

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Saint Louis vs Georgia

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KeyBank Center

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Mike White

Kanon Catchings

Marcus Millender

Media Conference



Q. How do you deal with anxiety or feelings going into a big tournament like this? A lot of athletes are doing things like breath work now, things like that. How do you deal with the anxiety of going into a massive tournament like this?

MARCUS MILLENDER: The breath work, that helps a lot. We do some exercises like that before games with our strength coach. But me personally, I just leave it all in God's hands. I thank the Lord, say my prayer before every game, go into a big arena like this and just leave it in his hands.

KANON CATCHINGS: Pretty much the same as he said. Leave it in God's hands. We do breath work but also trust in the work that you've put in in the past.

Q. Y'all don't tip off until 9:45 tomorrow night. That's a long wait. How do you guys plan on biding your time? What are you going to do to stay busy?

MARCUS MILLENDER: You know, we're going to try not to stay busy because that's a pretty long day. But our day is probably pretty spread out. We're going to do probably some things in the morning like shootaround, then have some film, and probably just sleep, take a nap or something like that.

We're going to be ready to go by 9:00.

Q. Smurf, looking at both of these teams, you guys are among the highest-scoring teams in the country. How do you keep yourself from not trying to push the pace and overdo it when you're playing a team that can

score as much as Saint Louis has shown they're able to?

MARCUS MILLENDER: We just try to go out there and play our game. We try not to let the other team dictate our pace whenever we're on the court, just executing the offensive strategies that our coaches give us.

Q. Kanon, what been your impression of Robbie Avila and what he brings to the team?

KANON CATCHINGS: Yeah, he's different from anybody we've seen this year. He can shoot the ball, pass the ball, very skilled. Just excited to match up against him.

Q. Smurf, like you were asked a while ago, you guys score a lot of points, Saint Louis scores a lot of points. Are you all more similar than different in that aspect?

MARCUS MILLENDER: Yeah, they shoot the three ball pretty much as well as us. They probably shoot it better than us. They play a fast-paced game which is what we want to do, so I feel like it's going to be a pretty fun game.

Q. Kanon, going back to the SEC tournament, what stands out to you? What did you learn from that loss that you feel like you guys as a team, it can help you guys going into this one?

KANON CATCHINGS: I feel like I learned how important it is to start off the game playing hard and just to stay locked into the game plan the whole game.

Q. As far as Somto goes, he struggled a little bit last game with the elbow. How has he prepared for this game coming up and what do you expect from him tomorrow night?

MARCUS MILLENDER: I expect a lot of energy. He's one of those energy guys on our team. He brings a lot to the team. He's a big piece to our team. He just brings a lot, so I expect a big game out of him tomorrow.

Q. A couple weeks ago that Jeremiah talked about Blue and how big he is for this team. What's your perspective, especially as a guy in his first year, how Blue helped you get settled and what he brings to this



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team?

MARCUS MILLENDER: Blue helped me personally a lot and just everybody on the team a lot. He's one of those guys that you can lean on whenever you're feeling down. He's going to always give you the real answer. He's been here before, so he knows what it looks like.

Q. Your first time here; how do you balance trying to enjoy what's going on with the task at hand tomorrow night?

MARCUS MILLENDER: Yeah, you know, as a kid I've watched a lot of March Madness games growing up, so I saw what it looked like, what it could look like, what it turned out to.

Like I said earlier to his question, I just pray, leave it all in God's hands and just go out there and do my thing.

MIKE WHITE: Excited to be here. Hospitality has been terrific. Look forward to our guys being able to shoot on some game rims and get a feel for the arena. But always a special event, and we're super excited to be here.

Q. When we spoke on Sunday, you had a chance to further look at Saint Louis. What has stood out to you about them offensively and what makes them so productive?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, I will say I talked about their offense the other day. And as you watch them a bunch, these guys are very, very capable defensively as well. Their defensive numbers are better than ours. Switchable, apply pressure, got speed and quickness and length in the backcourt.

But offensively, to answer your question, they're really sharp with their execution, their role identification, their ability to stretch you at five spots with certain lineups, of course, starting with Avila. When he's in a good rhythm, they're incredibly difficult to defend.

To complement him, their ability to drive it at spots with some speed in the backcourt, guys coming off the bench, they can really fill it up from three, so they've got good depth, as well. They just present a lot of problems offensively.

Really good cutting team, ability to draw fouls, and a diverse set of actions and concepts that allow for a bunch of preparation.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, long day. I'm not sure if the question came through on his audio there.

But we'll start today -- we'll be a little bit different in that we'll practice. We'll have another practice tonight to try to just get into that cycle where we'll go to sleep a little bit later. And then do the same thing tomorrow where we'll have a shootaround a little bit earlier in the day, and then instead of going right to a practice, we'll try to break the day up and get to a practice tomorrow night. That's our best swing at it.

But it is a little unique, obviously, 9:45. But it's unique for both teams.

Q. You mentioned Robbie and what he means to Saint Louis. How rare is he, that big man that shoots threes and what he brings to their team.

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, he's a guy that the more you study him on film, the more you appreciate his instincts and the his quick thinking ability. He's got an innate ability to draw fouls. We've got to show the officials legality with verticality and showing our hands.

Again, he shoots it really well from three at pretty high volume. Shoots it like a guard. But in my opinion -- I don't know what Coach would tell you -- I think what really separates him as a 6'10", 240 is his ability to pass the basketball and makes everybody around him better. They've got other good passers, too, but I don't think we have faced a 5 that passes it like this this season.

Q. Obviously I think slow starts for you guys is something you want to avoid at all costs. Last year in the tournament it happened against Ole Miss. How do you come out in a game where it's a weird 10:00 p.m. start?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, we've addressed it, we've talked about it. We've also gotten off to really good starts, and in our guys' defense last year, that's completely on me. We were playing a Gonzaga team that I think in their conference championship, if I'm not mistaken, was 1 of 22 from three. And we packed the thing in and I want to say they made their first nine threes before we adjusted.

Then we extended and then they started pounding us in the post. I'm talking about 366 days ago. We'd better be focused on Saint Louis and how to attack them and how to defend them.

Our guys understand. And we were locked in the other day. If you go back and watch our last game against Ole Miss in the conference tournament, first of all, it's a team



that was playing at a really high level, and they proved that the next couple nights. They played really well against us twice this year, of course. We had some shots at the rim with some contact and didn't get to the foul line, didn't finish, had a couple open threes that didn't go. And they hit some tough mid-ranges, and before you know it, it spiraled on us.

Our effort and energy and even our defensive connection were there. They were, if you go back and watch it. I felt better 24 hours after the game than I did directly after the game.

This is the NCAA Tournament; our guys will be juiced just like Saint Louis' kids. It'll be two teams from the tip playing really hard. And, heck, 9:45 is probably a time with 20-year-olds that they're more alert than 8:00 a.m. anyway. We'll be ready.

Q. If I could ask you about Jeremiah just a little bit. He missed a little bit of time and since then he's been coming off the bench for you. Even though he's still playing a lot of minutes, what's stood out about the way he has handled coming off the bench?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, you know, what's really cool is this is the first time I've thought about it in probably a couple weeks. It's a non-factor. You credit Jeremiah for that, and you also credit him for vocalizing, hey, I'm a little bit sore here, I need a little time, my shoulder has really been bothering me.

He gets really diligent with his treatment. He convicted to come back as quickly as he can. He helps us at Kentucky, where a huge win for us, of course, and really gets into an offensive flow immediately like he did not take any time off.

Coming off the bench for us, he's played the same but probably better. Down the stretch here, he's playing as well as he's played all season. Certainly with all these guys, there's an outlier or two over the past six or eight games, but collectively probably since he came back, he is definitely playing his best basketball.

Q. I wanted to ask you, obviously you have Kanon Catchings, Jake Wilkins, guys that make wild plays, highlight plays. But with Blue Cain, two-year starter, what has he meant to Georgia?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, and as you'll remember, even late his freshman year when we went on a little bit of a run in the NIT and got the NIT Final Four, he earned a starting spot there.

He's been consistent with his work. With these

20-year-olds these days, no one wants to be called a glue guy, but he's a guy that does a lot well.

He came here as a catch and shoot guy who's turned into, on certain nights, a really good defender, and those nights are becoming more frequent.

He's become very competitive. Physically he's tough as nails. Any chance I have to say that, I say it. I love the kid. His assist-to-turnover ratio, you want to talk about growth, just off the charts in terms of how much better he's gotten with his decision making and passing since his freshman year. And he's rebounding the ball from his position at a really high rate.

He's turned into a good high major basketball player. He's very important to everything we do.

Q. What did Dusty May bring to your staff at Louisiana Tech and Florida, and what did you see that foreshadowed the success he's had as a head coach?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, sure, and I anticipated getting a Michigan or a Dusty question, and you've got to do your job. I'll politely answer your question, of course, but we are so focused on Saint Louis. And if we have an opportunity to play Dusty or the team that Dusty is competing against, of course, we'd be very, very fortunate.

I will answer your question, though. Dusty is phenomenal. I've never seen work ethic like his. Motor, motor, motor. Just non stop. He's a guy that barely sleeps and he's always on it. Character, ability to connect with players, and a passion for the game would be the biggest characteristics I would say make him special.

Q. Mentioning Jeremiah, some of these guys that will be playing in the NCAA Tournament for the first time, how do you strike that balance of letting them enjoy all this is but also understanding it's another game to be played?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, so in terms of how we structured today, another factor outside of the fact that we tip at 9:45, is this practice opportunity here in this arena. In the past we've always gone from here to another gym, and you try to make the whole thing serious.

But when you leave the fanfare and the hoopla and the NCAA Tournament and the game arena and our guys sign kids' autographs and things like that, it's hard to turn that switch back into, hey, this is a business trip. This is the scouting report. This is, again, how we're going to try to attempt to slow these guys down who have got unbelievable firepower.



I guess the 9:45 tip, the blessing in disguise that we've fallen into a little bit is that we're going to use this as fanfare, enjoy it, guys. We're going to take a bunch of shots in there. I want our guys to have fun, I want them to be proud that they're in the NCAA Tournament. They've earned it. And then in a few hours, we'll go practice and then it'll be back to normal mentality.

Q. Give me one word to describe the SEC basketball conference.

MIKE WHITE: Deep. I'll give you some more just for fun. You can take them or leave them. Athletic, competitive, the best. It's become the best league in the country.

Q. I want to go back to Robbie Avila, his ability to draw fouls. To the extent that Somto is going to be on him, how much of a priority game plan is that to make sure that he does the right things in terms of defending him and without fouling?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, it's huge. And he draws them with shot preparation and driving it. He draws them on dump-offs, he draws them on post-ups. He draws them on elbow perimeter catch drives. If he gets an angle, he's just -- again, got that innate ability. He understands if you're not legal, he's going to draw contact. So we've got to be legal.

We can't rest mentally. Like, we've got to be engaged and be urgent when he's got the basketball. Yeah, he's really good.

Q. You guys finally get the 22 wins, best regular season in program history, now trying to get that first tournament win at Georgia. Why do you think this team is built for the NCAA Tournament?

MIKE WHITE: Well, I think both teams are. I think Saint Louis is, too. They're one of the best offensive teams in the country. When we're playing well, taking our shot, when we're connected offensively, I think we're one of the best offensive teams in the country, as well.

Defensively we've shown it at times, and we've shown it against some of the best offenses in the country. Can we put it all together? That's what it'll take to advance.

I look at Arkansas and the way we defended them. If you look and crunch some of those numbers and look at what Arkansas has accomplished -- and we've had some other good, more than quality wins as well, whether they're at home or on the road. You know, with all of these teams, we're -- we've got nine new guys. I know we're 30

something games into it, but I just -- I'm optimistic that we can continue to get better and better and better.

And I know time is running out, but hopefully we're a little bit better against Saint Louis than we've been all year.

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