

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Chris Mack

Christen Cunningham

V.J. King

Louisville Cardinals

Q. Coach, welcome to the league, or welcome back to the league. What have your impressions been like today?

CHRIS MACK: It's been great. Obviously, when you have Media Day, you know basketball season is right around the corner, and for our guys, the first true test comes this Sunday against Bellarmine exhibition, and before you know it, we'll be battling Nicholas State on November 8th.

So the start of basketball season is right around the corner. We've used this time over the summer and early fall to try to learn personalities, gain relationships with the guys on our team, and in the hopes that we can build trust between the coaching staff and players, and try to get to the point where terminology becomes consistent and becomes instinctive for our guys, and really try to build towards a season, hopefully, one that we'll remember for a while.

Q. Chris, you've seen quite a bit in your collegiate career. What has been your impression over the last couple of months in terms of the change in leadership in Louisville?

CHRIS MACK: I think it's been a positive one. I think so much has been talked about our program over the last year, two years, that hasn't put Louisville basketball in the greatest of light. But the players I have on our team and the ones in the locker room that I coach every day are high-character guys, and guys that I've really enjoyed coaching and being around. We've got a lot of work to do, and I think they'd be the first to tell you.

But I think the willingness to improve, and the willingness to learn has been really good, and it's been a very enjoyable ride so far, and we're looking forward to a very productive season in one of the toughest leagues, if not the toughest league in all of the country.

Q. Athletic directors talk about having a 100-day plan when they take the chair administratively. Did you have a 100-day plan? Did you have a 120-day

plan? Was there a process of months or weeks that you had going into it?

CHRIS MACK: I had a one-day plan, and that was figure out what I needed to do that next day. You know, you get thrown so many different things and you're trying to do them all at the same time. From hiring a coaching staff to learning personalities of your players and their families, just learning your way around the city and the school, and who you need to lean on. So there's a ton of stuff that's thrown at you.

It's old hat in a way, because it's what you did at your previous stop, but it's in a whole new place. So it's been a quick transition. The six months have flown by. But it's been a great one at the same time.

Q. V.J., what are your impressions of this new staff and this new era that is starting to unfold for Louisville basketball?

V.J. KING: I thought they've done a great job up to this point. I feel like we've established a totally new culture, and like Coach Mack said, it's been a positive for us, and I think we're headed in the right direction.

Q. Christen, same question of you. Your impressions, and you're not allowed to say, same thing.

CHRISTEN CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, the coaching staff has been great. They came in right away and started establishing a new culture. I mean, they're different from what I've been accustomed to, but they've done a great job, and we're looking forward to a great year.

Q. Coach, in putting together your coaching staff, how much of the assembly of the staff was based on your personality, that of the school, that of the league? As you put it together, how strategic did you need to be?

CHRIS MACK: I don't worry about all that. I want people that I can trust, people that I've had established relationships with that know how to coach the game of basketball and that are high-character people. So it wouldn't matter if I was coaching in the ACC or the MEAC, I would want the same thing.

So I brought with me Luke Murray and Mike Pegues who had been on my staff for several years at Xavier. I hired Dino Gaudio who was probably covering this event a year ago and was a guy that coached me at

Xavier, and I've had the utmost respect for over the years. And all the administrative guys that are on my coaching staff I've viewed the same way. I want them to be high-character people that I can trust. I think that's the most important thing.

Q. Christen, it says in the media guide that you have been elected a team captain along with V.J. What does it mean to be a captain?

CHRISTEN CUNNINGHAM: It means a lot. It just shows that my teammates hold me at a high standard, and they felt like I was capable of leading them this year. So it meant a lot to me. Each day I come to work, I keep that in mind with the decisions I make and how diligently I go about my work each day.

Q. V.J., is there pressure in being a captain?

V.J. KING: I wouldn't say pressure. I think the word we'd use would be more responsibility. Kind of piggybacking off what C.C. said, just having that in mind that our teammates did choose us as captains and to keep that in the back of our minds when we come every day, we go to class every day, we come to workouts or whatever it is that we do, that our teammates are always looking up to us and that we are that example to set for them, so we have to be at our best, even when we may not be. Like I said, it's been a great honor up to this point.

Q. Coach, you mentioned exhibiting against Bellarmine this upcoming weekend. Is the team ready for its first game? We had a coach earlier say we're almost ready, but we're not quite there yet. What is your status at this point?

CHRIS MACK: Regardless of whether we're ready or not, I think it's needed. I think players feel like they could go two or three practices, and all right, Coach, we're ready to play. And I think coaches need three, four, five months to start their first game before they play their first game.

So, it is what it is. I think we'll learn a lot from it. I think every experience that you have both positively and negatively you learn from it. If you don't, you're not getting better. So I'm excited to see how Sunday plays out. We still have some practices to go prior to that. But that will be a good measuring stick of things that we need to get better at.

Q. Chris, your first year at Xavier as head coach was my first year at ESPN, and of course I was in the A-10 at that time, and got a chance to know the DNA of your teams very well. How much offensively and defensively, and I know you may not have the personnel that you had established at Xavier, but how much of your offensive and defensive philosophies should I plan on seeing this

year?

CHRIS MACK: Well, I'd like to think that defensively we'd be very similar. You know, we brought the same belief and the same style of play and the same terminology that we used at Xavier all those many years because it's what our staff's most comfortable with. I feel like you can win on the road with that style. You can win against the best teams with that style. It relies on being together. It relies on communication. It relies on toughness.

Offensively we'll be a little different than Louisville teams in the past. I think offensively a good coach puts his players in the best position to be successful, and, a year ago if I would have taken Louisville basketball, I would have probably coached offensively a little different because of the personnel they had.

But we're not last year's team. So we don't have a plethora of five-men. So we're going to have to be a little unique with how we play. I think our guys are getting better every single day. As long as we play the right way, and by that, I mean playing together, making the correct decision, making the correct pass, I think you can be successful offensively.

But plays from one year to the next will be tweaked and changed just depending on who we have on our team and what they do well.

Q. Christen, going back to leadership, there is always a young crop of new student-athletes on a team. What is your role in coaching them along?

CHRISTEN CUNNINGHAM: Just making sure that they're comfortable each day. That they have a good understanding of what Coach Mack and the staff are trying to implement for that day. Like understanding terminology and things like that, just holding them accountable. Making sure if anybody starts slacking that, you know, not being afraid to confront them, whether it's in front of the team or off to the side.

But just always making sure that they're locked in and ready to go.

Q. Chris, you inherit kind of the job and the questions about some of the things going on in college basketball today at the end of your time downstairs you were asked about the verdict that came down in the trial recently. What effect, if any, do you think those things have on the University of Louisville, and what you're doing?

CHRIS MACK: Well, it's my understanding that Louisville wasn't on trial. So, you know, certainly we've operated under that cloud of suspicion all around the country.

But there are a lot of good things that are happening. I'm represented by a great group of young men that are high-character. So my focus has only been on tomorrow's practice, the next day's practice, Bellarmine on Sunday, and at some point we'll have to worry about that. But right now is not the time for at least me.

I'm more concerned about C.C.'s experience as his one and only shot playing for the university of Louisville.

Q. Coach, we've asked some of our head coaches about building out a non-conference schedule, and obviously because of your hiring you haven't had too much of a hand in this year's non-conference schedule. But does it help that as a new head coach you do have a fairly high number of games at home before having to get on the road and create that are strategy, that infrastructure of travel, and movement and all of that?

CHRIS MACK: You must not have looked at the opponents of who we were playing both home and away. You know, I think for us, the non-conference part of the schedule is all about challenging ourselves and preparing ourselves for ACC play. I don't know if a program has done a better job with their non-conference, of which I take zero credit, and our coaching staff takes zero credit, because that schedule, like you said, was probably 98% of the way through before I accepted the position.

So we'll have one of the most challenging schedules in all of college basketball but history will show the Selection Committee favors those teams that go out and aren't afraid to play anybody. So no one's going to accuse us of being afraid to play anybody, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Whether we play at home or on the road is really inconsequential because they're all good teams.

Q. Players, one of the interesting questions that have come up here today, and it actually came from the floor from a member of the media early on today, was what kind of team will you have when you come back here in March? Now, granted, it's one game at a time, it's one month at a time, but as you think about coming back here, what kind of team do you hope you'll come back with, V.J.?

V.J. KING: Right now I'm not worried about March right now. Like I said, we're preparing for Sunday, to get ready for that first exhibition. We're taking this day by day. If we compete and continue to get better, like we have been each and every single day I feel like we put ourselves in a good position to be where we want to be in March when that time comes.

Q. Christen?

CHRISTEN CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, with the preconference schedule we have -- I don't think we can begin to worry about March at this point. After we finish that we'll deal with the conference schedule we have.

But, I think it's every team's goal to be playing our best basketball at the end of the season. That's when it matters, so we're going to focus on working day by day, game by game, and that will take care of itself.