

Kris Jenkins back at the Final Four -- in the booth

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By Eugene Rapay



Kris Jenkins (above) has gone from Villanova's Final Four hero in 2016 to in the broadcast booth for 2018. (Photo: Mark Jordan/CoBL)

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SAN ANTONIO -- **Kris Jenkins** sat in the Villanova locker room, recreating an all-too-familiar scene.

Villanova is amidst preparations for its Final Four matchup on Saturday night. A towel sits around Jenkins' neck, soaking in the dripping sweat from a practice that just ended moments before. In front of him, a handful of reporters circle him with microphones and recorders, looking to get his thoughts on what laid ahead for the Wildcats.

Except, this wasn't Houston, but San Antonio.

It has been approximately two years since Jenkins nailed the shot of a lifetime, draining a game-winning, buzzer-beating three that lifted he and his Wildcats over the North Carolina Tar Heels en route their first NCAA Championship since 1985. Since then, Jenkins' one shining moment has been replayed millions of times.

In less than two months, it will be the one-year anniversary of when he graduated from Villanova.

While he's no longer an official member of Villanova's basketball team, that didn't stop him from getting a workout in with the current group of 'Cats. After all, the program does believe in the saying, "Once a Wildcat, always a Wildcat."

He was one of the cornerstones to that championship run and although he's not there for daily morning practices and lifting sessions, he remains a close follower of the team. Jenkins says he hasn't missed a single Villanova game this season.

So, that begs the question, who wins in a battle between the 2016 championship squad and the current 2018 Final Four team?

"No comment," Jenkins says with a big grin, after calming down from a hearty laugh.

While he worked out with the team, Jenkins isn't in San Antonio to help coach the Wildcats, nor is he around to simply cheer and watch the game. Instead, he's taking a quick detour from playing basketball to experience the broadcast booth.

"I've always wanted to commentate, I've said that always since middle school," Jenkins said. "I love sports, not just basketball. I love football, I love baseball. I love competition in general. Anything dealing with talking about competition, I'm all for it--but that's after my playing career. Absolutely, the NBA is the goal, always be the goal, and it will be reached."

After a G-League stint with the Sioux City Skyforce, the former Villanova star now plays with the Yakima SunKings of the North American Premier Basketball (NAPB) league. He's played in 15 games this season, averaging 9.7 points per game along the way.

He's taking a break from the hardwood and will be joining TBS in its coverage of the Final Four. Jenkins will serve as a guest analyst for part of the network's

three-hour pre-game show to preview Saturday's matchups. He will be joining **Greg Gumbel**, NCAA and WNBA champion **Candace Parker**, former Duke player **Christian Laettner**, and current Wake Forest head coach **Danny Manning**.

"[TBS] contacted my agent, Andre Buck, and his assistant Jeff," Jenkins said. "They got me out here, and I was all for it, especially since my guys were here. Of course, I wouldn't turn this down for anything."

Jenkins has studied other analysts to help prepare him for this role, particularly ESPN's **Jalen Rose**. He's also indulged in TNT's iconic in-studio NBA coverage team of **Ernie Johnson**, **Kenny Smith**, and **Shaquille O'Neal**.

"I watch all type of sports, but before the game, I make sure I get there with enough time to watch the pregame stuff," he said. "I'm into that. I wanna see what people say, how they think, how they see this player, that player--how they see this situation, that situation--compared to how I do it."

While he declined to participate in comparisons between then and now, he did offer his sentiments for the current Villanova team.

The Wildcats are on their second Final Four trip in three years, their third over the last decade. Although they were finally unseated from their spot atop the Big East conference in the regular season, they were able to reclaim the Big East Tournament title. The 'Cats are currently 33-4 overall, an impressive record that masks their turbulent month of February--one that was loaded with road games and filled with three of their losses this season.

"They play some young guys," Jenkins said. "**Omari [Spellman]** starts, **Donte [DiVincenzo]** is a redshirt sophomore, he plays a lot. **Phil Booth** sat out all last year. They had some guys in some new roles, and they had to learn. They weren't going to get it right away, but as you can see defensively now, they got it clicking it's tough for teams to score."

The top-seeded team in the East Region has seemingly breezed its way to the Final Four, winning each of its four games by double figures. The Wildcats downed the likes of Radford, Alabama, West Virginia, and Texas Tech to reach this point.

Villanova takes on the other remaining No. 1-seed in the NCAA Tournament, the Kansas Jayhawks. The Jayhawks enter with a 31-7 record, reaching the Final

Four after a thrilling overtime victory over Duke in the Elite Eight. Kansas operates on a high-powered offense that is led by Wooden Award candidate **Devonte Graham** and has four other players that average double figures in scoring--including the hulking 7-foot, 280 pound sophomore center **Udoka Azubuike**.

"When I saw the bracket, I thought the NCAA must love us," he said. "They gave us a pretty good chance to be where these guys are. They have a dogfight coming up this Saturday. These are the games you come to Villanova for; you come to Villanova to play in these types of games."

This Saturday, Jenkins will be taking a different role from one that he had been long accustomed to. He won't be suited up in his No. 2 jersey and basketball shorts, neither will he come in a tailored gameplan. Instead, he'll just "be himself" and be dressed up for the camera.

"Honestly, I'm going to challenge myself and see how much a natural I am," Jenkins said. "I'm gonna freestyle it. I'm going to say a prayer before I go in there, and then I'm going to freestyle it."