

Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

Washington Huskies

Coach Mike Hopkins

Jamel Bey

Keion Brooks

Men's Head Coach



JESSE HOOKER: We're joined Washington head coach Mike Hopkins and student-athletes Jamal Bey and Keion Brooks.

MIKE HOPKINS: Opening remarks, really happy to be here. Kind of sad to seeing this place be the last week, but excited for the season. There's some great teams this year for us to be a part of it. Looking forward to a great season for the Pac-12.

I think it's going to be a great year, and hopefully we get a lot of teams in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Keion, obviously you had a great experience at Kentucky. People want to know why the move and what went into making the decision to come to Washington?

KEION BROOKS: Sometimes you grow out of your environment. Kentucky was great to me. I have a lot of lifelong friends there, loved Coach Cal and the staff he had while I was there, but I just thought it was time for me to challenge myself and do something new.

After I pulled my name out of the draft, I thought, you know, I already had kind of a previous relationship with Coach Hop. He was recruiting me when I was in high school. So it made it easier for me. Made me comfortable, most importantly. Got to make mom feel comfortable, and he did a great job of that. That's how I ended up here.

Q. I got a couple questions for the players and one for Hop. I'll start with Keion Brooks. I don't know much about your game. I know you went to Kentucky. From some people I talked to, they tell me you've got an NBA type of game. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your game and your strengths.

KEION BROOKS: I think the biggest thing I bring to any team is just my versatility, especially defensively, being able to guard multiple positions, making multiple efforts, using my length and my athleticism to make it tough on people.

Then offensively, I just go down and try to make the right play every time, whether it's scoring, making the extra pass, or giving a good one for a great one. That's really it. I feel like I have a really good feel for the game. I know I have a knack of being in the right spot at the right time.

I just try to go out, play hard, make the right play, and live with the rest.

Q. Jamal Bey, this is your fifth year. You've got to be the most experienced guy in the pack. What's your expectations for yourself and your team this season?

JAMAL BEY: First for the team, just want to make sure that we start off on a great note. Last year we started kind of slow and then we built it up. This year I just want to make sure that we start off great.

And then for myself, just playing with better pace. I think sometimes I rush in my own head or get in my own head and get in my own way, so make sure I'm playing at my own pace and at my own speed.

Q. Coach Hop, first of all, a nice pin you're wearing on your lapel. I keep hearing a lot about this Keyon Menefield kid. I heard you guys had a couple scrimmages. I'm assuming Noah Williams is going to start at point guard. Tell me about Menefield and what you see from him in practice because I don't think anybody in the room is probably familiar with him.

MIKE HOPKINS: He's like any freshman, learning a new system. He came in at 135 pounds. I think he's 146, small and skinny. Yeah, there's certain guys that just know how to dance, and he knows how to dance.

He led EYBL in scoring. If you looked at the EYBL scorers, you look at the history, it would be like LeBron. He's just a



talented player. And the great thing about him, these guys will tell you, he just has a smile on his face, and he wants to win.

When you see these guys, they've been through this process, it's all about winning. When you have character, you have -- you know, we're old. We've increased our toughness. It's going to be exciting. The young guys have great young talent.

Koren Johnson is another guy from Seattle who's got a lot of great talent. Now we've just got to build that bond, and that goes back with the bond off the court and the experience and the connection on the court. That's a work in progress.

Love the team, and Keyon Menefield will be a heck of a player for us, for sure.

Q. The last question, I'm trying to wrap my head around it. You've got Noah Williams, a player has that's really talked a lot of smack when he played against the UW at Washington State, and now he's on your team. Explain that dynamic to me.

MIKE HOPKINS: Listen, in recruiting I've always believed, if you're going to take somebody from Seattle, you've got to make sure they're going to have a lot of success. At the time he was being recruited, we had Quade Green, a guy that had a couple more years left.

We think Noah is such a tough player. The reason why I know how much I love him is because I hated coaching against him. When I looked over there, I did not like him. I always say he's the modern day Draymond Green. When he's on your team, you love him. When he's on somebody else's team, you don't like him.

The great thing about him is he, like Keion said, he loved his experience at Washington State. Loved Kyle Smith, great relationships. I just feel fortunate for the opportunity to coach him. He fits our zone with our size. He's got a nastiness to him. Just like these guys, he wants to win. We've got a big chip on your shoulder.

Q. Mike, you had a lot of production to replace. What was your strategy with the transfer portal? How many guys do you even scout to get down to the list of those you're going to target? How do you approach it all?

MIKE HOPKINS: I think the biggest thing is people talk about recruiting high school and this and that. At the end of the day, you're trying to get people that fit your program, that are great fits.

I believe that we did a great job with the fits that we have. I believe that we had to have more depth in the front line, and we've got two very -- Franck Kepnang who played at Oregon brings a lot of energy and fight. Braxton Meah from Fresno State.

I felt like last year, Nate Roberts had an incredible year and Riley Sorn. Sometimes when Nate got in foul trouble, we had to go really small. This year we have the opportunity of having a couple guys and front line with these guys, that we've got great tremendous size. So our rim protection will be better than it's been the whole time, which when you play zone, you can do a lot of things on the perimeter.

You can trap a little more, be more aggressive when you have that rim protection, and we have that now.

Q. What's impressed you about Keion so far from working with him?

MIKE HOPKINS: Which one, we have two? With an "I" or a "Y"? There we go. Hey, listen, just spend a few minutes with him, and you'll see why we love him. When you have the combination of high character, great talent, great basketball player, great person, great teammate, when you have a group of guys like we do, Jamal has been here. Super senior, he's been through it, stuck with us.

You know that, when you're going in there -- and I don't even want to associate it with war, but coaches do -- when you go in to compete, these are the guys you want to go in with. We've got a great group of guys. That's what's so exciting about this season.

Q. Coach Brown was such a huge part of your offense. He had a phenomenal year last year. Tell me about your offensive identity this year and how it will change and how you see points getting generated now?

MIKE HOPKINS: Points, points. Me, no points. Points. Me, like Terrell, every team is different. You figure out how you're going to score. People ask me about three-point shooting. This guy shot 52% this year. That's my job. I have to get better shot selection for our team.

We have Cole Bajema, P.J. Fuller, Keion Brooks is a guy you can put a ball in his hands certain areas of the court, and he makes the right play, scores. We've got guys with deep duck-ins, and sometimes your offense is great defense.

A couple years ago, when we had success in the league, that's what it was. We had great defense, led to great offense. Just gives more opportunities for a lot of really great players that we have.

Q. Coach, you've had young teams in the past. This isn't a young team. Do you like coaching the young guys better or the old guys better?

MIKE HOPKINS: Pros. Pro people. It makes it a lot easier. They have experience. They've done it. These guys do everything they're supposed to do. They're on time, on target, work hard together, trying to get better. Still learning the new system, which has some growing pains.

Sometimes I'm the angry farmer. Like, damn, I watered you. I planted you. Grow. These guys have an attitude every day where it's all about getting better.

I've got an incredible staff. Will Conroy, who we made associate head coach this past year. Quincy Poindexter, Joaquin Jones, Jerry Hobbie. These guys work with these guys daily. You can see the growth. We've just got to start stacking those days back to back, and we'll be a tough team to beat.

Q. Keion, how are you fitting in the zone, and how difficult is it?

KEION BROOKS: It's definitely a learning curve. Kind of got to unlearn what I've been taught for the past three years. The biggest thing for me was been watching film. Coach has provided me with some guys who look really good in it.

Just to see what it looks like, it really helps. Then when you're out there, you kind of start to feel it more. Like the other day, we were in practice -- you know, we play a lot, and he say we're going to go man to man. I beg him, Coach, please, please, please, say we can play zone so I can get more reps at it and I can figure it out.

Q. I was looking through your schedule, and at first I see Alaska Fairbanks, Weaver State, and I'm like who they got nonconference? Ooh, at Gonzaga December 9th, that should be good. Just thoughts on playing at Gonzaga, how exciting it is, and also it being an in-state school rivalry, just the excitement around that matchup. Thoughts on that?

MIKE HOPKINS: Me?

Q. You can start, yes.

MIKE HOPKINS: Coach Few has built one of the great programs in college basketball. It's always a great marker to where you're at. Those are the teams that you have opportunities that are just great opportunities. They've got

a great program. I've got a lot of respect for them.

We play Auburn this year. Our league is great this year. So you've got a lot of opportunities.

I think this is going to be the deepest league Pac-12 since I've been here from top to bottom in terms of quality of teams. But definitely the Gonzaga game is just great. It's a great opportunity to see where you're at. They've got one of the best teams, and they got one of the best home courts. It will be a great environment, a great opportunity for these guys to play such a special program.

Q. I think back to your last tournament team where Jaylen Noel was just an unbelievable closer. We know heading into this year, Arizona and UCLA are probably going to be picked mostly at the top. From anyone from Oregon all the way down to Cal, 3 through 11, maybe to 12 with Oregon State, these games are won on the margins and you need a bona fide closer. Do you think this roster, maybe Keion or somebody else is going to be in a position to close games out much like TB did last year, and factored in with front line additions?

MIKE HOPKINS: It's why you practice. You have multiple guys who can be put in multiple positions. You look at Jaquez from UCLA. Tiger Campbell might have it sometimes. It could be who's growing at that time. You win games at the end by being able to get a stop, making foul shots, and execute on the offensive end, because a lot of these games come down to really being close.

The big thing I want to focus on, the scoring thing about happen. We've got talented players. We've got multiple go to type guys that we can put the ball in their hands in areas that we can produce. We've got to be able to get stops. That's the biggest thing. That's who we are. That's what we're about. Tougher together, baby. Get in the zone. Be active. Multiple player mentality. Come on, Ben. Let's go, baby. And we've got them.

JESSE HOOKER: Should we end it on that? All right. Oh, we got one.

Q. Jamal, you're, I guess, the oldest person in the Pac-12, the oldest player. What comes with all your experience? I'm assuming you can concentrate a lot more on basketball this year than you have in past years. What is it you're mentoring the younger guys on your team? What is it that you've learned all these years that's going to really help you this year?

JAMAL BEY: I think the biggest thing I've learned being here is make sure you know all your spots on the zone and

defense because you will not play. That's the biggest thing I learned.

When I first got here, I just wanted to play as much as I can, and in practice I played as hard as I can every single day. So I carried that throughout my career. That's what I try to tell all the young guys, play as hard as you can because this time that we have here and the time that we play basketball is pretty, pretty short. So just give everything you have.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

