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K-State coach is all business

Martin's Wildcats play GU on Monday

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Kansas State basketball coach Frank Martin doesn't sugar-coat anything for his players or the media.

There's not a lot of coach-speak in Frank Martin's vocabulary.

The Kansas State men's basketball coach is as blunt with the media as he is with his players. The media eats this up, of course, as well as Martin's sideline death glare, which pretty much renders Jon Gruden's "Chucky" snarl docile by comparison.

Following a nine-point home win over Presbyterian on Thursday, Martin assessed his third-ranked Wildcats' performance: "You saw the ugly side of our team today. Group of young kids with upperclassmen that provide absolutely no leadership.

"Great team, great kids, but we're the most immature team I've ever coached."

Martin's Wildcats will be Gonzaga's assignment Monday at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo., in the semifinals of the CBE Classic. No. 1 Duke tangles with Marquette on the other side of the bracket.

A search of online articles about Martin returns numerous stories detailing his unique rise in the coaching profession. You learn he's the first American-born member of his Cuban family, how he worked as a dishwater, cook, bartender and bouncer, how he became a highly decorated and highly controversial prep coach in Miami.

Martin coached prep basketball for 15 years, including a run of three straight state titles at Miami Senior High, but the 1998 crown was later vacated because of recruiting violations. Martin was fired, but later officially cleared of any wrongdoing.

He entered the college ranks as an assistant at Northeastern in 2000. He joined Huggins in Cincinnati in 2004 and rejoined him at Kansas State in 2007. When Huggins bolted after one year for West Virginia, Martin was promoted to head coach and he's overseen the last three seasons, including last year's run to the Elite Eight.

"Hugs got that thing going and he handed it over to (Martin) and probably some people out there who didn't know Frank personally were wondering if he could keep it going," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "He's done more than keep it going. He's raised it up a couple notches."

Martin's 2009-10 squad won a school-record 29 games and finished in the Top 10 for the first time in 37 years. The Wildcats have been picked by many to dethrone Big 12 kingpin Kansas and they're considered a national championship contender.

Marquette has scrimmaged Kansas State two of the last three years. Asked what opponents can expect when they face the Wildcats, Marquette coach Buzz Williams said, "the hardest, toughest, meanest, scrappiest, not-going-to-give-an-inch group that you can find in college basketball.

"I love Frank, I talked to him (Thursday morning). I love what he's about and I love his past, love his story. I have great respect for how he goes about things. He's done an unbelievable job in the talent they've accrued there. Nothing against Kansas State, but when you look at their body of work the last 10-20 years and specifically what they've been able to do with Frank there, I think it's extraordinary."

Martin has sprinkled in his philosophies with those of three coaching influences: his prep coach, Huggins and Duke's Mike Krzyzewski. He hopes fans see a little of Duke's trademark defense in his Wildcats.

"My senior year of high school I played against Tommy Amaker's team and I knew he was going to Duke," Martin said, "so I started paying attention to Duke back in the early 1980s. They hound the ball, get in passing lanes and don't allow you to run your offense."

There's little doubt the Wildcats have taken on the persona of their demanding coach.

"You can't be a competitor if you only compete when you're in the mood," Martin said. "You have to take pride in who you are and work to get better, challenge yourself. Everyone talks about games. Yeah, you play 30-whatever games, but you practice 120-130 times. It's your duty to keep teammates sharp and make your team better. Other

teams don’t come in and give you a day off, they don’t jog through their cuts. They compete. We try to hold our guys accountable.”

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