

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - USF vs Louisville

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Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Louisville Cardinals

Pat Kelsey

Ryan Conwell

Sananda Fru

Isaac McKneely

Media Conference

Louisville - 83, South Florida - 79

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome Louisville up to the dais.

PAT KELSEY: I'm going to give a lot of credit to Bryan and his team at South Florida. Gosh, they went into the Tournament, I think they had won 14 of 15. You could just see it when you watched them on tape. They were firing on all cylinders, extremely connected, ridiculously well coached.

They had, as you can imagine, our full attention. Got a little bit of additional motivation, which can always help a little bit, but just so much respect for Bryan and the job he did. They were desperate that last ten minutes.

But I'm proud of our guys. It might not have been the prettiest thing in the world the last ten minutes, but when a team's season is on the line, they're going to play with reckless abandon like they did. You look around, I think Wisconsin got beat by High Point. I know Duke was down by 11 at the half against a 16 seed. They might be up by 40 now.

Winning Tournament games isn't easy, but I'm proud of these guys to have the resolve and just to figure out a way to gut it out.

Q. For Ryan, I guess, what kept you guys in it and just not -- as that lead was getting cut, what kept you guys in it?



RYAN CONWELL: First and foremost, I have to give all glory to God. We're just so blessed to be in this position, just to even play this game.

I would just say our togetherness. Every time we come to the huddle, we always tell each other we're built for these moments. No matter if we're high, low, the adversity, we're just built for these things. As long as we just stick together, we can always gut it out.

Every time we came to that timeout, no matter what the score was, we're always just talking to each other, encouraging one another, and I think that's why we were able to get the job done.

Q. Question for Isaac. Just last week at the ACC Tournament, seven days ago exactly, you had your staples in your head. You just had a tough shooting day and just kind of seemed really down about that loss. Then here you are today tying a career high for 3s. It just seemed like you were playing with a ton of confidence. Can you speak to how you were able to get that feeling back? I know that you spoke about during that week in Charlotte, just kind of how the team keeps that confidence going, even on some off-shooting days. But can you just speak about everything that went into this performance today for you?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: It's because I got my staples out yesterday and I'm feeling -- no, I'm kidding. I did get them out, though. We've got the best training staff in the country. They did a great job.

It's a brand new season. Nothing that matters, no matter what seed you are, no matter who you're playing, this is a brand new season. We cut the slate clean and just came out and fired on all cylinders.

From the get-go, on both ends, I thought our defense was really good. When our defense is really good, we're getting out in transition, we're getting 3s, dunks, layups, whatever it is. My teammates did a great job finding me early in the game. Whenever you see a couple go down, your confidence continues to build.



It wasn't just me. Everybody made plays down the stretch. We talked about Kobe's rebound with a minute left. We all made huge plays down the stretch, and that's what we're going to have to continue to do to advance.

Q. Isaac, congratulations on the win. First half, you paced this team with 11 points, on fire, 4 of 5, 80 percent, 3-point land, 75 percent. How important was it for you to get off to a good start?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: Yeah, like I said, you know when you make those first couple shots, your confidence continues to build. I didn't have my best week at the ACC Tournament last week. As a shooter, you've got to continue to think the next shots going in always.

This past week, I had some shoulder issues, wasn't able to shoot a whole lot. All glory to God, He blessed me with those abilities. He allowed me to be out here today. My training staff did a great job. I'm super thankful to see the shots go down and super happy with the win.

Q. To segue off of that, Ryan, first half 1-for-8, turned around in the second half, pretty much led this team in the second half. What did you see out there that made you confident in the second half to just get after it?

RYAN CONWELL: I got the best teammates and the best coaches in the country. They always keep me confident. I always trust in my work. I work so hard just at my craft, and I believe every shot's going in.

So just coming out in the second half, I had the same mindset, no matter if the ball is going in or not. I also have to be effective on the defensive floor and just be there for my teammates. When it's my time to knock the shots down, I believe that I will.

Q. Kind of building off of that, Ryan, coming out of halftime, you guys scored on 7 of your first 9 possessions. You had 8 points and an assist during it. You talked about your mindset, but overall what was the message at halftime? What made you guys come out there in the second half to open up that 20-point lead?

RYAN CONWELL: We made a big emphasis on just doing that. Throughout the season, we would come out in the second half and have some slow starts, and we would kind of put ourselves in a hole. This time around we knew that everything's on the line. Just come out in the second half, we had to play with even more intensity than we did in the first half to get the job done.

Q. For anyone who wants to answer, just what does it

mean for you all to get your head coach's first win here in March Madness?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: It means the world. Nobody deserves it more than this guy. He's in the building 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. every day. He wants to win more than any of us. Just super happy for him.

All of our coaches. It's not just him. He'll tell you that too. He has the best staff in the country, and they do a great job with preparation. We have the best scout team in the country, like it's all across the board. Super happy for him, but it's all of us, all the coaches have done due diligence to get this win tonight.

Just super happy, and we're going to continue to roll from here.

RYAN CONWELL: To touch on the last question, I think PK, he's one of the best coaches in America. Like nobody sees the work he does behind closed doors. Nobody sees him always at the facility. Every time we pull up, his car is there. He works so hard, and he loves on us. He's not just a coach to us, but he's just a mentor. He's like a father figure. He's everything. He's always there for us. It means the world to just get that done for him.

Q. This is for the team. Fellas, 22 turnovers, that's all I've got to say. I need your answer there. Not you, Coach, the fellas, because they played the game. 22 turnovers, how are you going to stop that next game?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: I think I know what we're going to be doing in practice tomorrow for sure. Yeah, obviously got to clean that up. That was one of the points of emphasis going into the game was to win the turnover battle. Obviously I don't think we won that. I don't know how many turnovers they had. Definitely didn't win it then.

We found a way to win. Didn't win that battle but won every other battle in my opinion. I thought we kept them off the glass. They have one of the best offensive rebounders in the country, and we did a good job on him. But obviously we have to clean up the turnovers in the next game.

Q. Sananda, regarding rebounds, you paced this team with seven, six on the defensive end. What were some of the instrumental things that Coach was telling you to do in the second half to seal the deal?

SANANDA FRU: We just had a big emphasis on boxing them out. They're a great team, especially the offensive rebounds on the offensive side. We put a bit emphasis on everybody hit, create a pocket to get the loose balls. I felt



like my teammates and me did a good job to create these kind of pockets and gave me a great chance to grab the boards.

And on the defensive end, we emphasized just to crash and be super aggressive. Everybody going in and fighting for loose balls just to make it super aggressive.

Q. Isaac, just I can't help but think how painful staples are to be placed in somebody's ahead. How did you feel back then, and how do you feel now given where the team is now advancing to the second round?

ISAAC McKNEELY: Super happy. We wanted to get this one. We're a one-game-at-a-time program. USF was a game in front of us. We're the best preparation team in the country. We put all our eyes on them. Now obviously we're going to play the winner of this next game.

We'll enjoy this one tonight, but tomorrow the switch flip is -- sorry. The flip switches. We're going to move to Michigan State or North Dakota State, whoever comes out on top in that one. We're super excited to go to the next round and hopefully win some games.

Q. When the pressure is building in the second half, I'm kind of wondering what you're telling them you'd like them to be doing in terms of breaking that press, and what is not happening, what is not going right?

PAT KELSEY: First of all, you credit them, you credit South Florida. Like I said, their season was on the line. When you talk about a sense of desperation, that's what I -- it was a tsunami. You do a better job of shortening our passing distances, getting three outlets out of traps.

I thought a couple times, even when we broke it, we didn't attack to go score. I know there was one late. Ryan caught the ball -- after he said all those nice things about me, now I'm going to tell you a mistake he made. He caught the ball like at the top of the key, flashed to the middle, and Sananda was wide open under the basket, and he was looking the other way.

It was the longest ten minutes of my life, there's no question about it. We haven't played against a team like that, that has pressed us like that. So it was a heck of a test on a really, really big stage. Fortunately, we came out on top. We can learn from it, tie up some things in practice tomorrow, and then move on to the next one.

Q. Just played a team that was top 10 in scoring and top 10 in rebounding in the country. How did you keep them at bay for 30 minutes?

PAT KELSEY: It's not easy because they're dangerous. I've got a lot of respect for Bryan. No. 2 and No. 5 were two huge points of focus, as was 35. He was the Player of the Year in their conference. 5 got loose, especially in the second half.

But I thought we did a really, really good job on No. 2, who's also a really, really good player. In tournament play, you have to defend, you have to rebound, and you have to take care of the ball. We didn't do the third one very well, but I thought we did the other two at an elite level. Fortunately, we were able to advance.

Q. I'm not trying to lay blame here, but you're missing your point guard. How much was that maybe an issue when it came to facing the press?

PAT KELSEY: It wasn't. Injuries happen in basketball. It's why you have 13 guys on scholarship, or I guess you can have 15 now. Guys step up.

I'm just so proud of like a Kobe Rodgers, who in this really, really big moment, the last time he played in the NCAA Tournament game, he tore his ACL, and he had to sit out that entire next year. He transferred to us at Charleston. You talk about a kid, a phenomenal young man from my hometown of Cincinnati, lost his father at a really young age to cancer, his mom's battling cancer right now. He's been through so much.

Took a leap of faith and came up to this next level with us. I know Isaac had a million 3s, and Isaac was phenomenal. You talk about a bad shoulder and staples in your head and the toughness he showed to be out there. But we talked about an X factor, and it might not pop up on the stat sheet, but just that defensive dynamo that went in there. 35 is the best offensive rebounder in the country, and there was a play where Kobe went above the trees and got a huge offensive rebound in a big moment.

So to me, the story is about Kobe Rodgers, not anybody else that didn't play. It's about Isaac McKneely, that's who it's about. When people go down, other people have to step up. You have to assume a new role, and I'm really, really proud, amidst that adversity, that we have a bunch of guys that had the resolve and the wherewithal and the toughness to figure out a way to advance in this tournament.

Q. What differences, if any, have you noticed with Ryan and Isaac just in terms of them being senior guards going through this for the last time and the way that they lead the rest of the team? Has there been any uptick in just them knowing this is it for them and them bringing the guys along?



PAT KELSEY: I mean, like J'Vonne and all -- see, we have an extremely mature team, extremely mature. I could go all the way down the line, Zu, I'm looking at the thing, J'Vonne, Ryan, Isaac, Adrian, Sananda, Khani, Kobe, Aly. We have great leadership, but that leadership goes all the way up and down our roster because they're self-led, they're great in the process every day, they're pros, they take care of their body, they're in the gym. We have a veteran group.

When it's your last go-round, you know this is your last time you're going to play in the NCAA Tournament -- I mean, I remember we played in Detroit in my last game in the NCAA Tournament like it was yesterday. You just hope and pray and you're so happy for those guys that the journey continues because this truly is a great, great thing.

It's hard to get here. It's hard to get here. I told those guys the other day embrace this, enjoy it. Enjoy all this pomp and circumstance that goes on.

Then even now, we're going to play a really good team on Saturday, no matter who it is, but when they go back to the hotel tonight and they're breaking bread with their buddies and they're getting a meal, have fun. Celebrate this thing. Coaches will get to work. They'll wake up tomorrow and we'll get to work on the next thing. This is a special, special thing, and I want them to embrace it.

Q. That sequence coming out of halftime, what were the keys to that? That kind of ends up becoming the winning time for you guys, taking the 20-point lead?

PAT KELSEY: What we really talked about at halftime was we went through the major points of the game, or the bullet points that we said that were the huge keys. We said transition, first and foremost, with these guys. They're one of the fastest-paced teams in the country. Their attack is extremely dangerous, and you can't take plays off. We have to do that.

The second was they're an elite rebounding team. All this stuff in preparation -- rebounding, keeping them off the free-throw line, trying to contain No. 2 and No. 5, trying to keep 35 off the glass. Those guys were extremely attentive to those keys to the game, and that's what got us off to a great start.

I just said we can't rest on our laurels. We've got to go back like we're in the locker room in pregame and come out and do those same things at a really high level. You knew they were going to make a run. I'm telling you, like I watch them on tape, and I'm like Bryan can coach now, like that team was clicking. They got the heart of a champion.

I like watching those guys play -- and I coached a couple teams, like my team at Charleston a couple years ago had a bunch of dudes that would talk crap in the media, and they had a bunch of dudes that would stand at half-court and bark at the other team during warmups. It's not my style, but that's what gets them going. I let those guys do it as long as they didn't cross a line or anything like that, and I've got a lot of respect for them because they're not afraid to do that.

Our guys heard what they said in the -- somebody said, one kid said they went to Louisville a couple years ago, and they popped us, and we're going to pop them again, and something something. Our guys heard that. Our guys heard that. I respect it because they go up and they're not afraid. They'll go out and try to back it up.

It was definitely something that we heard, we internalized. We don't have a bunch of guys that are like, but I could tell it was simmering in them and it bothered them. But I do have a lot of respect for them.

Q. Coach, you talked about some of the things you need to tie up. Free-throw shooting was at 60 percent today. How many wind sprints have you made Sananda run?

PAT KELSEY: Free-throw shooting, you get 20 coaches in this room, and they'll all give you a different philosophy on how to improve your free-throw shooting. Some guys get them up at 6:00 in the morning and do it. Some guys don't do it at all. I forget who said this, it might have been Rick Pitino. I just credit Coach Pitino for everything because I'm at Louisville, if you want better free-throw shooting, recruit better free-throw shooters. That's a tongue-in-cheek joke. I don't mean that.

We're a good free-throw shooting team, really good. We've got great process. Guys are in the gym all the time. I have all the confidence in the world that, when they step up, they're going to make them.

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