

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - St. Louis vs Michigan

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Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Nimari Burnett

Elliott Cadeau

Trey McKenney

Media Conference



ELLIOTT CADEAU: Just playing hard on defense. We feel like we have the best defensive team in the country, so just going out there and playing with a lot of intensity. We feel like we have a team like that, that can have a lot of players in double figures. Going against each other in practice every day will have definitely prepared us for this moment.

Q. Nimari, do you guys learn more from a game that Saint Louis had like this where it was a blowout or do you learn more about an opponent when it's a close game?

NIMARI BURNETT: I feel like you can see the strengths and some of the weaknesses of a team in a blowout or in a close game. And with this team, you saw a lot of strengths, of course, last night, them playing a fast-paced offense, especially against Georgia and their pressure defense, and they did a really good job of turning that press defense into transition offense.

You could just see how well they play with each other and they have a lot of really good shooters. Almost 1 through 5 at any point in the game can really shoot the ball. It's important for us to have great communication going into tomorrow and great intensity, as well.

Q. Avila, did you run across him, do you have much history with him from Illinois?

NIMARI BURNETT: It's crazy because I just found out yesterday that he's from Illinois. Morez has a little history with him, he played against him. But I've always seen him throughout his collegiate career, how talented and skilled he is as an offensive player. He's just like the hub. Everything runs through him.

At the same time, they all play well off of each other. He's a big part of what they do, and we look forward to the challenge tomorrow.

Q. What do you guys think the single most important thing that you have to do tomorrow is to beat a good Saint Louis team?

NIMARI BURNETT: I would say the single most important thing is urgent communication. I think that will allow us to

Q. For Elliott, yesterday Coach and a couple guys talked about how important it was to be challenged in that first half of yesterday's game, and you guys not losing your poise or focus. How good of a reminder was that, do you think, entering this tournament and going forward?

ELLIOTT CADEAU: Yeah, I think it was a great reminder for us. I think it was a good wake-up call for us kinda because that wasn't the position we wanted to be in going into the half.

Just realizing that every team in this tournament is extremely talented, and we just can't take any moment for granted.

Q. Trey, I wonder if you had a chance to look at Saint Louis University and that explosion they had last night and what your impressions are.

TREY MCKENNEY: You could tell that they play a similar style to us, just very conceptually, and they don't really play out of half-court sets. They just play in flows. They have a really good feel for the game and a lot of shooters, and they have a really good big man, so it'll definitely be a really good game.

Q. Elliott, yesterday Saint Louis had six in double figures and a few more that just missed it. What is the approach defensively when facing a team like that where everyone can constantly be a threat to score?



be in the right spots defensively and, especially with our switching defense, just being on the same stream. And then offensively communicating to each other where we need to be, our spots, whatever, and getting out in transition, what we do best. I think that'll allow us to dictate pace and just dictate the tempo of the game.

Q. You guys are the top seed in your region, but Saint Louis may be the top seed as far as best nickname in the tournament for Avila, with Cream Abdul-Jabbar and Milk Chamberlain. Who has the best nickname on your team?

ELLIOTT CADEAU: I'd say for me, I'd probably say 'Rez. They call him The Resolution. It's tough.

NIMARI BURNETT: A close second is Dominican LeBron with Yax.

TREY MCKENNEY: I'd say The Resolution, too, but we've got March Roddy.

DUSTY MAY: We're obviously very excited to prolong our stay here in Buffalo and have a chance to continue competing, learning more about ourselves and continuing to grow. Saint Louis is an excellent basketball team. We're excited to see if we can solve some of the challenges they're going to present.

Q. Can you elaborate on your close relationship with Josh Schertz, and did you have a little exchange at his halftime last night where you said something to him, and just how close you guys have been over the years?

DUSTY MAY: Well, before the transfer portal, there was graduate transfers and he had a player leaving his Division II school and I was at FAU early on. It was year two, so we were considering this player. So I downloaded a couple games that Lincoln Memorial played the Division I games against Butler, and I believe it was Tennessee. And I'm watching our kid play and I thought, wow, this is a well-coached team.

So he and I struck up a relationship, and he ended up coming back to Boca a lot because that's where he grew up. And he would come to practice and we'd have lunch and talk ball and just hit it off from day one. He's an absolute basketball junkie. He's a savant. I've learned so much from him. And then he ends up at Indiana State and I was born in Terre Haute. He grew up in Boca and I was coaching at FAU. I think at times he wanted to switch places, but I rejected that offer at the time.

But just someone that now I kind of wish we didn't have

each other's practice databases from all summer, each other's playbooks and whatnot.

But when you look at the way we play, we get to the same thing differently because of personnel. But we're both hunting the same thing and have a lot of respect for him and his journey and how he goes about, I guess, developing players and teams.

But yes, I saw him at halftime walking up, and I told him he needed to pick it up a little bit. They were only up 17 or 18 playing the best team in the tournament.

Q. He's talked about it, this exchange of practice material, the agreement to do that, what led to that? Is that unusual in the coaching business?

DUSTY MAY: I'd say it's probably very unusual. There's a group of us that share -- and actually he and I are -- we're close enough where I don't even call him. I'll shoot his video guy or he'll shoot my video guy a text and say can you send me last week's workouts? We're toying with this, we're thinking about this concept. It might just spur an idea.

Because we think of the game so similar and we've talked about all these things in advance. Luckily we both play conceptual basketball where if we take something away, they're going to have an answer for it and vice versa. It's going to be a great chess match amongst players who have been trained to play the game at a high level.

Q. Michigan has had a lot of good teams. This team has a record number of wins in a season. Do you have a favorite standout win from the year this season, and how closely connected is this roster to some of the past teams? I know Trey Burke came back recently.

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, this team is very connected to the past performers at Michigan. When guys are coming from all different directions and different schools and whatnot, sometimes there's not a connection to a university or a team or the history of it.

Our former players have been so gracious with their time, coming back and spending time with our guys and getting to know them and sharing their story and letting them know how much they enjoy watching them play. I think that's been a part of our guys really feeling a part of Michigan basketball history and wanting to represent those guys and perform well to make them proud and whatnot.

What was the second part of the question, a favorite win?

I can't think of one right now. Obviously we had a lot -- we



went undefeated on the road in Big Ten, so anytime you can win in a road environment in the Big Ten. Obviously our rivals, Michigan State and Ohio State, just being able to go on the road and find ways to win.

Vegas was very rewarding because just before Vegas, we weren't a very good team. Then it was just like bamboo, we fertilized it and it shot to the sky out of the blue. That was pretty memorable because it happened very quickly. I'm sure later on we'll have a chance to reflect.

But just more proud of watching our guys grow throughout the season and to see how close they've become as a group.

Q. As this team continues to grow and develop, how encouraging was it to see that you had answers for scoring yesterday when you needed them, and how does that help you go forward?

DUSTY MAY: Well, for the most part, I think we found the solutions that were presented. And you never know how you're going to attack -- you can anticipate what's going to happen, but until the game is played and they show you how they're going to defend, you never really know how it's going to go.

I thought in the second half we really settled in to taking advantage of our size advantage and playing through that and then using that to generate offense other places.

But I thought we shot the ball well, even in the first half. I thought they did a nice job of taking away the paint and collapsing on our bigs so then we made the extra passes and made open shots.

Each game is a lot different. And I tried to even explain to our guys, this shot in this game was a bad shot, where that shot in the Purdue game might have been a good shot for whatever reason.

Our guys are continuing to figure out what's best for us at that moment. The best part of it is they don't mind giving up their own stats or numbers because 'Rez has it going or Aday has it going or whatever the case. Just a very, very smart unselfish group.

Q. After the game yesterday it was Georgia and Saint Louis, Mike White suggested he thought you might try to call him to get some tips, but he said you shouldn't bother because he didn't feel they did anything well. Did you reach out to him and what can you learn in a blowout loss like that from them?

DUSTY MAY: We learned a lot from that game. I spoke

with Coach White this morning. A big part, a big reason I'm sitting here today is because of Mike White and him allowing me to be on his staff and learn from him and be a part of his family.

Yeah, we talked about Saint Louis. We talked about his team. We talked about our team. I don't think anything he gave me will be the difference in winning or losing. But there were a couple things where he said, we thought we would be able to do this, we didn't get to it. We felt like we would be able to attack here and weren't able to, or they were even better in this facet than we anticipated on film.

So just his opinion on those things.

But I don't think any of that will have any bearing on the game. It's going to come down to those five guys on our team on the court competing against the five on the other and just making plays and seeing what happens.

Q. Your teams have made the tournament four straight years and you've won a game in three of those. How important was it for you to bring that culture from FAU to Michigan, and how important was it for you to instill that in your players and get them to buy in, and how can you move on and bring that momentum you had from that blowout win you had yesterday to tomorrow against Saint Louis?

DUSTY MAY: I think the only culture we brought from FAU was our staff and Vlad who joined us and LJ who had signed with us and those guys, the people. We did try to bring a mindset that we're here to win. We're not here to rebuild. We're not here to see how long this can take and stretch this out. We're here to do something, and that's to win.

The rules and climate of college basketball allows it to happen -- we won at FAU when we won in '17 in year 1 before the portal and coming off signing 10 players, whatever the case. We felt like it was possible to win at a high level if we brought the right mindset, work ethic, and culture is people. So, yes, the culture, we did bring some of it.

But the last year at FAU especially, we had high major problems at a mid major. So I think that prepared us for what we were going to have to face when you do get a job in the Big Ten conference or a Power Five.

Q. You've played against some of the premier shooting bigs in the country. What have you learned about your teams and your defensive schemes from those games?



DUSTY MAY: Well, we've learned that against pick-and-pop bigs, if you allow a direct pass, they're going to shoot about 25 to 30 percent better. If they make one or two, you need to be prepared to go to your contingency plans quicker than usual.

We've played this defensive philosophy for several years, so we know what can beat it on a given night. We know what the holes in the defense are. But it's just like everything else, there's a give and take.

Each game going into Saint Louis, there's a couple things where they're elite in so many areas that we have to be okay giving this up. Because if you give that up and then you react to it, then it's a chain reaction of them being in a great rhythm and great flow. We've got to be okay giving up what we're going to give up. And if we feel like that's not going to put us in a position to win, I guess we've got to be adaptable enough to pivot and change it on the fly. But that's kind of where each game is a little bit different.

You take all this information and try to predict what's going to happen, and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

Yeah, stretch 5, Robbie Avila, his first couple years, he didn't shoot the ball like he does now from three, his trail threes, his pick-and-pop threes. He's obviously put a lot of work in on his game and that's added a whole 'nother element because that wasn't there a few years ago at the level it is now.

Q. You kind of touched on it a little bit, but Saint Louis is an offense that not only shoots 40 percent from long-range, but last night they had 66 points in the paint. What can you say about the challenges of going against an offense that can score so well in so many different ways?

DUSTY MAY: You know, they're like us, they have a lot of really talented unique players that play to their strengths. They present a number of challenges. I stopped studying Ken Pom numbers as closely recently just because we've gotten so busy. But I think most of the year both of us were top 10 in two-point field goal percentage offense and top 3 in two-point field zone percentage defense.

So when you look at a lot of our metrics and analytics, we mirror each other in the final result. They shoot the three a little bit better, we offensive rebound a little bit better, whatever the case.

But they present a number of challenges because they have guards who can post, they'll attack early offense like we do with an early post-up, with their centers throwing the

high-low passes like we do. Fortunately on a quick turn, I think a lot of their concepts, the way they play are similar things that we do. They probably set more guard to guard pick-and-rolls. And we probably set more guard to guard pick-and-pops, things like that philosophically that I think are probably more dictated on personnel.

But they present a number of challenges. Hopefully our size and length can disrupt their rhythm and timing just enough.

Q. I was going to ask how similar you guys are because I know you and Josh have a good relationship and seem to share a lot. Could you expand a little bit on your relationship with Josh? I think my colleague CJ Moore wrote about a meeting happened in Boca Raton where you guys spent about 10 hours in your office.

A. Yeah, I think it was immediately after one of the seasons, and he said, I'm going to come through, we'll sit and we'll talk ball for a couple hours and we'll have lunch. I think we were going to meet Jim Crutchfield to play pickleball, and I think we ended up sitting in my office for 10 straight hours. We hadn't eaten anything, I think we'd had a cup of coffee -- probably a couple cups of coffee and some water. And we missed lunch, we missed everything. We missed Crutch's pickleball and we just got caught up and had notebooks full -- I had a notebook full of notes and about a million ideas running through my head.

Usually when we're on the road recruiting, his assistants are mad at him and mine are angry with me because we're not watching and evaluating recruits as much as we're talking basketball and strategy and culture and the things that we feel like really impact winning.

So yeah, I think our recruiting coordinators work together to make sure we're in different cities as much as possible.

Q. Yaxel has written very eloquently about his mother and her battle and he's talked about it. There's obviously a maturity to him about handling that. How does that maturity carry over to what you see in the way he plays on the court, if you will?

DUSTY MAY: His level of unselfishness and caring and giving is -- off the court, on the court, it's how he lives his life. We've tried to encourage him to be a little bit more guarded with his answers. He's just so pure and genuine, authentic. He doesn't know how to use coach-speak. He doesn't know how to use player-speak. He just speaks from the heart at all times.

When you meet his mother and his sisters, just like him,



they have a warmth to them. I saw them last night when I was going up to put on my sweats to watch film, and they're just so happy and warm and proud of Yax. It's a heck of a story. That's the best part of the religion of sports group that's doing the documentary on our team and Kansas's team. Not trying to shameless plug, but I'm excited just to watch our guys and the stories on the side where they're in their apartments and they're doing the things they do outside the basketball court.

Those are going to be great memories for me because we have some really, really unique guys that are special people, and so I'm excited to see more about his story. Because when you recruit these guys out of the portal, you don't go sit in their living rooms and you don't have lunch with them at the cafeteria like we do with high school seniors. You don't sit in 6:00 a.m. workouts and 8:00 p.m. workouts and whatnot.

These older guys we've gotten to know them better and better as the season has went on, and we're lucky to have these guys. Michigan is lucky to have them representing our institution.

Q. How did you see last night the role that Roddy has embraced and the leadership that he has kind of shown itself on an important stage for that young men?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, Roddy was awesome. We don't advance to the Sweet 16 last year without Roddy. Our locker room is not what it is without Roddy. Our practices aren't the same. He's probably as beloved as any player in our program universally. You can't find anyone that doesn't respect -- when he speaks, they respect what's coming out. If we need a message, usually I'll just go whisper it to Roddy and he'll say, we've got it.

For him to have that level of success on the court in his hometown area in front of all his friends and family, that's what it's all about. For him to elevate his play in that moment is going to be a great memory for him and hopefully memories after tomorrow.

Q. Going off of that, players in the locker room talked about the message from Roddy at halftime where they thought maybe you guys didn't play to your fullest potential in the first half and then sort of the turnaround that led to in the second half. How have you seen him specifically embrace that leadership role? And as a second part of that question, obviously you guys are here to win, but there's a lot of human element to March Madness. How cool was it to see the pop from the crowd when he checked into the game for the first time yesterday?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, a great moment for him and his family, as well. He has to feel appreciated. I think the families, they experience more than Roddy does. He's in the heat of the battle. He's in the arena. When we're playing at Ohio State and the student section is around his family and his aunt and his mom and all the stuff that goes into -- they're really the ones that take the brunt of it.

So for the script to be flipped and for him to feel that warm welcome and applause is really cool. But Roddy has embraced whatever the team has needed. Literally we need you to come off the bench, Roddy, and here's why. And he's like, got you, Coach. Usually those guys in life make it because there's nothing that we do that's about him. It's always about us.

Q. You obviously have a great relationship with Josh Schertz, and when you look at the profiles of the two teams, a lot of similarities there. In that regard, how much does this matchup feel like maybe a bit of a self-scout as well?

DUSTY MAY: Well, when we're watching the personnel and showing them what they do, we were able to say, hey, guys, what does this look like? Oh, that looks like corn chef's flip. What about this? Looks like pistol flag.

They use different words for a lot of what they do. We have our coded language. But there aren't any actions that they're going to run that we don't run in some capacity in our playbook and what we try to do. And most of it, I can watch it and say either he stole that from this team or I stole that from this team and, then we shared it with each other.

Q. Based on the relationship with Josh you have, and I'm half joking here, but I'm probably using the word regret in the wrong way, but I can't find a better word. For 364 days of the year, you relish this relationship you have. Is tomorrow that day that you wish you don't relish it or maybe rue it in some way?

DUSTY MAY: I loved it when he was at a Division II, we were different levels, and I was down in Boca Raton because this would never happen where we had to compete against each other.

But yeah, to be honest, I'm different. If you look at a lot of our bye games, we're not afraid to play anybody, but typically guys that I'm friends with or I respect them or I've always liked the way they've done business, we'll schedule them because it helps their program, and that's good for those guys.



If I'm going to lose, if we're going to lose, I want to lose to a guy that does it at the level that he and they do it. And hopefully we don't, but if we do, then you want to do it to somebody who you're going to be better for it.

Q. Can you speak more to the uniqueness of Rob Avila's game and your front court. You have a large front court that seems formidable. Is that enough for a player like Robbie?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, obviously we have a lot of different weapons. But they have guys that play bigger than their size, as well. Obviously we have size across the board, but they've got several big wings that are physical, they're aggressive. Their guards can guard up and play bigger.

But Robbie is the ultimate connector. He's one of the best decision makers that I've seen in college basketball as far as how quickly he can process and make the right decisions, and he puts the defense in a pickle almost every single position.

He's been fun to watch and to see his journey. Because you put him with different players as the hub and they look like a well-oiled machine no matter who the other four guys are because of the intelligence he brings and the skill level.

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