

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

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Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

USF Bulls

Bryan Hodgson

Joseph Pinton

Izaiyah Nelson

Media Conference

Louisville - 83, South Florida - 79

BRYAN HODGSON: Hat's off to Louisville for winning the game. Obviously they played better than we did today. They have a good coach. They have really good players. They've been good all year.

We felt like coming in that we had a chance to beat them. We obviously did not play well. A big part of that is they did a great job guarding us, and we shot ourselves in the foot in the second half getting down 23. In the first half didn't really put ourselves in a position to win the basketball game.

Most importantly, throw the stats aside, I'm extremely proud of this group of young men. Been doing this for 18 years, this is the best group of young men I've ever been around -- selfless, motivated, disciplined. They love one another, and they celebrate one another's success. That's extremely special.

They've given me more than I could ever give them. Really wanted this one today. Really wanted them to experience that, getting a win here in the NCAA Tournament. Obviously did not happen, but we're very close. This is a family. That word is thrown around a lot in sports, but we really have that in our locker room, and that's special.

I'm very grateful for these two young men trusting me, a young first-year head coach at Arkansas State, following me here to South Florida, putting us in this position being here in the NCAA Tournament. I'm a really bad coach without these guys, I can promise you that.



Obviously a tough day to not make shots. I know the critics will say we took too many 3s. I think we missed some really good ones. Did we take some bad ones? Sure. But we've had our identity offensively all year. It's been very successful, most efficient offense in the history of the program.

Again, I just couldn't be more thankful for this group of guys, and credit to Louisville.

Q. Joseph, what were you thinking as things were getting closer, as you were cutting the lead and the momentum that you had gained and just to fall short? The thoughts of how this team battled back.

JOSEPH PINION: I thought we battled back. Obviously we put ourselves in a hole, but I thought we battled back really hard on that run. The whole crowd was behind us. I definitely thought that we were going to win the ballgame, but we came up short.

Q. How much is the fact that your team didn't quit when you were down by 23 kind of a reflection on your coach and the way that he preaches?

IZAIYAH NELSON: It's just in us, like we know there's been games where we've been down 20 or down 15, so we just never -- we don't have quit in us. So like all 14 guys, we don't ever back down from anything. Coach knows, Coach tells us like every time, this game isn't over. So like him telling us that, that gets in our mind like we know this game ain't over and we can always come back from something.

Q. Izaiyah, on that run, you were very instrumental in getting your team back into this basketball game. What was going through your mind on some of the things that Coach Hodgson was talking to you about getting back in this game?

IZAIYAH NELSON: All that was going through my mind was we can win this game. There's been games in my college career where we were down 30 points and we came back and win that game. In my mind being in that position, I know what it takes to come back and win.

I'm just telling the guys, keeping all 14 guys saying, y'all,



don't give up. Keep going. We can come back. From being down 23 and then coming back and being down 4, like that just shows that anything is possible. It was just like we fell short, but it is what it is.

Q. Izaiyah, you had to hold onto the big fellas over there. You did a phenomenal job. What motivated you in the second half, just picking it up, picking up the pace, coming back? It was so close.

IZAIYAH NELSON: My teammates, man, they tell me like every day, like I've got to be the leader and I've got to be the energy guy. So like my energy, it feeds off of them guys. That's what I decided to do, like I probably didn't do too much things, but my energy, they feed off of it.

So like we came up short, but it just sucks.

Q. Izaiyah, nine rebounds, you were a beast out there, man. Tell me about that because you had your game face on from the very, very beginning, young man, and it just shows in the game that you're a monster on those boards.

IZAIYAH NELSON: Coach tells me every time I've got to be the board man. That's my job. I know my role, and I take my role very seriously. If my role is to grab every single rebound, that's my mindset, like I'm grabbing every single rebound. In my role is to sprint, sprint out of the screen, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do my job. Whatever it takes, I'm going to do it.

Q. Joseph, Coach mentioned the 3-pointers. When you were able to connect, what was working there? On the flip side, what was a struggle throughout the game for those?

JOSEPH PINION: My teammates, they always set me up really well to go get 3s. We have so many guys we have to guard. There's guys over there screening for me, sacrificing their own rolls to get me shots. That goes to show how selfless our team is.

Sometimes teams scout really well against our teams, and they knew what we were running too some of the times. So they were able to top block us a little bit and force us to go into something that we didn't necessarily want.

Q. How much does Bryan's journey kind of serve as an inspiration for you guys?

IZAIYAH NELSON: It serves us a lot because like everybody goes through something in their life. So hearing Coach B's story, and when he came to Arkansas State, just hearing that story like how he didn't have a family and

things like that, like I didn't have a father growing up. So him having his father come to the game tonight, it just sparked something into me because I didn't have a dad growing up. It was just my siblings and my mom.

So just seeing that, I would do anything for this man right here next to me. Like he believed in me, and he just believed in me, man.

Q. Coach, did you sense that the crowd in the building was on your side, knowing your connection locally here to Buffalo? It felt like it was almost a home game at times there as you guys were kind of making that comeback toward the end?

BRYAN HODGSON: Absolutely. Extremely grateful for western New York, the city of Buffalo for embracing this group. We definitely felt that. With that comes a little bit of a sense of letting people down. Extremely grateful for the support we had. It definitely felt like a South Florida pro crowd. I know myself and everybody in that locker room is extremely appreciative of that.

Q. Bryan, you spoke yesterday about how every year the team is different. What was the identity of this team? What are you thinking about right now with this group of guys?

BRYAN HODGSON: How selfless they are. College athletics has changed so much. Everything has become so transactional. There's nothing transactional about that group. We really have the opposite, very transformational relationships.

Those two young men that were just sitting at this table left large, large amounts of money on the table to come play at the University of South Florida. They could have gone ACC, SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, wherever they wanted, for triple the money, and they didn't even flinch. They didn't take visits. They didn't field phone calls.

They came with their coach to the University of South Florida, and there's a level of loyalty in that locker room that's going to bode well for those young men for the rest of their lives.

I've heard all the nonsense about how our young men spoke heading into the game. What are we even talking about? Do you want these young men to not talk confidently about how they're going to play against their opponent?

I'll tell you what, if I'm in the business world, coaching, any profession, and I've got to make a hire, I'm going to hire a group of people that are confident in their ability. Did we



want Wes Enis to sit in that press conference and say, no, we can't beat Louisville? No. Don't hire that person. Those are the people that I want to coach. Those are the people that I want to work with, confident people.

We could have won this game. Louisville won the game today. I wouldn't mind playing Louisville again. All credit to them, but that nonsense, like we instill that in these young men to carry themselves with confidence every day. They're confident, loyal, hard-working young men.

Q. When Izaiyah was answering that question about your journey, I saw you getting emotional there. Where do those kinds of emotions come from?

BRYAN HODGSON: That young man's done more for me than I could ever do for him. I had him all three years of my journey as a head coach, and we've won a lot of basketball games together. We've gone to three straight conference tournament championship games, we've won two conference regular season titles, came to the NCAA Tournament together.

Really right now I'm just honestly struggling to picture myself coaching this game without him. He's the definition of loyalty. He's the definition of toughness.

Obviously it's been very well-known, my story this week because I'm back home in western New York. He's got a much deeper story than mine, and that young man is a billboard for mental toughness. Just to hear what he said about me, I feel the same way about him times a million. We'll be a part of each other's lives forever.

Q. You talk about confidence, very confident bunch you had here. We could talk about the press and how in ten minutes the game totally changed. Even in the loss, though, what positives did you get from this going forward to the next season?

BRYAN HODGSON: When you coach this game or any sport really, you want to be around guys that have no quit in them. You should have heard what was said in that timeout, not by me, not by the coaching staff, but by those young men when we were down 23.

Those two were a part of a team last year that I coached that was part of the sixth largest -- sixth biggest comeback in the history of college basketball. We were down 27 points in the second half at UAB and came back and won the game. They were reminding their teammates of that and to continue to take it one possession at a time. Everybody do their job.

You take that approach from basketball, you take that into

life. I'm very confident that all those young men are going to be very successful, productive members of society. They represented the University of South Florida in a phenomenal way this entire year, one of the best seasons in the history of the program, and that can never be taken from them.

Q. What did it mean to you to have Martin Stockwell with you on this journey this season? Why was it important for him to be with you in South Florida?

BRYAN HODGSON: Coach Stock, as I call him, he was my high school coach. Quite frankly, I wasn't a very good player. Again, we talked about my childhood, but I was adopted by a family that, I mean, I was -- the rest of my family, my siblings were all valedictorians and salutatorians. Here comes a 6'5" guy who wants to play basketball. Coach Stockwell just poured into me and was by my side my entire high school career.

Most importantly, he showed me how to be a coach after that ball stops bouncing. My entire coaching career, he would drive from Jamestown, New York, to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to support me. Then I go to Jonesboro, Arkansas, even farther away. He'd get in his car and drive from Jamestown, New York to Jonesboro, Arkansas to support me. Never with the thought in mind he would work with me, he was just there to support me in my journey.

When the opportunity arose, it made perfect sense because I watched how he poured into me, poured into my high school teammates, how much love he showed, and really was a mentor to all of us. That's tremendous value for any program, and he's done that all year with this group.

Q. With all that in mind and despite the loss and knowing that that hurts, can you put today into perspective of how meaningful it was for you? Just to put aside your team, but you personally, just given the attention that's been focused on you in western New York.

BRYAN HODGSON: I never wanted the attention to be about me. Obviously it naturally occurred with me being from here. Thank the Lord, A, for being in this position. I'm a believer. I've been so blessed to be honest with you, and give thanks to the Lord for that.

To be home in Buffalo, I just grabbed my phone as we walked down the hallway, and someone sent me a picture of my mom and dad with a big smile on their face. Just that's something I'll never be able to repay these young men for, because I didn't know if or when that would happen for my dad to be able to be here and see me in



person and how excited he was.

More importantly than all of that, I think what was really special about this week is that my parents, Larry and Rebecca Hodgson, got a little bit of a light shined on the type of human beings that they are, how many children that they've saved and provided for. They took in over 110 foster children through their home and worked jobs while doing it and just so selfless in everything they did, and so thankful that they saw a little bit of recognition for that. They never did that to get recognition, but they deserved it because they're phenomenal human beings. I'm very fortunate to have them as my parents.

But very, very appreciative for the opportunity to have them here today for sure.

Q. This is kind of a two-part question. First question is what does USF mean to you? We've been around Amir built and obviously what you've done. Is this just the beginning of USF Bulls basketball?

BRYAN HODGSON: USF is a phenomenal place. Very appreciative to the administration there for believing in me. When they hired me, I had two years of head-coaching experience under my belt. It was a very, very sought-after job. They had guys that had been coaching for 25, 30 years that wanted that job. I had never been to an NCAA Tournament before as a head coach. So they took a chance on me, and I'll forever be grateful for that.

It's a phenomenal, phenomenal university and community, athletic department. They treat their people with the utmost respect and resources in order to be successful.

I'll say, yeah, the University of South Florida is just scratching the surface. There's so much momentum going on on that campus and in that community, and it's really just getting started. Again, great leadership, that's what drives all that, but South Florida's got great days ahead.

Q. I just want to say I'm proud of you because over the past 15 years I've seen your overall body of work from Jamestown Community College to here we are, right? I know you're not a "me" guy, but how gratifying was it for you just to be back home as a head coach and getting the support that you received here?

BRYAN HODGSON: It was amazing. I appreciate that. Buffalo is a special town. Western New York is a special place, the city of good neighbors. It really is. We felt that today. This community embraced my team, and that means the world to me.

I think these opportunities don't come often. One of my

assistants said in the locker room there's guys that coach their entire career and don't make it to the NCAA Tournament as a head coach or as an assistant. I got to do it, and I got to do it in my hometown, and that's extremely special.

Before I get out of here, so much is talked about me, but I've got the best coaching staff in the country, I mean that. They're phenomenal. A bunch of brilliant, hard-working individuals that sacrifice so much. As much as we're talking about me and being home and deservedly so, these players, I just want to thank my assistants, our staff, our families. My better half Jordan puts all of her, the things that are important to her to the side to allow me to be in this position, my son. I sacrifice, unfortunately, time with my son. It's part of the nature of the beast. And so does my coaching staff.

I want to make sure they know how appreciative I am of them.

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