

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - James Madison vs Wisconsin

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Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

James Madison Dukes
Coach Mark Byington

Noah Freidel

Terrence Edwards Jr.

T.J. Bickerstaff

Media Conference

Q. Wanted to start off, ask you guys, you're in Brooklyn, in this big arena, huge city after such a long season, how does it feel to be in this moment and soak it all in?

NOAH FREIDEL: Yeah, it's just cool to get up here, and we've been excited. We have been waiting all year for this, but we are not doing too much. Today is a workday. We're here to practice and get better and get ready for tomorrow.

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: We are not here for vacation. We're here to work and get ready for the game tomorrow.

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: I would say the same thing. Feels good to be here, but we are just ready to play honestly.

Q. Terrence and T.J., have you been fishing with Noah?

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: Yeah, one time I was like going to go but something popped up. But yeah, he's a guy that will get you out of your character and he will make you come with him. So yeah, we got plenty more of that coming after the season.

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: I'm not going to lie, I almost did two days ago, but I might just do it over the summer. I haven't been fishing in a minute.

Q. Who have you taken and how did it go?



NOAH FREIDEL: I went with -- (audio interruption) -- it was just a nice little chill fish, 4, 6 o'clock, nothing crazy. Didn't catch anything, though.

Q. You talked about this not being a vacation. Coach Byington used similar phrases. He said you're not here to be tourists. How do you get that message across to the team for guys who may be have not experienced anything like this before?

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: It's surprising that guys who have not experienced nothing like this, they are locked in, and guys that have not seen the big city, they are the most ready. Everybody understands what we are here to do. We are not down here to hang out or anything like that. We are just down here to get this one tomorrow and try to get one on Sunday.

Q. For T.J. and Noah, you guys have both been in this tournament before. What is the message you're getting across to guys who have not been in March Madness before?

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: I'm telling them to keep the same mindset as every other game we've been playing. We've played in adversity this year and all different types of settings and still played our game and won. It's pretty much the same. It's don't look into the bright lights and just play your game and be ready.

Q. Talk about your defense and how far that has come from the beginning of the year. I know Coach had some questions early in the season of how you guys would be, but the last month, you guys have been really locked in. Can you talk about that and what has been the biggest key for you guys on that side of the basketball?

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: Coach preached to us, too, that we can't just put up a lot of scoring. Especially when you try and go to the next level, you have to defend. Me and Noah came together, and we know teams get us out there on the iso and stuff like that and we just lock together and told each other we ain't going to give up that many



points. That's been the point of going forward and just always be in gaps and your help assignments.

NOAH FREIDEL: Throughout the year we notice good things happen when we get three stops in a row. We call them locks. And the more locks we got, the more wins we got and good things would come from that. As a team we just focus like if you get beat, someone is going to be there on your help side, have your back and just fly around.

Q. We've talked a lot about you guys trusting each other. Does that show in your play with the amount of assists that you guys average per game? You talk about help on defense and trusting. Is this the team that you guys have trusted the most or most connected that you guys have been on before?

NOAH FREIDEL: It's that and having a mature and experienced team and guys that are mature and experienced. It's easy to lean on the person to your left.

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: Same. Going into these games, I feel comfortable because everybody sacrifices. Because if it's not your night, you have to find another way to impact the team that turns out to a win. So that's what we build on all year. Especially me being one of the leading scorers on the team, you have -- the game ain't going to always be your game out of 34 games. So you have to find ways to help the other team.

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: When we share the ball, we are really hard to beat. We share the ball. We get out running and things like that. We're always going to cause problems when we do that so we want to make sure that we continue to do that.

Q. On Sunday, you had not really had much of a chance to look at Wisconsin yet. After getting a chance to watch them on film and figure out what your assignments and everything are going to be, what's your impression and how do you match up with them?

NOAH FREIDEL: We'll treat it as every other game as far as film and setup and things like that. It's nice to have a week longer scout than usual, so lock in and learn their plays and just be really prepared for tomorrow.

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: I feel like we match up with every team in the country, so like Noah said, we kept everything the same as far as the scout and stuff like that. We more worked on us to get ready for this game so we are ready.

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: I watched some extra film when I went home even after practice, but from what I saw, I think

it's a really good matchup for us. Just following our game plan and listening to our coaches, we should be fine.

Q. You talked about blocking out the noise in the season, but now with the amount of coverage that March Madness has got and a lot of focus on you guys as a potential, quote/unquote, Cinderella run, how are you guys trying to manage expectations? And going off of what you guys were talking about with the question, focusing on going 1-0?

NOAH FREIDEL: You hit it perfect. We are focusing on going 1-0 and not worrying about anything else but this game tomorrow.

TERRENCE EDWARDS, JR.: Same. What he said. We are not worrying about what people are saying on the outside. We keep everything between us coaches and the team. We are more locked in on us and yeah, that's that.

T.J. BICKERSTAFF: It's having the same mindset, 1-0, like you said.

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, it's the best time of year. You know, for us, basketball fans, it's great to be a part of this with JMU and get us to this place. And I'm excited to take this team into the tournament.

It's been a tremendous year. We've done a lot of great things along the way, and we know the most exciting and best is still afforded to us in the future. We've had a great prep coming up here, and I know our guys are excited to go against a really good Wisconsin team.

Q. You had so many close calls, Wilmington as a player, and with Bobby at Charleston as an assistant. What does this opportunity mean to you and have you shared that with your players?

MARK BYINGTON: This tournament is really special when you're at the level that we're at. And it's very, very difficult to get here. I've lived it as a player. Lost in championships games as a player. Had a year where I thought we had a great team. I tore my ACL and could not finish the year with the team.

Then as a head coach, and like you mentioned when I was assistant coach, there's been many times we were there. That's why it's so hard to get here, but you've got to appreciate this moment.

When we play, you know, in the Sunbelt or the CAA or SoCon or some other conferences, it's not always the best team that gets there. Sometimes it's the team that got hot at the right time, the team that got fortunate. The way the

tournament is right now, it's a one-bid league, and things in college sports has made it even tougher for one-bid leagues. It used to be you were in an 18 conference and you had to be one of eight or one of ten, and now we have to be one of 14.

So things got even more difficult. So when you get here, you've got to appreciate it. You've got to cherish and you've got to take advantage of the opportunity.

And I haven't shared with the guys -- I share with them different things about me playing or coaching along the way, but this is their journey. This is their time, and they were destined for this all along the way. And I just had to guide them and sometimes get out of the way and let them do their thing.

Q. Talk about trying to live in the moment and it's obviously the biggest game maybe you've ever coached, but there's also so much chatter at this time of year, speculation as far as who is going where as far as the coaching carousel, and jobs open up more, sooner than ever. Is that something that you have to address with your team when some of the chatter is attached to your name, or just how do you deal with the idea that there's all this speculation out there and you're, again, trying to do your job?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, this team knows that I'm committed to every single thing about them on this journey and to be able to run this race with them.

And this has not been any kind of distraction, anything along the way. The truth of it is, I think our guys got used to distractions, used to rumors, used to things. It's kind of a generational thing where a lot of things are not true. And, you know, we are always honest with each other. We always care about each other.

And everything that I have has been put into this team and everything has been given to me. There has not been anything on the outside that's been a bother to us. We've been solely focused on trying to be the best we can this year and making a runs as far as we can in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. I know you said Sunday, you talked to Jerry Wainwright already and he had been in a similar situation, he won a 13-4 game. Who else have you heard from and maybe people who have been through this specific, trying to pull off the upset?

MARK BYINGTON: I've talked to a lot of coaches. You know, sometimes it's natural. Sometimes it's about recruiting. We deal with a lot of things. The one I definitely

picked their brain on the last 48 hours was Dusty May. I wanted to see what was the natural, or what was the magic. We talked different times. I have great respect for him as a coach and what he's done there, and it just so happened they are up in Brooklyn.

But, you know, everybody gives you advice and I listen to advice, whether it's somebody who has been here many years ago or somebody who has just had a great run like him last year.

Q. With the prevalence of sports betting in society, how much do you have to worry about your guys being subject to those angry people online who maybe missed their parlay or whatever maybe happened in their lives?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, it's a scary future, and I know they are dealing with it now. And I can tell you, a lot of times I get hateful things Tweeted at me or whatever else, and you're always feeling like, you know, I just won the game by ten, but maybe it wasn't enough for you.

It's dangerous. It's scary. And I don't know how they can do that and kind of make it safe. You know, I do worry about the future of that because I think professional athletes are able to handle things a lot more, and I know it's difficult on them. When it seeps down to college, I think it's scary but we're just going to have to figure out a way to live with it and tolerate it. It's not going anywhere.

But just like the players, the coaches, I mean, sometimes you get the strangest responses, and you can guess, all right, we didn't hit -- guy didn't get his parlay because of us, who knows.

But we don't focus on it, lines, this, that, everything else. My team doesn't look at it. We are trying to win a game by one. So if that makes somebody happy or not happy, that's up to them.

Q. We were talking a little bit about the present and the future. I was hoping to bring it back to the past a little bit. You guys are going to be wearing patches to honor the late ^ Lefty Driesell. Can you speak about what he's meant to JMU, not just college basketball as a sport?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, Lefty, he's a legend, and not just what he did at James Madison, getting them to the tournament, but at the same time, college sports.

I'm really proud and happy that we are doing this, we are representing him on this stage and this level. You'll see the Lefty patch on our guys' uniform. It felt really good. I



heard from his son yesterday, Chuck Driesell, and he told me how much it meant to the family that we are doing this. And I told him, it's the least we can do. He's done a lot for James Madison and college sports, and I'm glad we are honoring him this way.

Q. You mentioned Dusty May and talking to him, and we talked about why couldn't JMU be what FAU was last year, and then you go through and have that record. Did you talk to him last summer? I know you guys know each other pretty well, but has that been an ongoing conversations with him?

MARK BYINGTON: Well, everybody gets busy in the season and sometimes you talk to somebody with a play or an action or something they are doing well, and there's a lot of guys you respect. For me, I particularly pay attention to people that have taken tough situations and made them good. That's something I take pride in, in taking things that were not in a certain area and you got them to a different place.

So many coaches like that, that I would always try to bounce ideas off. I'm an eager learner. I'm constantly trying to figure out how to do things better. And any time that you can find a coach and a relationship with that you can trust, bounce ideas off, it's a great resource, and I love having that.

Q. The only team in the country that has won as many games as you have is the reigning national champion. How confident do you sense they are in themselves?

MARK BYINGTON: I've got a confident group. Sometimes you win 31 games and you don't think you've been through a lot of adversity. We've been through it and sometimes overcome it during the game, during moments. And this is a resilient group. We have not had to go down like some and had bad losing streaks. We've learned along the way.

We are not trying to sit there and even talk about 32. We are talking about going 1-0, and we have talked about going 1-0 the entire year. And when we get to play Wisconsin on Friday, we are just trying to go 1-0. We are not trying to get to 32 or win the most wins in the country. It's a singular focus, and our guys have bought into it. It keeps me focused and keeps them focused, and we don't have to worry about what's behind us or in front of us.

Q. The athletic department has had an incredible year and you guys are a huge part of that and the visibility. What is it about James Madison that has allowed for a great year for the whole school?

MARK BYINGTON: It's been a special place. One of my

favorite things that I always talked to about is people who are nonathletic at campus and what athletics can do for the omissions or stories that might not get told or that aren't heard of without having the platform of athletics to be able to tell it. JMU has got a great story. Every single thing there is big-time. Tremendous people. Great fan base.

You know, I'm glad we are able to kind of be on the stage to shine JMU even more. Our football team and us, we are in the Top-25, and there was a couple weeks there, it was awesome. Every time you looked on television, you were seeing JMU, and that's great for anybody that has pride in the university or knows about the university and also to know the story.

Our softball team was in a National Championship game just a couple years ago. The sports there is at a high level. It's not just football and basketball, and I'm glad that we can kind of help shine the light on other sports as well.

Q. How important is it to discuss three straight stops and give guys goals they can contain?

MARK BYINGTON: When I first started at JMU, we had a grad assistant who wore chains around his neck and a lock for every time we got him. I lost that. I think he's at Florida now. I think he took the locks with him. Haven't been able to find them.

But the guys that were there before believed in it, I believe in it, and it's a huge part of what we do. So we do go into our game and we know our magic number is 7. We get seven locks in the game, we are winning. But there's multiple times we'll be talking in the game, hey, we need a lock right now, and when we put them together, the score takes care of itself and we get a win.

Q. Wisconsin is notably bigger than you guys. How have you guys during the course of the season handled teams that are taller and longer than you guys?

MARK BYINGTON: We are not a small, petite team. You look at Noah Freidel, 6-4 shooting guard. Terrence, my small forward is 6-7, maybe even taller than that, and Julian Wooden is 6-8 with a 7-2 wingspan.

The difference comes at the center position against Wisconsin, and they do play with great physicality. I think that whole league does. You look at the Big Ten and the size of them and the way they compete and battle against each other. I think you have to be that way to play in that league. You don't have to be that way to play in all leagues.



But it is something going into this game that we can't get pushed around. We got to battle. We have to understand that. Our guys know it's a challenge. And usually when there's challenges like that, they respond. But if we are getting pushed around on the rebounds and the screening and everything else, it's going to go their way.

So we understand that going in.

Q. You joked a little during the selection show watch party about this is homecoming for Michael Green. What does this mean to him, and what has it been like to have a player who knows -- is from Brooklyn?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I don't know if it's good or it's bad. I mean, he's got a ton of people wanting to come. He's a special young man who has been through a lot this year. He got off to a hot start and played great and went through a little tough period and fought his way back.

But his family is extremely important to him. And he talks all the time about -- I mean, being from Brooklyn is important to him. Being from New York is important to him.

So when it worked out that the game was going to be here, you could see him light up, and he'll be about business. You have to focus in on what's on the court and eliminate distractions. There's a lot of them right now, and it's great for his family and friends to be in the stands. I expect him to play well tomorrow.

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