

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

Washington State Cougars

Coach Kyle Smith

T.J. Bamba

Mouhamed Gueye

Men's Head Coach



Francisco a little bit and Columbia with the skillfulness hopefully. Just a little more athletic than the other teams.

Q. T.J., what type of role do you hope to play this year? Every time I see you, you look like an NFL linebacker more than a basketball player. Big old strong dude. I know Coach Smith loves your defense, but what type of role do you see yourself playing with those guys that aren't on the perimeter there this season?

T.J. BAMBA: I feel like it's my job this year to lead the group. Being in the program for three years now, I know what it looks like, and I know what it takes to be a great team and get to that postseason that we hopefully are pursuing this year.

So I just look to lead the group, put my best foot forward every game, defend, and I'll definitely look forward to taking the jump on the offensive end, be more productive, efficient, showcase my talent.

Q. Mouhamed, Efe used to tell me you were the second best athlete on the team last year. I'm just joking, but what do you see your role this year? I first want to see I really enjoy watching you play. I played in the NBA. I watched a lot of NBA guys. I definitely think you have that type of skill set and that type of mobility. I feel sometimes you play a little bit too passive, but I know you guys had a backcourt that put up a lot of shots. What did you work on in this off-season, and what's your expectations coming into this season?

MOUHAMED GUEYE: This off-season I worked on my game overall, obviously shooting because that was my biggest. But I work on my game overall, like T.J. said, trying to lead, trying to be a better leader, be more vocal. Be more aggressive, like you said, on the defensive end, and I think that will help the team too.

Q. For Kyle and both players, with all that turnover, what were you able to carry over from last season in the success you had?

JESSE HOOKER: We're happy to welcome Washington State head coach Kyle Smith and student-athletes T.J. Bamba and Mouhamed Gueye to the stage.

KYLE SMITH: Just really excited about this group this year. We're a little different look, and I think people ask questions about that. Really proud of our two captains here. They've made this trip down here and they've done a wonderful job of sustaining what we accomplished this year and hopefully make another step forward.

I don't know, we're just looking forward to this season.

Q. Coach, what happened? Did you file a complaint against me or something? I don't have any Washington State games this nonconference.

KYLE SMITH: I don't know what happened. That will make the Apple Cup more interesting this year.

Q. As much smack as he talked when he was with you guys about UDub, I've got to scratch my head on that one. How big of an impact has it been? Norah is gone. Flowers is gone. Roberts is gone. Abogidi is gone. How much of a void has that left for you guys?

KYLE SMITH: A little bit. We're just a different team. Despite our talent is different. We have a little bigger guards, I think. Our frontcourt is a little more skillful. I think our group's more skillful.

It's going to make us play a little differently, but I think our guards with T.J. and Justin Powell in the backcourt and Andre Jakimovski, Mouhamed and Jabe Mullins kind of fill out the group.

So it will probably look more like teams I coached in San



KYLE SMITH: I think there's an expectation level in the program. We talk about having great attitudes, working hard, guys having pride in being a Cougar, and the group that's behind has done the same. We're just going to look a little different.

The goal is to improve every year. Two years ago we -- the program we inherited was 207th in the country, and we've gotten up to 44. We need to make the next jump to do that, to be playing in the NCAA Tournament in some capacity.

So I think it's about the bigger picture and who you're playing with isn't as important. I think it's a different group, but they've got a good way about them to keep improving.

Q. Anything from the guys about what you can carry over from last year, even though the roster is so different?

T.J. BAMBA: I feel like last year, we formed a brotherhood with the team last year, and I feel like the carryover this year is going to be the culture.

So just forming that relationship off the court and building with each other, really investing at times off the court with each other, that's going to hopefully carry over to the court and help us have a great year.

Q. Mouhamed, what does it mean to you to be a captain in just your sophomore season? Coach Smith, what did you see from Mouhamed leading up to his sophomore season?

MOUHAMED GUEYE: It means a lot. My team trusts me. My coach trusts me. I've got to show them that they make the good choice, and I will show for sure.

KYLE SMITH: I think Mouhamed is one of the most talented players that I've ever recruited that's ever been at Washington State. What was most impressive about him last year, and you didn't want to put a lot of pressure on him the first year. He showed up to work every day. He was early to practice. In our analytics and hustle stats, he's top of the chart.

So he was exhibiting leadership qualities by his example, his role modeling, and he's just taking the next step.

He's a lover, man. He loves everybody. He does. He enjoys his teammates. He enjoys his coaches. He's fun to coach. Both these guys are as good as I've had. We assume this is his last year too, so might as well get a crack at being a captain.

He's done a great job and just really looking forward to the great things he's going to do.

Q. You mentioned them already, but what have you seen from the transfers Jabe and Justin so far?

KYLE SMITH: I call them the twin Gingers. I hope that's not offensive to the redheads out there. They're both very similar but good.

I think these guys can attest, they're very pass-first guys, very skillful with size, can shoot. They're what we call triple pass, shoot guys that make us better offensively.

The question where are the points going to come from? Well, I think people are going to be surprised how much both these guys improved offensively, but also it helps having those guys that they look for others.

I think where the ball zips around in practice, and hopefully there's carryover of that in the game, and I think there will be.

Q. Kyle, last four years Washington State's improved its winning percentage every single year. For your fourth year at Washington State, what is required to make that jump again for this group to have even a better winning percentage than previous years?

KYLE SMITH: First of all, we'll probably have to win more games. That's the obvious. I'm a numbers guy. Don't forget, I'm a numbers guy.

But we've been -- the last three years we've really made a commitment to being good defensively, rebounding, and trying to get where we could take care of the ball. Coach Montgomery's been blasting our teams for not being able to get assists.

I said, look, I think it's a recruiting issue, certainly not a coaching issue. But I think we have a group, that area we addressed and improved, and I think we're going to be better, I would say.

But the challenge for us to make that jump is to keep the defense in the rebounding at that level, and that's going to have to come from our -- we have bigger size on the perimeter. We're more switchable. We're going to have to do those things to really compensate.

It was pretty -- we led the Pac-12 in shot blocks last year with Efe, Dishon, and Mo. We're designed differently. Going to stretch us as players and coaches to sustain. You've got to defend and rebound to win. That will be our challenge.

We've got a grumpy Coach Shaw up there trying to figure out how we're going to do that moving forward.

Q. Welcome back to San Francisco. Just a quick question. You did so much great work here to build up the program, and to see them get in the tournament, just what did that mean to you just watching that from afar?

KYLE SMITH: I was really proud of them. Just being able to have someone like Todd take over the program, someone I coached, someone I coached with, and guys like Jamaree Bouyea who didn't have any recruitment but really embraced, like these guys. And T.J. and Mo, they're a little better athletes and highly touted coming out, and they are embracing the same thing.

Guys like Khalil Shabazz who I got to coach and see them have that success, it's neat. It gives us confidence. Our staff had some guys on there that helped build that and them take it the next extra mile. That's kind of where we're -- that was year five? No, year six. We're in year four, so hopefully we can make that similar step.

Q. You've got the rep of being an uber competitive guy. Your former teammate and former roommate Noah Williams at Washington now, and you guys got into a little bit of a tiff on social media. I think you referred to him as food. Could you give us a preview of that matchup and what to anticipate?

T.J. BAMBA: I mean, I know Noah; Noah know me. He knows what's going to happen when we play them. Practiced against him for three years. He know my tendencies. I know his. Every time he call me, I feel like he's trying to soften me up. Every call I tell him, you know you're a fool, right? Just to remind him he's on the other end.

It's going to be fun playing against him. He's a competitor. He talks a lot of smack. I'm just looking forward to locking him up and getting that W versus UW, you know.

Q. Kyle, when you have a player on your team that transfers in-conference that you've got to play twice a year, not specifically Noah, but how difficult is that?

KYLE SMITH: It will be a distraction a little bit, but we've just got to keep focused and remember it's our team versus their team. But we know Noah. It's going to be fun. It's going to be that piece.

I don't know, not used to it. You didn't used to be able to transfer in conference. That's more of a more new thing.

So we'll see what happens.

Q. Must-see TV?

KYLE SMITH: It's good, good for the league. More clicks, right? More eyeballs on games.

Q. Coach, you guys are going to be making the trip to Prairie View A&M this year as part of the Pac-12/SWAC challenge. Just curious about the educational opportunities you guys are going to have around that team, and then for Mouhamed and T.J., kind of your thoughts on playing a game of this importance.

KYLE SMITH: I'm surprised -- I'm from Houston. I thought it was my homecoming. Just joking. That didn't go so well.

Anyway, we're excited to get down there. It's an educational opportunity. These guys are obviously from -- T.J.'s from New York, but Mouhamed's from Senegal. We have a very diverse group, and to understand a little bit about historically black colleges and universities will be impactful for us.

I think this all goes back to when we started doing this when the George Floyd happening occurred, and we thought it was a great idea. It's to encourage us. These guys don't get an opportunity to play Power 5 at home and be able to share those while competing as well, to be able to get those experiences we'll have.

T.J. BAMBA: For sure. I say the whole idea of it, like doing a game versus the SWAC conference is great because people like me, I'm from New York, the Bronx, it's primarily black people there. Not a lot of people get the same opportunities as other people would in suburban areas and other states.

So it's like seeing people like myself from different communities going to black colleges, historically black communities and whatever, they're there so that they can be given an opportunity to be great and prosper and extend their creativity among everybody.

So just being able to partner with them and then play against them, it's an opportunity for them, and it's an opportunity for us to learn more about the history that goes on down there. I'm sure they're looking at it as an opportunity to play against a Power 5 school and being on a platform where all eyes are on them. So it's great for the both of us.

We get a learning experience, and they benefit from it from the sport.

MOUHAMED GUEYE: Just like he said, I'm just excited to go learn about the history and just have fun.

Q. I'm really into stats too. Very interested in what your hustle stats are. And players, what are you learning from Coach about stats and how you can change your game?

KYLE SMITH: I've had this question a lot, so I'll try to simplify it. It's basically our internal efficiency rating. So things that we emphasize, they get rewarded by playing more. It's winning plays minus non-winning plays divided by possessions. It's the best way I can describe it. Is that fair?

MOUHAMED GUEYE: Yeah.

KYLE SMITH: What are you guys learning?

T.J. BAMBA: I mean, I could say it like from the first day I got on campus, I'm from New York, playing in Dyckman or Rucker Park outside all the time, I'm thinking basketball is just basketball. So I'm learning it's way more to it.

It's about efficiency, the numbers, the statistics, and all of that. All of that being thrown at me at once, I'm like, whoa, what's going on? So it hit me.

But as time went on and I like learned this is where the game is going today, so you have to kind of like adapt with it. So once I started doing that and embracing it, I've gotten so much better. Like looking at the efficiency on defense helped shooting, passing, all that stuff. It all comes into one, and it makes you a better player and more like go in and watch film and really go in, ask questions, and have them break it down to you.

You kind of like -- you get a lot of "aha" moments, I should say. So you like understand everything better.

MOUHAMED GUEYE: I would say it's just like a cheat code. They give you like the cheat code of the test. Whenever you do it, like you see results and you see this work, so I think it's really good for us.

JESSE HOOKER: That's all we have time for for Washington State. Thanks for being here today. Best of luck this season.

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