

3-13-2018

## Determined to defy the odds

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### eCommons Citation

Lagattuta, Anna, "Determined to defy the odds" (2018). *University of Dayton Magazine Blog*. 24.  
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# Determined to defy the odds

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Anna Lagattuta • March 13, 2018

Camaraderie. Resilience. Teamwork.

Radford Highlanders head coach Mike Jones attributes his team's success to these qualities.

The 16th-seeded Highlanders found out Sunday night they would be playing in the #FirstFour of the 2018 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship. Jones described the past 24 hours as a whirlwind of packing, preparation and a particularly raucous bus ride from Virginia to Dayton.



"I know a lot of coaches say this, but we have a terrific group of young men who I have loved coaching this year. It hasn't always been peaches and cream, but I'll tell you what, they got closer and more connected as the year went on," Jones said, speaking of his team with dignity and pride.

The Highlanders, who went 12-6 in the Big South Conference this season, were ranked seventh in the preseason polls, and they viewed the low ranking as a challenge, rather than a defeat.

“Coach used to put ‘seventh place’ in the locker room, just put ‘seventh’ everywhere ... every day that just motivated us to be better,” said guard Carlik Jones, a freshman from Cincinnati.

Coach Jones recognizes that part of what makes his team so special is its ability to be individuals and express themselves. The team has found an ideal balance between focus and fun, which has motivated the players to keep getting better.

“We went through a lot of adversity. I am just really happy that these guys became champions. It’s something that will link them for the rest of their lives,” Jones said.