

**March 16, 2009**



An interview with:

## **MIKE SLIVE**

DAVE WORLOCK: Thank you, everyone, for joining us. Good afternoon. We'd like to get to your questions just as soon as possible. Before we do that, we'd like to provide an opportunity for Commissioner Slive to weigh in on his thoughts now that roughly 24 hours have passed since the brackets have come out and he's had a chance to absorb everything and get his overall thoughts and impressions on the work that the committee put in for the last several days.

Commissioner Slive, if you could begin today's teleconference with those remarks, we'd appreciate it.

MIKE SLIVE: Thank you, David. Hello, everyone. Thanks for being on the call. As Dave said, it's been 24 hours. We've gotten a little sleep, had a chance to think about everything.

I think all in all the committee, me, my colleagues, feel very, very good about what we accomplished. It was not easy. I think I've said several times publicly since the bracket was released two things. One is that we spent a lot more time seeding the teams this year, more than any time in my five years. And, as is the case every year, when you get down to the end of the selection process and you have several teams to look at whose resumés are very similar and you only have a couple slots, it's a very gut-wrenching moment for each member of the committee. Notwithstanding the fact there are some folks who are unhappy, we think we have a bracket that's going to provide fans everywhere with a very, very exciting tournament.

With that, David, I think we're ready to take questions.

DAVE WORLOCK: Thank you, commissioner. We're ready for our first question.

**Q. This seems to be fairly wide open, but because of all the changes that occurred during the season and conference tournaments, is this one that you think you could really have, whether it's a lot of upsets or exciting, unexpected games in this tournament?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think that's really a possibility. We obviously spent a lot of time on the first four lines. Then when we got down to sort of the middle, a lot of teams looked very, very much alike, which is what made seeding so difficult.

It would not surprise me if the unexpected became the expected. That's how I sort of characterized the year, then characterized the tournament week. The unexpected every night became the expected. We might well see that same theme throughout the tournament.

**Q. Is that a good thing for college basketball?**

MIKE SLIVE: Well, it depends on whose team you're talking about. You know, the event is such a wonderful event. It captures the imagination of everyone. To the extent teams have chances to win and upset other people adds certainly an element of excitement for everyone throughout the bracket.

**Q. I know you had to leave the room when the SEC was brought up, but hearing some coaches talk today, including South Carolina's, the feeling was the entire SEC was downgraded and the non-conference wasn't going to matter, Tennessee getting a low seed, despite playing some of the strongest in the country. What do you say to that?**

MIKE SLIVE: I was where you were during all those conversations: outside the room. I really can't characterize what went into the conversations, what was in the minds of the committee. I'm not there for the conversation and I'm not there for the vote. I can't vote.

It's impossible for me really to give anyone an assessment of what the committee thought. All I see when I come back in the room is something is done or not done. As the chair, I just took over and moved on to the next item.

So I really don't know how to respond to your question. I don't have anything to offer.

**Q. Do you think there might be some awkward conversations in Destin or do you think the coaches understand it?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think we're going to have some very instructive conversations in Destin. I think Southeastern Conference basketball is great basketball, traditionally great basketball. We've won the national championship the last few years. I think we just need to sit down and talk about the philosophy.

I'm going to be very happy to share my view of what I think it takes, to share the view of what I think the committee is going to do in the years to come. The idea that the full year is what counts, that it's the whole body of work. So I'm looking forward to those conversations. One thing about our meetings in Destin is that the First Amendment is live and well.

**Q. Last year at this time the committee chair told me he had dealt with one call from an AD upset her school was left out of the tournament. Have you had any calls like that?**

MIKE SLIVE: I've had no calls. I've had no calls. I got an e-mail from a commissioner who praised the committee for its work, understood how difficult it was. There was some disappointment, but understood it completely. Thanked me, wished us luck during the tournament. I've had no other calls.

**Q. Is that one of the mid-majors, non-BCS?**

MIKE SLIVE: No, it was not.

**Q. What advice do you have for the Creightons and Saint Mary's, who were probably in the conversation, to boost their résumé in the future?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think I've been helpful by saying that the full body of work counts. November and December count. January and February count. The tournaments count. For those institutions that are in a configuration of schools that don't provide them with the kind of visibility that others do, if they step out in the early part of

the year and do something notable, then that will be something that the committee can deal with.

When the committee is analyzing teams, as you put teams in the field, you continue to analyze teams against all the teams in Division I and the teams you've already put in the field. So that gives us -- this concept levels the playing field.

We've seen schools step out and become very significant players in a very major way, schools like Gonzaga, Xavier, Butler and others. The schools that are disappointed, again, it isn't always just what they did or didn't do, it's what other people did. So they just need to continue to do the good work that they do, consider every game that could help tell their story to the committee.

**Q. Is that kind of what happened to Saint Mary's and Creighton, it's what other people did, like Mississippi State getting the automatic bid?**

MIKE SLIVE: When we got down to the end, and it happens every year, usually it's around eight teams, give or take, and you have a certain number of slots. You can always vote people in the field. I'm not saying this about any school you mentioned. I'm just saying this as a general proposition. On occasion, all those slots stay available. On occasion sometimes those slots get eaten up by the results of a tournament. So a team that might have been worthy of coming in, there may not be room for that school by the time we get to Sunday afternoon.

**Q. Is that what happened this year, slots became unavailable?**

MIKE SLIVE: I want to be careful here. I'm not talking about institutions. I don't want you to infer, because you used two schools in your question, that you're getting the answer to that question. Be very careful, I'm not answering that question. I'm just telling you how it works.

**Q. The PAC-10, the inclusion of Arizona has gotten a lot of conversation. Can you fill us in on how that decision came about?**

MIKE SLIVE: Arizona's got a lot of discussion, not only in the west. It's got a lot of discussion (laughter).

I think Arizona is a classic example of looking at the entire body of work. Their strength of schedule is strong. They went out and they beat

Kansas, they beat Washington, they beat Gonzaga, they beat UCLA, they beat a good San Diego State team, they beat Southern California. They played a good schedule.

Then at the end, they were 7-5 in their last 12 games. The committee, each individual member, took all of that and on balance decided that Arizona deserved to be in the tournament.

It's a classic example of what I'm saying. You can look at the whole body of work. Sometimes if you've been very successful early, it can help you if some things don't go exactly the way you'd like them to go at the end.

**Q. The PAC-10 didn't have any team higher than four, but had six teams in. Do you look much at conference affiliation?**

MIKE SLIVE: No. I'm glad you asked. We do not look at conference affiliation at all. We don't have a conference RPI. We don't have anything in the room that tells you anything about a conference.

We do it solely by looking at teams, teams against teams against teams against teams. Then the committee votes teams into the field. I'll be honest with you. I didn't really know how many teams were in from the PAC-10 until somebody mentioned it after the bracket came out.

That's the way it should be. If you had any other kind of rule, then you would not be able to be fair to two teams whether they were in that conference or outside of a conference. It's an important fundamental principle that we follow, and we follow very carefully.

**Q. Can you speak at all on Washington being a 4?**

MIKE SLIVE: Being a regular-season champion is one factor. It's a very positive factor. In any league, to win the regular season, is a very notable achievement. It's something that is not lost on the committee. Certainly adds something substantial to a résumé.

**Q. In 2001, the last year before the bracket went to a pod system.**

MIKE SLIVE: That's right.

**Q. One of the reasons was in '01 Boise had a regional that had nobody anywhere near Boise in it. A lot of East Coast teams. I just see a little bit more of that in this year's bracket than maybe in the past few years. Maybe it's because of where these first and second**

**rounds sites are this year, corners of the country. In today's economy, I think about the fans and families of the players who have to travel distance. Is there anything more that could have been done to help geographically keep teams closer to home?**

MIKE SLIVE: Your observations are right on. It's a combination of things. Obviously, there are two sites out west. But I think where to start in this analysis is first we're obligated to create a geographically and competitively balanced national tournament. Two-thirds of the teams that we're dealing with are east of the Mississippi. So you have that as a fundamental issue that's just there.

Then when you protect the first four lines, because a lot of schools, if you analyze the bracket, are very close to where they're located. But at some point when you get down into the bracket, you have to move teams around. It got very complicated this year, probably as complicated as any bracket we've done, because you had three conferences with seven teams, two conferences with six teams, and when you have to separate the regions, you have to separate the first three teams for every conference in the regions, then you continue to do that, it got very sticky when we got down into the bracket because we had to follow the principles. Sometimes you couldn't place teams where you would have liked to have placed them because you still want to protect the seed because people earned competitive advantage by their body of work during the year.

So all of that came together. Fundamentally you're trying to protect no two teams from a conference can play before the regional final. So it's a combination I think of all of those things that led to it.

The good news is a lot of the teams, because of the pod system, are playing close to home. The bad news is, because of so much of the effort to balance it geographically, you have to move teams.

**Q. For future thought, since two-thirds of the teams are in one half of the country, is it possible to select first and second round sites to reflect that in the future? That would be a dramatic change from the philosophy.**

MIKE SLIVE: You're going to have a region in the west traditionally. If you have a region in the west and two-thirds of the teams in the east, you're just going to have some travel.

In the summer meeting, we'll sit down, we'll say to ourselves, let's look at the bracket, the principles, let's look at the economy. On the other hand, though, let me tell you this. Boise sold out, and so is Portland.

Every summer, you've heard us use the word 'scrub' to describe seeding. But every summer we scrub all of our principles just to see if there's something different, and whether or not, because of the deepening recession, that should drive any changes. We'll take a hard look at that.

**Q. Let me play devil's advocate on behalf of the mid-majors here, using Arizona as an example. Arizona won two road games all year, both of them being against the Oregon teams, which weren't very good. You said over and over it's who you play, where you play 'em, that kind of thing. Mid-majors don't get a lot of cracks at getting to play big-conference schools, particularly at home. They don't have many chances. Arizona, by virtue of playing in the PAC-10, is going to have a lot of chances. How do you justify the fact that Arizona can win two games on the road all year and still get in? A lot of these other teams obviously don't have the same opportunity to get the marquee wins that impress the committee.**

MIKE SLIVE: Your observation about their road record is exactly correct. The committee had to balance. Don't forget, it's the consensus of 10 people. I may express a view. Whenever you hear me express a view about what I think is important, I lay them out, but everybody has their own way of analyzing all this data.

I think those number of wins, six wins in the top 50, is very, very impressive, and obviously on balance the committee felt that may have outweighed some other factors. It's always a balance.

Getting back to the fundamental question you asked, which is a very fundamental question, and a good one. The committee doesn't have mid-majors. The committee doesn't have majors. The committee has basketball teams. Our goal is to put the best 34 teams in the tournament at-large.

You can argue that we shouldn't have put a team in and we should have put another team in because, in your opinion, the team we put in is not one of the best 34, but the team we left out is. That's a matter of judgment.

This tournament is about the best teams. It's not designed to social engineer college

basketball. I think that by virtue of the philosophy that I have outlined very carefully today and every day since I've been talking, I have made it possible even more so for all teams to use all parts of the season to burnish their résumé.

In the final analysis, our job is to pick the best 34 teams, not to protect or hurt any particular grouping of teams.

**Q. I understand that. I understand you're the spokesman for the committee. The fundamental question I would, again as a devil's advocate, Saint Mary's, Creighton, the schedule they play is the schedule they play.**

MIKE SLIVE: Let me make this point. Five years ago if you were talking to me about teams, you would have put in your listing of teams that you call mid-majors, you would have put Gonzaga, Dayton, you would have put Xavier, you would have put Butler. Somehow those teams found a way over the years to distinguish themselves from their neighborhood, and they have in effect showed the committee that they can play with the best 34 teams in the country, and those teams have made the tournament.

**Q. I'm sure we can debate this over and over.**

MIKE SLIVE: I'm trying to articulate that we've thought about those issues.

**Q. The smaller schools, not calling them mid-majors, they don't play the quantity of top 50 teams that Arizona would by virtue of being in a big conference.**

MIKE SLIVE: I understand that. I guess I'd have to ask you if we were alone, have been a libation, talking about this, what would you want me to do about that?

**Q. I know you weren't in the room for the SEC discussions, but just considering they've had a rough year, are you kind of rooting for them a little extra harder to have a good first weekend?**

MIKE SLIVE: I tell you what, I've got to wear two hats. I've had exclusively on for the last week my NCAA hat. When the tournament starts, I can't do anything about it, except I can be a fan. Obviously I hope our teams have success.

**Q. Are the stakes maybe a little higher**

**this year?**

MIKE SLIVE: I thought a lot about this obviously. I mean, I think the whole system speaks to the integrity of the NCAA basketball committee, the fact that I'm not in the room for any conversation, I can't vote, and the fact that the committee does what it deems appropriate.

But I think I'm right, you can check it out for me, it gives me some consolation that we have won seven of the last nine national championships in men's basketball, women's basketball, and football. I have every expectation that when we get to Destin this spring, we'll sit down and have a hard-nosed conversation about how SEC men's basketball moves ahead in the future.

**Q. What is the key for moving ahead?**

MIKE SLIVE: I think one of the keys is, I've been saying, it's the whole body of work, all the games count. That starts in November. We might want to take a look at that.

**Q. Yesterday you made a comment that pertained to the scheduling of the so-called non-power mid-majors, whatever you want to call them. You said one of the things you're trying to do is open a window wider and give those teams a chance to play the schedule that can get them the kind of games that were previously talked about. What kind of things were you talking about? What kind of things could be done to facilitate an opportunity to play the kind of teams that can enhance their résumés in November and December?**

MIKE SLIVE: As a member of the basketball committee, or even as a commissioner, I don't schedule. I can talk about it. But what I think is best, I can't force anybody to do it, there are a lot of opportunities for schools to be very aggressive with regard to neutral-site games early in the year. I think if you took a look back, I'm not certain of this as a fact, but my intuition would tell me that's how a lot of teams have emerged onto the national scene, being willing to play some very good teams at neutral sites and being very aggressive to get people to come or even be willing to go on the road and play a couple games that, if you win, it's really helpful. If you play well and lose, that still can be helpful.

**Q. You look at the closeness of some of those games?**

MIKE SLIVE: Yes, we do. We talk about what we call good losses. If somebody goes out

and plays a team that ends up very highly ranked in the field, you look at it, it was a very close game. As a matter of fact, this year we added a symbol into our data that would tell us which games were overtime games. We look to see whether the games are won or lost by 15 or lost by 2.

There really isn't much data that the committee doesn't think about or look at when we evaluate a team. Again, it's by team. We're not identifying or branding any school because they come from a particular conference. That is another element of fairness that we add to this mix.

**Q. I know you said you can't force teams to go and schedule. You can't force the power conference teams to go out and schedule games against some of these programs. But are there ways to further tweak the system, the reward within the RPI formula?**

MIKE SLIVE: We've already done that. We've already tweaked it. Two or three years ago we took a hard look at the data says you win two at home, it's hard to win on the road. Now in the RPI, you know, we have it configured where you get a substantial bump if you win on the road. You get a substantial penalty if you lose at home.

At least nothing comes to my mind now that we would be able to do. This is my fifth and final year. I think I've seen improvements in that area over the five-year period now.

DAVE WORLOCK: Thank you, everyone, for participating on this afternoon's call. Obviously the entire Men's Basketball Committee and staff are excited about tomorrow night's opening-round game in Dayton between Alabama State and Morehead State for the tipoff of the 2009 men's basketball championship. We're very excited to get underway in shortly over 24 hours. Thank you for participating in this call and enjoy the tournament.

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