

Villanova Head Coach Jay Wright Says AdvoCare Invitational at Disney to Provide Early Test for Wildcats

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (Nov. 20, 2018) – **Over the past four years, no program in college basketball has won more games than Villanova University. The Wildcats, coached by Jay Wright, have won two of the past three NCAA men’s national basketball championships, reeling off 136 wins in the process.**

But none of that sustained excellence nor championship pedigree will matter over the rapidly approaching Thanksgiving holiday weekend when the 2-2 Wildcats roll into ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Walt Disney World Resort to compete in the 13th annual AdvoCare Invitational tournament (Nov. 22, 23 and 25).

The tournament features a loaded field lauded by college basketball experts as one of the most competitive in the nation this year. The Florida State Seminoles (3-0) – an Elite Eight team last season that returns seven of their 10 leading scorers in 2018 – are ranked 14th as they enter the AdvoCare Invitational, while the vastly improved LSU Tigers are ranked 17th and are 4-0.

These two squads join Villanova — which entered the season ranked No. 9 before suffering back-to-back losses for the first time since 2013. NCAA tournament-qualifier College of Charleston, Alabama-Birmingham, Canisius College, Memphis and Oklahoma State round out the field.

In an exclusive and wide-ranging interview with Disney Sports, Wright spoke about the uncertainty coaches’ experience this time of year not knowing where opponents are in their overall development. Additionally, he talked about how visiting the Disney Parks helps him clear his mind and detailed why Villanova is among the best schools in the nation for student athletes looking for the balance of top academics and competitive basketball.

Disney Sports: ESPN basketball analyst Jay Bilas called this tournament one of the best early-season tune-ups in the country. Any thoughts on that?

Jay Wright: “When you get into these tournaments – especially a tournament of the quality of the AdvoCare Invitational — you know you are going to run into good teams. What you don’t know is where those teams will be in terms of their progress at this point in the season. So, it turns out that a lot of the teams we might face are going to be good teams. We know that Canisius is going to have a really good team; Oklahoma State is going to be really good; Florida State is going to be great; Memphis is going to be really good; College of Charleston...we played them last year. They were a young team that had a lot of success, and they’ve got everybody coming back. There are a lot of big-time teams in this tournament, so we know we’re going to get a battle every night, and I know there are going to be great games.”

DS: This is a business trip for you and your team, but you are visiting the happiest place on earth. Are you planning to have a little fun while you are in town?

JW: “My family knows I love Disney World. Me personally, as soon as I get there, I’m happy. I usually have to worry about recruiting and the team, but when you get into the parks, there is so much going on that it clears your mind of all of that other stuff, and you just have a great time. And I know all of my family, and all of our alums who have been to this tournament before are just really excited about coming down there. Disney is a great place to come with your family, and I know my family is excited about going to the parks.”

DS: What went into your decision-making process to play in the AdvoCare Invitational?

JW: “We have been to the tournament before, and it was one of the greatest experiences we had as a team. Not just as a team, but as a university. We had so many of our fans come down, and everybody over Thanksgiving watches it on TV, and being on ESPN is always great for us. And when it’s an event hosted by Disney World and ESPN, there are always going to be great teams. If I remember correctly, we lost at the buzzer to N.C. State in the final (69-68), but we had some great games down there and everyone loved it.”

DS: How much do coaches pay attention to pre-season college rankings?

JW: “We know that we’re going to run into some very good basketball teams. Being up here in the Northeast, we’re familiar with Canisius, and know they have a really good reputation. As I was saying earlier, you know the names and reputations. What you don’t know is where they are in their growth during the early part of the season. But, when you see that team that Florida State had last year with everybody coming back, and you look at LSU and their development and growth over the last year, this tournament becomes a great reference point for you and your team.”

DS: How excited are you to get down to Disney to compete in the tournament?

JW: “We’re excited. We were down there some years ago (2007) and had a great time. I hope we have a great Villanova crowd. If everyone that tells me they are coming actually comes, we should be good.”

DS: How have you and your team been able to sustain the level of success you’ve achieved over the past several seasons?

JW: “I feel very fortunate that I coach at a place I believe is the best place to coach college basketball in the country. There are a lot of great jobs. This place (Villanova), in terms of the balance of academics, competitive basketball, alumni support, the passion the university has makes me feel like I have the best college basketball job in the country. For kids who want to come here to play...if you want to be a student-athlete, if you want to excel academically and athletically and be a part of a community, there is nowhere better.”