding 1 to 65 just this way, you're going from best to worst.

So I think the process itself, the seeding process this year, and I think everybody anticipated it, too, going in, I think you folks and our friends in the media all anticipated it, that seeding would be a significant issue for the committee. It turned out to be that. We spent more time on seeding than any time in my five years on the committee.

**Q. Arizona's road record at 2-9, they only won in Oregon. Did that kind of mix up the conversation and make it any trickier?**

MIKE SLIVE: That was a very, very important point. The committee had that information, discussed that information. Each member of the committee had to balance that against their very, very significant success playing teams in the top 50 with some very significant wins, and had to balance that. Each committee member voted.

Again, they're a classic example of a team that has good attributes and blemishes, like every other team did. The way the votes came out was to put Arizona in the field.

**Q. I know in part because of recession there was a desire to have teams play as close to home as possible. Was that a factor in Ohio State being sent to Dayton?**

MIKE SLIVE: Again, we follow these principles and procedures. That's the policy we've been using since 2002. Ohio State is in Dayton because that site was available when we went to them in the bracket. It really depends on your seed and what's been done ahead of you.

Oftentimes where a team goes has less to do with that team than it does with what happened ahead of them. So in the case of Ohio State, there were no obstacles or issues, there were no other big teams they could meet in that region before the regional final, which was a very difficult issue we had to deal with this year in the bracketing, because we had three teams with -- three conferences with seven teams, and I think one with six or maybe two with six, I don't remember. So that's really how it happened.

You know, it isn't that we take Ohio State out of the mix and say, Where are we going to put

Ohio State? It doesn't work that way.

**Q. The fact the game ended less than an hour before the selection show, does that eliminate the flexibility you have with them?**

MIKE SLIVE: It did not this year at all.

**Q. I went through the mock exercise, so I understand how this happened. Does it show there's something broken when you send two teams from Arizona to Miami and UCLA to Philadelphia, and the teams we get in Boise are all coming from the east? Is there something wrong with the system when that happens?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think the fundamental issue is a very simple one: we have to put out a competitively and geographically balanced bracket. Two-thirds of the team that play basketball are east of the Mississippi. So people are going to have to go. Then we protect the first four lines. Those teams that earned the first shot at staying as close to home as they can, then you work your way down the bracket.

We're very sensitive every year, but particularly this year. I mean, we are well aware that millions of Americans, along with every single one of us on the call and in the room, have significant problems related to the economy. At the same time, we had an obligation to make sure we have a bracket that works.

So a lot of teams are closer to home, and some of the teams have to travel. I think you can appreciate it probably. If you've been through the mock, you understand exactly what I'm talking about.

**Q. I definitely do. Did Boise get hurt by being more east than Portland? A lot of people were hoping to get Washington or Gonzaga. Portland got both of those teams.**

MIKE SLIVE: I think there were other issues in the bracket, the constraints of the bracket, that dealt with that. There was never any discussion about that.

**Q. With Florida State, a No. 5, I know you just said you protect the top four, how close was Florida State to being a 4 and possibly being in Miami this weekend?**

MIKE SLIVE: It isn't a question of being a 4. We seed the teams 1 to 65 one line at a time. And it's based upon how the committee feels about a team and where they deserve to be based on

what they've done in the seeding list, and then we put it in the bracket.

It gets complicated. When Wake Forest was assigned to Miami, we couldn't assign Florida State there because it would have meant that we would have had -- they would meet before the regional final. You know we separate teams from conferences so that they can't meet until the regional final.

So it's what I said before. It isn't necessarily about that team. It matters what happens before based on seeds.

**Q. Florida State could have been in a different pod in Miami.**

MIKE SLIVE: I don't think so. It depends on what sites are available. As we go through the seeds, it just depends on what sites are available when we get there.

**Q. About Missouri and also in the context of Oklahoma and Kansas, I know there was some discussion about Oklahoma as a 1. I'm also curious if Missouri got in the discussion as a 2 and how Missouri looked against Oklahoma, considering they beat them head-to-head, and I think Oklahoma lost four of its last six, two with Griffin, and Missouri won the tournament and was a little hotter.**

MIKE SLIVE: I'm trying to take a quick look at their résumé here. I mean, I think as the year went on, when you look at their last 12 games, 10-2, Missouri caught everybody's attention. They finished very, very strong. They're a good basketball team. And when you look at the entire résumé, and you look at their strength of schedule, how they did, obviously they got some very significant wins in the top bracket. So it was a very close call, a very, very close call.

It's a good example of just how many teams we have that could merit high seeding. There was a lot of time spent trying to figure out where people should fall.

**Q. To clarify, when you say 'a very close call,' are you saying it was a close call with Missouri as a 2?**

MIKE SLIVE: I'm not saying that. I'm just saying, looking at the first four lines, there were a lot of people in the conversation. I think Missouri, as the season went on, inserted themselves appropriately in that conversation.

**Q. Arizona's RPI was in the 60s. I'm wondering, how much did that matter as the committee was going over their résumé?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think it's an example of what we keep saying over and over and over again, that the RPI is just one factor amongst a myriad of factors. It was one that was on the table. I think everybody knew it. In the final analysis, again, I'm just reiterating what I said before, you know, the fact that they were still successful with so many good wins against good teams, the committee decided that they deserved to be in the tournament.

**Q. When you said earlier they were in a grouping of teams in a conversation, how big was that group?**

MIKE SLIVE: I'm trying to think in what context I said that.

**Q. You were asked if they were the last team in, the last at-large team in. I think you said they were in a group of teams at that point.**

MIKE SLIVE: Traditionally it's about eight teams that you get down to when you have to make this agonizing decision. These teams get a lot of discussion over several days. We don't keep track of who's last.

This is the most gut-wrenching moment of five long days. It also depends what happens with tournaments. This year, I think there's at least three, I don't recall, where slots were taken as a result of tournaments.

I don't know how else to describe it to you. That's how it went.

**Q. Could you discuss Saint Mary's situation, how Patty Mills' injury was an impact, and the loss in the Gonzaga final with Mills?**

MIKE SLIVE: We were very well aware of Saint Mary's and very, very aware of what a wonderful player Patty Mills is. I mean, I was watching the game along with a lot of other people. I think it was five minutes to go in the half, and they were up by about six, and he got hurt, and then things changed. His injury was amongst a lot of other injuries that occurred during the year. He obviously made a valiant effort to come back. They didn't have success against Gonzaga. Then they went out and played Eastern Washington.

The committee spent -- as you can imagine, we spent a lot of time talking about Saint Mary's. We talked about the pros and the cons.

Again, it's about Saint Mary's, but it's not. It's about other people. We talked about Saint Mary's throughout the week. We monitored the game Friday night. They were part of the discussion right up to the end. Everybody had to make a hard decision.

It was very difficult. I was asked the other day, I don't know if it was on television or otherwise, but I was asked about, What is the most difficult piece of this work? And that is when you make that last decision, you got two slots or three slots, you got eight teams, they're all deserving, we're looking for the best 34 teams. We talk about it. People then vote. We don't know how anybody votes. Saint Mary's just didn't make it. It's painful.

**Q. I believe you said on CBS the committee tries not to guess. I was just wondering if the fact that they didn't look good with Mills against Gonzaga meant that it was difficult to project that he would play better and they would be better in the NCAA tournament?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think what we try to do, again, I meant what I said in that we have to look at the body of work as it's presented to us. That's what we got. You know, you and I both, everyone else in the room, knows what the facts are in this case. We could parse it and try to dissect it more. But in the final analysis, the committee, each individual member, had to decide. The consensus of the committee was that some other team or other teams deserved to be in the tournament.

I don't know what else to say about it.

**Q. The fact you had conferences with seven teams, how much more difficult does that make it, with the economy, how did that impact those decisions?**

MIKE SLIVE: That's a good question. We have a safety valve built in in a conference has nine teams. So what happened here is we had three conferences with seven. I think there were two with six. So we did not have a safety valve.

So we had to follow the principles and procedures. So it made it much, much more difficult. There are more teams from more conferences, it requires us to thoughtfully move through the process. Every time you put a team in a conference -- a team from a conference that's already there, then you have to begin to use -- you have to spread them out, you don't want them to meet till the regional final. You get to a point

where there just isn't a place, then we have to decide what happens next. Do you move a line? Then you might run into it's a rematch if we do that. I think that was a question earlier. It was very difficult.

This was a very, very, difficult bracketing process. And it was made more difficult because we're all very sensitive to the economy and what it means. We kept a lot of teams close to home. The bracket worked for that purpose, but some teams had to travel.

**Q. I was wondering about Niagara, if they were on the board very long. The understanding is they really weren't going to be considered in the top six or eight, they were off the board. Would you address that.**

MIKE SLIVE: I think Niagara is one of the teams, when we sat down and started the process, Niagara was one of the teams, along with a lot of other teams, that were considered. Obviously, the committee did not choose -- understand, Niagara was a darn good basketball team. They had a couple tough losses with teams with RPIs of over 200. They had four losses to teams that were 100 or higher. They obviously beat a good Siena team at home. They lost to them away. They have a résumé that we looked at.

As it turned out, the committee did not think that Niagara was one of the 34 best teams in the country, but they're a heck of a basketball team.

**Q. Can you qualify for me how, be more specific? Were they in the last group?**

MIKE SLIVE: I'm not going to do that. They were on the board. They were being considered. There's no way I can take every team that was being considered and tell you exactly where they were.

**Q. Considering San Diego State's struggles to compile quality wins outside of the conference, was it the committee's impression at all that it would have had to win the Mountain West Conference tournament to advance?**

MIKE SLIVE: San Diego State was a team that was in the conversation. Again, I want to reiterate, there's no single event, accomplishment that we can ascribe to a team. They played teams in the -- they played outside the league against Arizona State, Saint Mary's, Arizona. They played actually eight teams with RPIs of 100 or more.

They have a résumé. They're a good basketball team and they're fun to watch. We watched them through the tournament. I can assure you they were in the conversation. They did well. Their wins against Utah and BYU mean a lot. But there were a lot of other teams who looked similar. And we were looking for the best 34 teams, and that's how it came out.

**Q. When a team like San Diego State has an RPI of 37 and a team such as Arizona has an RPI of 63, is the public a little confused by RPI these days?**

MIKE SLIVE: They shouldn't be confused because we say over and over and over again that the RPI is a tool that is used by the committee amongst a whole lot of other tools.

If the RPI was the do-all, end-all, we wouldn't have to meet. We would just figure what the RPIs are and line 'em up.

It's a factor. There are teams in the tournament with RPIs higher, and there are teams in the tournament with RPIs lower, because it's the entire body of work that counts.

**Q. Last year Arizona State inspired a lot of debate about getting in versus not getting in. Did they inspire any kind of debate this year, or was it pretty clear-cut? Six PAC-10 teams got in. Only one I think is in either Portland or Boise. Was that a situation of you had to take care of the teams above these teams as far as where they're placed?**

MIKE SLIVE: Under the bracketing principles, the teams in the top four lines obviously get regional preference, and we move from there.

The interesting thing is that we learned how many teams each conference got in as we went to the bracket. I want to reiterate that we really don't talk about conferences. As a matter of fact, there's no conference RPI, there's no data in the room. The conferences are just not discussed.

The first time I learned that the PAC-10, you said it was six, I wasn't even sure it was six when we started this call. We've got to separate the first three teams of a conference regionally to keep them from meeting before the regional final. As a result, when you get to teams, it's not necessarily about that team as much as about what happened to teams above them.

**Q. I asked about Arizona State, as well.**

**Any debate or was that pretty clear-cut?**

MIKE SLIVE: They were in the conversation from the beginning, and they stayed in the conversation until they got in the tournament.

**Q. I know you were saying that conferences aren't really discussed. I'm wondering if the committee this year was aware of the fact the last couple of years there was sort of a disproportionate number of mid-majors playing other mid-majors in the first rounds, and if there is any kind of concerted effort to not have that happen again this year. It looks like this year in the mid range games, seeds 5 through 12, none of the mid-majors are playing mid-majors.**

MIKE SLIVE: First of all, the committee deals with teams. We don't have a label that some team is a mid-major and another team is a major. We look at all the teams.

There's no guidance in that regard in the principles and procedures. But it's a good example of a concept that we are placing teams in a seed list based upon the quality of the team. We actually don't see the brackets until all of the seeding is done and the bracket is then put out. When you finally print it out, as you get it, do we know who people play.

So the question, some years maybe it turned out one way, this year it turns out another. But it's based upon the quality of the teams in that year where they end up.

DAVE WORLOCK: Thank you, everyone, for participating on this evening's call. We understand there may be more questions out there that you want to get asked. We'd like to take this opportunity to remind you we have a chance for more questions with Commissioner Slive at 3 p.m. eastern time on Monday afternoon. Commissioner Slive will be on his way to Dayton for the opening-round game, which is Tuesday between Alabama State and Morehead State as we get the tournament started.

Thank you, again, for participating. We wish you all a pleasant evening.

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