

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

Oregon Ducks

Coach Dana Altman

N'Faly Dante

Quincy Guerrier

Men's Head Coach



guys that want to compete at a high level, and if those three guys stay healthy, we've got good experience. Quincy was with us a year.

Before that, he was at Syracuse. Dante's been through some injuries, but he's been with us 2 1/2 years. Will's been around four years.

That gives us a great core, and experience is so important in college basketball right now. Because of the COVID year, a lot of guys staying around, a lot of teams are really old. To compete, I think you've got to have that experience. There's a big difference between an 18-year-old freshman and a 23-year-old fifth year guy.

Anyway, I think we've got some experience. We've got a really talented freshman. So it's just a matter of getting healthy, staying healthy, and defending and rebounding a lot better than we did a year ago.

Q. Kind of the same question for the players. What was the thing you finished last season thinking the most about and wanting to focus on or just maybe shake off and forget about?

QUINCY GUERRIER: I think it was our physicality. We didn't communicate enough defensively, like Coach said. We got out rebounded a lot, and that's the thing that we addressed this year at the very first day of practice.

We're working hard, and we just want to have a good year. We're on the same page. Our chemistry is way better than last year, and that's going to play a big role in our success this year. So we're competing.

Q. Dana, a couple times you've spoke, you mentioned N'Faly having a healthy off-season for the first time. Can you maybe give us an example of where he's improved, where you're seeing this improvement, and him taking advantage of that first true off-season for him.

DANA ALTMAN: He's pretty proud of the way he looks (laughter). You know, the COVID didn't allow us to spend any summers with him. Any time a 6'11", 250 pound man

JESSE HOOKER: We welcome to the stage Oregon head coach Dana Altman and student-athletes N'Faly Dante and Quincy Guerrier.

DANA ALTMAN: Our preseason practice has been a little disrupted by injuries. We've had a little hard time getting everybody on the floor and playing five-on-five, we haven't had enough guys to do that.

So we're moving along slower than I anticipated, but I do like the guys. I think eventually we'll get most of the guys back on. I'm a little worried about two injuries that we have that we may not get a couple of guys back for a while.

But I think the rest of the guys we can get back and get to work.

Q. Dana, what was the most frustrating part about the way the season finished and what did you do in the off-season to turn the page?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, we were disappointed. We won 20 games, and we should have won more. For whatever reason, team chemistry, it boiled down to we didn't rebound well enough and we didn't defend well enough if you look at the stats.

Our offense was okay, but defensively and on the boards, we weren't good enough. And we should have been. We had the guys to do that. So for whatever reason, we didn't get it done.

At the end of the year, I think all coaching staffs evaluate what you did right, what you did wrong. We all looked at ourself and said we've got to do better.

Fortunately, I've got three starters back, and they're good



battles back from an ACL, it takes time. That's not an easy injury to come back from.

So that messed up his sophomore year and a lot of last year. He didn't get to practice with us, and then when he did start coming back, we were into the season. He was on a minute restriction, wearing a big old brace. So it just took a while for him to get comfortable.

His conditioning never got to the point where I felt comfortable playing him a lot because of the knee and just fear of injury. So he averaged 18, 19 minutes a game.

I think we need to get him on the floor a lot more than that. He needs to get in great shape. He shot 67 percent, 68 percent from the field. He led the league in scoring percentage. We've got to get him the ball more. He's got to play more minutes. He's got to stay out of foul trouble.

But I think conditioning is a big part of that. And I was joking about how he looks, but he's just in much better shape than he's had an opportunity because of injury. You can't get in great shape when you have a bad knee because you can't get out there and run enough. You can do as much underwater treadmill running as you want, but it's just not the same as the starts and the stops on a basketball floor.

Q. Coach, I'm interested in your take on the move of UCLA and USC out of this conference as a coach that's been in it and played a lot of competitive games against those teams. What is your take on their departure?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I'm disappointed. I like the Pac-12. I think we're a unique conference out here on the West Coast. You've got four road trips, you don't travel -- I like the road trips. You go out and you play two on the road. L.A.'s a big recruiting area for us.

There's no way to sugarcoat it. It's not good for our league. But we'll survive. We've got ten good teams, and it's our challenge to improve, you know, to get better.

But as far as a basketball conference is concerned, since I've been in the league, USC hasn't won the conference title or the tournament. UCLA maybe won one tournament, one league title. Arizona's been up there. We've won four conference titles.

So our basketball league is going to survive. We've got good coaches, good programs. We'll find our way. But it is disappointing because L.A. is important to us. UCLA, USC, I like Mick, I like Andy, so personally it's not any good.

But it is what it is, and we've just got to fight through it.

Q. This is for all of you guys, but you guys were very guard centric last year. Sometimes it worked and other times it didn't. I realize it takes some time to kind of feel out a new team, but from your guys' perspective this early in the year, injuries withstanding, what do you guys see as maybe the emphasis on offense and the kind of identity there so far?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, as I mentioned, I'm not this concerned offensively as I am defensively and on the boards. We've had five Sweet 16 teams in our 12 years. Those are our five best defensive teams, according to KenPom. And they were. Our rim protection, our depth on those five teams, we were better defensively on those teams.

And I'm not very smart, but I look at those stats and go, okay, those are our five best teams, and last year our defensive rating was poor, and it the worst rebounding team we've had in our 12 years, including my first team, which had some limitations.

So disappointed in that. I think we control some of our defensive intensity. We control some of our ability to rebound. Even though we played small most of the year and the one big guy that we had was only able to play 18, 19 minutes a game. You can always make excuses for not rebounding, but if you're smaller, you should be quicker to the ball.

So we've got to be more physical. We've got to do a better job on the defensive end and on the boards. That being said, offensively we've got to get the ball in to Dante; 67%, 68% is off the charts. Quincy shot 60% from two last. We've got to get him around the rim more.

We have two other guys that are 6'11", 7'. Instead of looking good in the airport, they need to look good on the court. We need to get on the boards.

We need to defend the rim.

Nate's had a good spring and summer. He's been out the last few weeks, but I think he's going to start coming back now. Kel'el is a talented freshman that has tremendous upside, but we need to move him along a little quicker. He's not showing us everything he can do. He's got to turn it up a notch or two.

But there's no doubt the talent's there. He's 7', long, and when he decides to really kick it in, he's going to be a

problem for a lot of people. I just hope it happens this year.

Q. Quick followup for all you guys. Do you feel the guards on this team are better suited to get the ball down low this year in terms of the way they're playing?

DANA ALTMAN: Yeah. Again, I think the only reason we didn't get it in to Dante that much is because of the minutes he played. I think he averaged 18, 19 minutes a game. That was the biggest thing. I think eight or nine points a game.

If we can get him up to 25, 30 minutes a game, it increases his opportunity to get the ball more. Again, looking at those stats, the 19 minutes he was on the floor, our defensive average was pretty good. Our rebounding average was pretty good. The 21, 22 minutes he wasn't on the floor, our defensive average suffered, and so did our rebounding average.

So it showed the importance of having him on the floor a year ago. Then I expect Quincy to turn it up a notch and really help him on the boards, which he's very capable of. And those two other big guys that we have.

But all of our guards rebound. Our best rebounding teams have always because all five guys knew it was their responsibility to rebound. So Will's got to stick his nose in there and all our guards. We've got to have a team rebounding atmosphere, and we didn't have that a year ago. Our guards didn't rebound well enough. When Dante was off the floor, we just didn't go get the ball.

Q. Dana, I wanted to ask about Keeshawn Barthelemy. Two-part question, I guess. How has getting him acclimated to your program gone, and how do you see him fitting in on the floor this season?

DANA ALTMAN: Keeshawn wins the award because he's the only guy that's been at all 18 practices. He is. He's the only guy that's been at all the practices. He's durable. He's been easy to work with.

He knows Quincy really well because they're both from Montreal, which I think has made his adjustment to Oregon a little easier. He's going to play a lot of ball for us, and we're going to have to move him around some. When Will's off the floor, he'll have the ball in his hands a lot. If we can get Will on a roll shooting the ball.

When Payton was making shots for Will, Will shot it; I think he led the league in three-point percentage. So we've got to have somebody making some shots for him, and I think Keeshawn can do that for us. He needs to pick up his

defense a little bit, but I think he's working at that.

So Tad did a great job with him. I mean, that's the thing about the transfer portal. You work with a guy and work through a couple years and you think they're getting better and they take off. They take off on us, they take off on Tad, they take off on all of us.

Tad is a helluva coach, and Keeshawn is going to be a good player for us. He's going to play a lot of different roles for us.

Q. You touched on where a little bit, but how impactful is going up against Dante for him in his development? And before Nate got hurt at Canada, you said he was playing really well. Could you maybe just touch on what he's improved on as well from his freshman year?

DANA ALTMAN: First of all with Nate, his work ethic. And that's everybody adjusts differently to college. There's no set pattern. Some guys come in, and they're ready to make the adjustment right away. Other guys it takes a little longer. Sometimes with bigger guys it does take longer because of the physicality of the game.

So Nate just struggled a little bit making the adjustment last year. Man, as soon as the season was over, though, it was like something clicked, and he was in the gym all the time and extra time. So I was really pleased with the spring and summer.

Then his foot started bothering him, so he's been out for a while, but he'll be back. There's just much more awareness, maturity level, if you want to call it, that he's ready to give us. I think it will be a slow progress, but I think he'll give us a lot. And as the season develops, I think he'll give us a lot.

Kel'e'l, he just has to make that same adjustment. As I mentioned, everyone's different on how quickly they adjust to Division I basketball. We're trying to play at a high level, so playing against Dante every day is not the easiest thing. Dante's got 20, 30 pounds on him and he's a couple years older. He's got a lot more experience.

And Dante's focused. He's been getting to the gym early every day. He's been staying late every day. I hope Kel'e'l recognizes that and starts following him around a little bit more, you know.

There's no secret to being great. One of the first things is being there early and staying late. Dante's watched some other guys do that -- Payton Pritchard, Eugene, Chris Duarte. So they have a path to follow, and those guys are

trying to follow that path.

Q. N'Faly and Quincy, you guys are writing down what Coach is saying about making more shots getting you more time. Show him that middle of the year. Don't let him just say that stuff here. There's a pattern, two or three of the coaches had the summer trips, and everybody kind of came back bragging on how beneficial they are. You want to talk just a little bit about how important, in general, those trips are and specifically yours this summer?

DANA ALTMAN: They can be. It depends on the team. I think these guys felt like we got some chemistry. We had some guys, Dante didn't go on the trip, and we had a couple guys who didn't play, so that kind of hurt us.

But for the guys who did play, I thought it was a good trip. So we're hoping that we can capitalize on that a little bit this year. What I thought was going to help us has kind of been hindered by the fact we're not practising right now. Those ten extra practices we got as a coach -- I know some guys think it's just practice, but I think it's pretty important. So you get those ten extra ones, and now we're kind of missing some of that benefit that we would have got from the ten extra ones because we're missing so much practice time now.

No, the trip was good. I enjoyed it. I think the players did. Keeshawn and Quincy and Ethan Butler, another Canadian that we have on the team, their families were there, got to go to a lot of games. Dillon Brooks, Boucher, Eugene, Cleese (phonetic) and Devoe -- a bunch of our Canadian guys came and watched us play and then spoke with the team about their experience and what the University of Oregon meant to them and playing on our team.

So those things, I hope, made an impression. I got emotional listening to them. Those guys meant a lot to our program. Canada's been great to us. Devoe to get us started and Jason Cleese and Brooks, Boucher, Dylan Ennis. Those guys have been unbelievable.

Q. You've been doing this for a long time. How do you decide whether to devote your energy to the older players in the transfer portal or the young guys coming up in high school?

DANA ALTMAN: It's not an exact science. Right now you're trying to balance out having enough experience on the team to compete at a national level but still getting those freshmen. We've got some commitments that we hope sign here in the next couple weeks that really give us a great freshman class.

Then it's just a matter of how many guys stay, how many guys go, to figure out in the spring how to balance that out.

But if we get the freshman class that we want, our freshmen are going to play a lot bigger role next year because of the talent we think we're bringing in. But as I mentioned, because of COVID, a lot of teams are old, and a lot of players are taking advantage of that extra year to develop before they make their run at the NBA.

With NIL, some of them can afford to do that because a lot of the guys economically couldn't afford to stay in college because the family background, their economic background, they had to go try to make a living. Now with NIL, some of them can stay, which I think we've seen this year in college basketball, which I think is great for college ball. And it's great for development.

And some guys finish their degree. Other guys go to work on a Masters degree. As we tell these guys all the time, 35/65. That 30 years is a long time. Go ahead and get your degree. Go ahead and work on a Masters degree, because ball is going to be done and there's still a lot of life to live. So let's go ahead and knock that out.

But to answer your question, I think it's a balancing act that none of us have perfected yet, and it's going to be different here when the COVID years get done. Then we start worrying about balancing those teams even more with freshmen, I think.

Like I said, if things work out like I hope they will hear with the guys that we've got committed, they're talented enough to come in and play. Then you've just got to balance that team.

Q. I've got a question for Coach, but I've got a question for N'Faly first. N'Faly, I was at your game when you got injured. I remember it not looking like much of a play. Then the next thing I know, you're out for the season. Then I had some of your games last year when you came back wearing a big brace. I just wanted to ask how you're feeling physically and how you're feeling confidence-wise coming into this season.

N'FALY DANTE: I feel great. First of all, I feel really good, and I just want to thank Oregon to make this thing possible. Going through injury is not something that's really easy, but they make me feel like, yeah, they're going to be behind me like every step.

I feel great. My knee feels great. I had the best surgery, and then I had the confidence to come back. It's going to be a good season for sure.

Q. I hope you can stay healthy. Quincy, I hear Coach says he wants to get you more shots in the paint. I attended quite a few of your practices, but you seem to be the prototypical stretch forward. You really like to shoot the three, so it's going to be interesting to see how that works out. Have you been working more on your low post-game? Whenever I attend your practice, you look like you're shooting threes most of the time.

QUINCY GUERRIER: Yeah, I had that conversation already with Coach. I will have to go crash the board this year and get some easy buckets inside. I had that in my game already. My first two years in Syracuse, most of the time I was down in the paint. So I just have to balance the three-point and then scoring inside and just recognize the situation and not just settle for three.

So I'm excited for this year, and of course I've been working on my post-game and all that.

Q. Coach, for you, the Legacy Series is a big deal for the Pac-12. You kick it off with Florida A&M coming to your place. You always have hosted schools from the HBCUs. How much are you looking forward to going down to Florida A&M next year and taking your team and playing down there for that experience?

DANA ALTMAN: First of all, Robert McCollum, the coach at Florida A&M, we worked together for three years at Oregon. He's an outstanding coach, an outstanding man. So I was really glad we got Florida A&M just because of how I feel about Robert and how much he helped our program for the three years he was with us.

I've been on their campus. They've got a great facility. Robert loves coaching there. So it's going to be great for our players. We've got some activities going on when they come in, and Robert and I have talk about a few things.

So it's going to be good for both programs. We have a tournament in Florida next year, so we tied it into that trip. I think he's playing Portland and Oregon State when he's up. So he got three games out of the trip. It's quite a ways to Tallahassee. We tried to tie some more ball games into it.

Just the opportunity with Robert. I hope he knows how much I respect him and how much he meant to our program for the three years he was with us.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

