

# Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

## Arizona Wildcats

## Coach Tommy Lloyd

## Kerr Kriisa

## Ažuolas Tubelis

Men's Head Coach



**'Zona Zoo, Rollie and Jason Terry judging the Dunk Contest. Is there anything we missed that wasn't on camera that was fun that night?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I'm going to let these guys respond to that.

KERR KRIISA: I mean, yeah, it was fun obviously. There were like R.J. and all these guys that had helluva careers, and just to see them, that they care to come back and see us play in Red and Blue, and like you said, grade our dunks and stuff like that. It matters. It was a fun night for sure.

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: Yeah, that was fun. I had a chance to talk to Jason Terry after the game because he was an assistant coach here for one year. So, yeah, we talked about like how is his team doing because now he's assistant coach in the NBA, I'm pretty sure.

Yeah, we just talked, and that was fun.

TOMMY LLOYD: And I think it's special to get -- I think it's one of Lowry's first times back.

### **Q. I forgot Lowry.**

TOMMY LLOYD: And obviously Deandre coming down was great. Those guys did a lot for the university and are tremendous ambassadors for our program.

**Q. I have one more question. Coach, that was one of the most competitive Red and Blue games I've ever watched. It was everybody put everything on the court. So was that one of the goals of the game? Usually it's a fun game and it's competitive, but that was an exciting game.**

TOMMY LLOYD: I like to tell our guys they need to have fun, enjoy the moment because it's definitely a community event. Any time you get 15,000 people to come to a scrimmage, it's pretty cool.

For me, it's great to have our guys play live in front of people for the first time and kind of get that out of their

JESSE HOOKER: Coach, please lead us off with some opening remarks, and we'll go to questions.

TOMMY LLOYD: Sorry I forgot my headband, guys. Make sure Kerr's got his, so we're covered.

It's great to be here again. We're excited to start a new journey. Obviously we've got a great group of guys. These two have done a great job this preseason getting this team ready to roll. So we're excited to see what the season brings.

### **Q. Tommy, as one of the leaders in this league, how have you processed all the time about UCLA and USC moving to the Big Ten and just sort of the unknowns with the future?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Obviously we're disappointed because I love competing against those schools. Again, they've got to make the decisions that they think is best for their athletic program. So I'm going to respect that.

I really believe and I feel strongly that the brand of Arizona basketball is strong enough to stand on its own. So I'm just going to focus on doing the best job at Arizona, and obviously we want to have -- we want to do everything we can to compete for conference championships and compete for National Championships. I mean, that's still my focus.

So I wish those guys the best of luck. Hopefully I'll be able to compete with them obviously the next couple years and then beyond. I would love to continue to play those schools.

### **Q. How fun was it at the Red and Blue game having all the alumni back at McKale, Richard Jefferson in the**



system. So I told our guys I want them to compete. Whenever we take the court, we want to play hard. We want to play smart. So we just use that as another teaching tool, and we take it, and we'll break down the film like we would for any other game and try to learn from it.

**Q. Tommy, just following up what you said before about UCLA, I know it's down the road, but fans typically get more excited about Arizona-UCLA than almost any conference game. Have you heard from fans about that, and have there been any discussions that you might keep playing them?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Not to this point. Everything is so new, and there's so many moving parts. I'm just giving you my personal opinion, and so I haven't like run that through the channels or even talked to UCLA about it.

I'm sure in the near future we'll sit down and have to have those conversations, and hopefully we can figure something out.

**Q. One for Kerr. Go back, I don't know, it was a good time, but how difficult was it for you last year at the end wondering whether you were going to play, how much you could play, what you were able to do or maybe not be able to do? Just looking back at it now, how tough was that for you?**

KERR KRIISA: I would say at the -- I mean, now it's like there's nothing else to do now. But at the time, of course it was tough because you're preparing your whole season in order to be able to play for March Madness, and then you get there and then the week before you get injured.

So obviously it was frustrating, but we had a great medical staff, regular staff. Everybody just said, stick with it. I did like 24/7 rehab, tried to get in the best shape as possible with my ankle. Obviously it wasn't easy, but I got through it.

I mean, looking back, it was still a great experience. But I wish it would have gone a little bit differently.

TOMMY LLOYD: And I'll add to that. Like I'll give Kerr a ton of credit. He and I have never really talked about it, but he had a real injury. For him to give himself up and try to come back and play for our team at the end says a lot about him.

So I was really proud of how he approached it, but I was also proud of our guys. I don't know how many teams could lose their point guard and win four postseason games. So I thought it was -- it said a lot about the other guys in our program. It said a lot about Kerr how he

attacked that and tried to come back for his teammates.

**Q. I want to talk about your current employer, but you could make the case that you know as much about continuity in a program as almost anybody in the country. When you look at Arizona going forward with how much the college basketball picture has changed, how challenging will it be to have the kind of continuity you want to make it continue to be a program?**

TOMMY LLOYD: You're right. So many things have changed, and there's so many more moving parts than maybe there was 10, 15 years ago.

I think it comes down to one thing. I think it comes down to treating people right. I think, if you treat people right, you treat players right, I think you have a better chance of them wanting to stay around.

That being said, I'm also really excited for the guys that did leave and the opportunities that they've created for themselves. So we're just going to attack it on a day-to-day basis and try to make good simple decision after good simple decision and treat people right. I think that's going to be the foundation of our continuity.

**Q. Coach, I think I asked you this question last year, but you had just got there so I'm going to ask you again this year. I'm just curious for my own curiosity. Gonzaga, one of the top programs in the country and probably the top program on the West Coast, and I think Arizona has been one of the best programs. Like I said, I've been in the Pac-12 for 37 years. Outside of the John Wooden era at UCLA, I think Arizona has been the best. What's been the difference as far as recruiting? Is it as hard of a sell to get a guy to come to Tucson as I would assume it was for some of the top rated players in the country to come to Spokane?**

TOMMY LLOYD: First off, recruiting is tough, I think no matter where you're at. To me, more important than trying to talk kids into coming to Arizona, it's just about -- what I always try to do is figure how are we going to build the best team for the upcoming season and have a few pieces we can develop for the future.

So I try not to put too much stock in or pressure on our staff that we have to go out and recruit five McDonald's All-Americans because I don't know if that always translates into winning and consistency.

Listen, you need good players. Bar none, that's 100%. And I would just say I'm still in the learning process of that too, to be honest with you. I can't tell you exactly what the differences are or what it's going to look like a few years

from now.

But we're going to try to be genuine. We're going to try not to over-promise and under-deliver when you recruit kids. I think it's really important when you recruit somebody, you're doing it with that in mind of that kid being successful at your school. Not just, hey, we'll see how this kid does, and if it doesn't work after a year, we'll get rid of him.

So I'm trying to be really methodical and make sure that we deliver on the things we talk about when we recruit a kid. I'm probably being a little cautious, to be honest with you, and slowly build how we recruit at Arizona because I want to make sure we're being mindful and doing it the right way.

**Q. My other question is for Kerr Kriisa. I'm just curious, because I played against a guy with the last name of Kerr that wore No. 25. I'm trying to figure out how you're wearing it, and maybe Coach Lloyd can answer. Is that number not retired at Arizona?**

KERR KRIISA: No.

**Q. So how did you --**

TOMMY LLOYD: Not yet.

KERR KRIISA: What was the question? Is it retired?

**Q. How did you come about wearing No. 25 that was Steve Kerr's number?**

KERR KRIISA: I got to give tons of credit to Steve here too because I'm pretty sure our EMOY was negotiating with him, and I'm pretty sure they asked him before if it's okay that I can wear that number.

TOMMY LLOYD: Sorry, you've got to explain what EMOY is.

KERR KRIISA: Oh, I'm sorry. Brian Brigger, our equipment manager.

**Q. Coach, you get a new job, head coaching gig. You want to put in foundational pieces, maybe win a few games, and go 18-2 in conference. Was last year, the success you had, even beyond maybe what you anticipated coming into the year? And did you approach it like, quote, unquote, rebuild, or did you just hit the ground running with that?**

TOMMY LLOYD: No. I mean, listen, none of these guys have played in the NCAA Tournament. And so I wanted to make sure we were due. That was honestly my first

objective is we're going to get to the tournament.

Then other than that, I didn't set any limitations. I mean, let's see how good we can get, and these guys did an unbelievable job last year of just getting better week by week. When we lost, we learned from it. So it was a joy.

All these seasons are journeys, and they kind of unfold and become their own story. So that's what makes it fun. But I wasn't trying to script what we were doing last year. I was just trying to give these guys everything I got, and I was just trying to kind of follow their lead, and they did an amazing job.

**Q. Kind of a followup to that, were there any foundational pieces you were looking to set just from the beginning last year that you look back now and say, I'm glad we got that taken care of, philosophical practice, anything like that?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, we wanted to establish a style of play. We wanted to implement a system with great pace, great player movement, great ball movement. On defense we want to be tenacious. We want to really pressure the basketball.

And I really wanted to hammer home, more than anything, the effort and energy that we're going to play with every single day.

**Q. I can't stop thinking about the fact that you had to face both TCU and Houston in the tournament last year. I can't think of two more unbelievably physical teams. Obviously one of them you survived, one of them you didn't. But there's probably a moment or a matchup like that coming again this year if everything goes according to plan. What can you take away from that experience with a lot of the guys back from last year to be ready for that moment this year?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, you're right. TCU and Houston are two really good programs. Incredibly physical. Very well coached. I thought we were a really physical team as well. For me, that's the number one standard. You have to like can you check that box? Can you go play in physical, high-level games. Are you a team that can go toe to toe?

And so I really want to see if we can continue to build that at Arizona. I think we have some guys now in our program that do have -- that have shown that toughness. I think we have maybe some other guys in our program that might not be, quote, unquote, you wouldn't say they're a tough guy, but I think we need to establish that identity, and we're going to continue to grow.

Because like there's nothing worse than getting in a game, in a tournament or whatever, and just being physically outmatched and not being able to win that game. So we want to make sure we're doing everything we can in those physical matchups to come out on top.

**Q. Congratulations on last year's success. I know you're starting over this year, and the goal is the National Championship. After watching the Red and Blue game, Zu, I was really impressed with your bounciness. You look leaner this year. Kerr, your ball handling clearly has been something you worked on over the summer. To the two of you, what phase of your game improved the most over the summer?**

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: I think my defense improved the most and my shooting from three-point line. Yeah, that's basically it. I don't know, I didn't work on my bounce, so I don't know.

(Laughter).

Maybe, I don't know.

**Q. You're leaner. You don't look as bulky as you did last year.**

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: Everyone says that, yeah, I look skinny, I know. I know I'm not that skinny.

**Q. How about you, Kerr? What did you work on?**

KERR KRIISA: First of all, thank you. Finally somebody notices because Coach doesn't say that, good job.

TOMMY LLOYD: Oh, wow.

KERR KRIISA: Finally getting some credit. I mean, yeah, we had a great summer with the coaching staff and Coach Tommy, and I really put in the work. Then I had a great national team summer after. So, yeah.

**Q. Both of you have played a lot of international basketball. What's the difference that you see? Is there any difference at all between playing international basketball versus playing players in this conference or even against players in other conferences in the States?**

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: Yeah, in Europe -- I mean, here in States you have very athletic guys playing, and like now we're playing with like our age guys. In Europe, me and Kerr played with men. So physicality is different. But here in States, the pace is faster. I really like it here.

That was one of the reasons I came here was because I wanted to play fast and run and dunk the ball, you know.

KERR KRIISA: I would say -- I mean, as a point guard, like playing pick-and-rolls in States, there's a lot of gap defense. So you've got like first line of help and stuff.

I feel like in Europe you don't have really first gap defense, so I feel like it's a little bit easier in Europe to read the pick-and-roll stuff.

Like Zu said, yeah, the athletes are crazy. Like back home, you might play against some guy who's like 35, but he doesn't even look like a basketball player. Here you just, you've got straight up dogs coming at you. It's like a little bit different. But finally getting more used to it. I like it here.

**Q. This is for the players. Arizona has a pretty rich tradition, especially recently, of basketball recruiting and really getting talented guys and integrating them well. Can you talk about how Arizona integrated you guys into the program. Followup for you, Tommy, about just that success that you had at Gonzaga translating at Arizona and recruiting on the international trail.**

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: With me, it was like a funny story because Coach Jack Murphy came to Lithuania to watch Kerr play, and I played against him, and he said, oh, I want this guy too. So I don't know, I got offered like a scholarship, so why not, you know.

KERR KRIISA: He lost that game, by the way.

AŽUOLAS TUBELIS: I lost it, but I was good, though.

(Laughter).

**Q. Kerr, how did they incorporate you?**

KERR KRIISA: What does incorporate mean?

**Q. Just how did you come to get introduced to U of A basketball and how did you find success there?**

KERR KRIISA: I mean, yeah, I feel like coming from Europe, taking a college step is kind of a risk because you've got to be in a perfect situation in order to succeed. I mean, for me it's hard to say also because we had like staff change and coaches change, so I'm really thankful and grateful for both of the coaches that I had.

Right now I'm really happy. I'm happy for the style. I like my staff. The players that we bring in. It's a lot of

international, which makes like our locker room way more fun. I feel like it's just pretty good right now.

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, for me, obviously I'm comfortable coaching international basketball players, and hopefully it will -- if I continue to coach for a long time, it will continue to be an important part of any program I'm associated with.

For one, and Kerr's right, we love having a really diverse group of people in our locker room. I think it makes it a lot of fun. Just the little differences, the little nuances that come up, the language things. We have a ton of fun with guys. Like we're having a lot of fun with Filip right now from Serbia, and he's a great kid, and he does it all smiling.

So, no, I think it's just a ton of fun. Listen, I love the way these guys, they think the game, and they play, and I think it's right in line with how I like to coach.

Listen, if you're watching these NBA games, I mean, a lot of these are the same concepts that they're playing with in the NBA. I mean, you watch how those guys are able to move the ball now in the NBA. I know there's some great isolation players in the NBA, but there's a lot of players that really know how to play basketball and move the ball well, and they're playing with some great concepts.

To me, I think we can do our own little version of that in college, and I think it's pretty cool.

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