

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Saint Louis Billikens

Coach Josh Schertz

Trey Green

Kellen Thames

Brady Dunlap

Media Conference

Q. Trey, in the aftermath of yesterday, how late were you up last night or how early were you up, to get back to normal after an emotional night?

TREY GREEN: Yeah, we were all excited to win the first round of the tournament. This is a dream come true to be here, something you dream about as a kid growing up. It was a late game, so getting back around 3:00, we were still energized, but we were all excited pretty much when we got back.

We were all so excited. My roommate and me, we were just talking about the game and Michigan and things like that. We were still amped up from just playing. Probably around 5:00, honestly.

Q. Michigan and you guys both scored over 100 points yesterday and they're also a top-10 scoring offense this year. What is it going to take defensively tomorrow to try and slow them down?

KELLEN THAMES: I'd say it'll take everything we've got in film. Just going with the game plan Coach is going to give us, just understanding that there's talent on both teams. But we're just going to have to make sure we're very attentive to detail and just make sure we clean a lot of stuff up today in practice and just understand the coverages that we have to take on to the court tomorrow.

Q. Trey Green, Robbie Avila, playing off the ball with him, what's your favorite things about his game when you're playing off the ball with a guy like that?



TREY GREEN: Yeah, we call him Baby Jokic. He can pass the ball. Honestly, his IQ level is real high. He knows the game. He can read the game. Even though he's not the fastest player, he can read it at a fast pace, and it slows everything down for us. To have a guy like that with the ball in his hands that can kind of pick apart the defense for us, it allows us shooters and drivers to play our game. It's a blessing to have him on the team for sure.

Q. Trey, to follow up on that, yesterday the shot wasn't necessarily falling, but you had a triple nickel with six rebounds, five assists, and you kind of played on ball a little bit more than usual. Was there anything that kind of led to the increased play making?

TREY GREEN: Yeah, shot wasn't falling. Just to show that I'm capable of doing more things than just shoot the ball or score and contribute to winning. That's kind of the main thing Coach Schertz tries to instill in us, how can you contribute to winning? And if the shot is not falling, can you do other things? I was happy to help my teammates win the game and get on to the next round.

Q. Kellen, you were late coming out for the second half yesterday and Josh said you were having a little cramping problem. How are you now, and is that scary because you haven't really had cramping problems?

KELLEN THAMES: Yeah, I wouldn't say it had anything to do with things prior, just kind of under the weather a little bit, just kind of going through, like, just the normal common cold, just chills and stuff like that. Just going through that caused a little bit of a cramp. I understood that I've got the remedies to fix it, and I was able to fix it and come out there and do the same thing I was doing in the first half in the second half.

Q. Brady, what do you think you guys have to do tomorrow to carry the momentum over from last night?

BRADY DUNLAP: Last night we were extremely attentive to detail and the game plan. Obviously we have to carry that over. They're one of the best teams in the country. We have to play our best game of the season to make a run at it.



Also, it's been an emphasis of our team all season just to be physical and rebound the ball and try and win the possession game. That's just kind of something we have to focus on is just rebounding. They're such a big team that if we can just be physical and try and even out the rebounding game. We so talented offensively, we can play with anybody. So I feel like that's something that we really have to take into tomorrow.

JOSH SCHERTZ: Certainly excited to get a chance to compete again. This group has been special all year long. It's not been perfect, but they've been incredible to work with. We know we've got our hands full tomorrow against, I think, as good a team as there is in the country.

But I know these guys. They embrace big challenges all year and no bigger challenge than what we're going to face tomorrow at noon. So we'll go in, put our best foot forward and see what we can do.

Q. The first of 27 questions about Dusty May. What were those early encounters between you and him like that cemented this friendship?

JOSH SCHERTZ: You know, I think Dusty and I, we have a lot in common. Both very good looking and hair and all that stuff.

No, but we're both obviously obsessed with basketball and trying to figure out ways to do it better. I think friendships usually start with common interests, and the common interest is basketball and how we can do our jobs better.

It's always nice when you have somebody who's in the same chair as you. It's hard, sometimes being a head coach, can be lonely. It's hard for people to understand what you're going through. Even your staff -- he has a great staff, I have a great staff. But it's always nice to talk to somebody that's sitting in the same chair, dealing with the same situations you are.

He's been an incredible resource for me over however many years it's been. But I think it always starts with our -- again, I think he's like me where we're always looking at how we can do what we do better and how we can handle situations better. And we're always picking each other's brain. Obviously not while we're been here, but prior, on how we can do our jobs at a higher level.

He's obviously an incredible coach but has been incredibly humble and has continued to grow and evolve as the game has grown and evolved.

Q. To continue on that topic, you've said, I think, that you talked to him and maybe a couple other guys like

once a week during the course of the season. Is that accurate, and what are you talking about every time you're talking? Is it just strictly the nitty-gritty of basketball?

JOSH SCHERTZ: No, sometimes we'll have other stuff to talk about. A lot of it is basketball. There's only a handful of people probably in coaching -- I think Dusty, Ben McCollum, maybe Ryan Pannone -- that I talk to weekly. There's a lot of basketball talk, but we may be just talking about our players, our lives, what's going on.

It's a friendship centered on basketball, but I don't think it's something where we'll talk about stuff going on. Like his son works with the Heat -- in the video room at the Heat. There's just conversation outside of general basketball.

But I consider particularly those three guys to be friends. And the friendship is greater than just your typical, come in, talk X's and O's and that -- although I would say the preponderance of the conversation is around basketball and leadership.

Q. This is kind of a two-part question for you. You said last night that you thought Michigan was the best team in the country. I just want to know what about them as a team that has impressed you so much? What is it going to take for you guys to give them their best shot tomorrow?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, I think what makes them in my opinion the best, you have certainly elite talent. I think you have elite coaching. It's a great combination to be good. They can hurt you in a lot of different ways. Their transition, they do a great job in the pick-and-rolls. They're a terrific offensive rebounding team. They can hurt you in the post, they can hurt you on the perimeter, they shoot the three well.

They've got as good a point guard in terms of passing as there is in the country in Cadeau. Mara is an extremely gifted big man. Yax is a Swiss Army Knife. Morez inside, outside, what he brings defensively could be probably their most valuable guy, most important guy.

Their bench depth even with Cason out is still good. Burnett, Gayle, it's a really good deep basketball team. And they do it on the defensive end. They've got great size and versatility. They switch a ton of stuff. They make it really hard on you. They've got great size. They protect the rim on both ends.

There's not a lot of where you look at them and think, oh, that's a true weakness.



In terms of tomorrow, it's just going to take -- we have to do what we do and do it at an incredibly high level. We'll have to play our best game of the season to win, there's no question. They'll stress test us in every way and challenge us on both ends of the floor to hit a level that we haven't had to get to yet.

And we played, I thought, really well last night, but we'll have to play even better tomorrow to give ourselves a chance against those guys. That's how good they are. But we're looking forward to the challenge.

Like I said, this group has embraced that all year long.

Q. What has it been like for you these past two years to help this program become one of the premier mid major programs in the country?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, it's been a joy. You take a job and you never know what you get there. But this place it's special, and the people make a place. We have great people, and our fan base is terrific.

When we got there, certainly we were taking over a program that had certainly pockets of success, but was coming off a 14th place finish in the A-10. We came in and really tried to develop a culture and a way of playing and a work environment. It hasn't always been linear, but it's been -- I think, the people have stuck by us and believed in us and poured into it.

It's a great setup. It's a job where you can win and win at a high level. We have everything you need to compete, and I think one of the best leagues in the country in the Atlantic 10.

Again, the people that are driving it, from the board down to the president, down to the athletic director, there's incredible alignment and commitment to basketball. That's made my job ultimately pretty easy in terms of just going out and getting the players and putting the players together.

They do all the heavy lifting, so it's made my job pretty straightforward.

Q. Coach, you have a really good team. I've seen your team almost put up 100 on St. Bonaventure and Mark Schmidt really likes Robbie Avila. With the size of Michigan's players, especially their front court, will that change in any way how you utilize Robbie Avila?

JOSH SCHERTZ: We'll have to see how they guard us. I would think who's going to guard him? Is it Mara, is it Johnson, is it Yax? Where do they put Mara? The thing

with Robbie is he can find mismatches and he does a good job of triggering a layering offense.

We've just got to be -- his ability to provide spacing, he's obviously an incredible shooter and passer. He'll be a focal point for us, regardless. He always is.

He was terrific last night in orchestrating the offense, and we kind of revolve around him. Most teams, they revolve around their point guard. For us it's a little different. We kind of revolve around our center, and everybody plays off that.

But you know, I think his ability to provide horizontal spacing, take bigs away from the basket, opens up driving and cutting lanes, and we'll need all of that. I thought he did a really good job last night defensively at protecting the rim. He had a lot of plays at the rim where Georgia got the ball there, and he forced misses and was really physical putting his body up there. Only blocked two shots, but he altered way more.

We'll need the best version of him and everybody else tomorrow against Michigan.

Q. There's been a lot of talk in this tournament about high majors potentially being scared during the regular season to schedule formidable mid majors. Do you feel at all that was the case with your team during the regular season? And regardless if you felt that way, was there anything vindicating about going out against an SEC team last night and do what you were able to do against them?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, it's a discussion point. It's certainly accurate. I think every school schedules in a way that they think is best for them. No one is trying to help anybody else. Everybody schedules solely in a way that benefits them. If you're thinking about it at a high major level, their deal is they want to play other high majors and they want to play Quad 4 games. And if you're not a Quad 4 or another high major, it's hard to get those games. You have to get them in neutrals.

You have to find ways to do it, or you've got to be good enough as a mid major, like a non-Power Four like a Gonzaga or somebody like that where there is an established tradition that it's going to be a Quad 1 game.

At the end of the day, the Power Fours or Power Fives in basketball want to play as many what I would call, like, house money games as possible, where you're playing another Power Five. And if you win, it's a great win; and if you lose, it's a great loss.



There's a difference, even if it's the quads are the same, losing -- even though we're higher in the NET this year than Missouri, it's still a stigma of losing to Saint Louis versus losing to Missouri. Those things factor into scheduling. I think that'll always be the case. I think you're going to see the high majors doing the best they can to avoid playing mid majors because as you see in this tournament, the gaps are not as significant as the outside public would have you believe.

Whatever the basketball pundits would tell you, there's this huge gap between -- is it easier to go 16-2 in the A-10 or 6-12 in the SEC? I would say it's easier to go 6-12 in the SEC than it is to go 16-2 in the A-10. But that's for the bracketologists and the committees to decide.

But hopefully this tournament has at least shown that the non-Power Fives are certainly capable of playing on equal footing here with a lot of the high majors, and hopefully that will bode well for the tournament as we go forward.

If there is expansion, that the expansion is not in getting more necessarily high major teams in, but the expansion allows a lot of these mid major teams. And I said last night, the A-10 prepared us for this. VCU, you see them beat North Carolina, you see us win. We play in one of the best leagues in the country and we were extremely prepared for this postseason through that experience.

Q. You've only had Paul Otieno for nine or ten months, but have you talked to him about his backstory, about how he came here really young by himself and just maybe how he's handled that whole thing over the years?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, you know, we've talked some about it, and I've gotten to know his host family in Kansas City who took great care of him. Paul is just a -- it's a wonderful story of a guy coming over, and again, having to figure stuff out and kind of find his way. And who would have thought he'd be -- he's a soccer guy originally -- becomes a basketball guy.

I've coached 28 years. I could say I've never coached a better human being than Paul Otieno. Talk about a guy that's as good as it gets as a high-character teammate, sacrifice. He plays 11 minutes last night and he's as happy as if he played 30 minutes. He comes in as a two-time all league guy from the MAC and 1,000-plus point guy. And it hasn't maybe gone exactly as he's hoped.

And he's never had one bad day, not one bad practice, never complained, never come in and asked for more. Has always just been incredibly happy for his teammates, the team's success. And he's contributed -- I thought last night

might have been as good of a game as he's had. At VCU -- there's been a couple of them where he's really impacted.

But he's a special kid, and I think that backstory is a big reason why. He's never had anything handed to him. He's had to earn everything he's ever gotten. There's never been a yellow brick road for him. He's had to bear down and earn everything he's ever gotten. And you can see in the way he lives that he's applied those lessons, and he's very appreciative, very thankful, very grateful.

And he's got an incredible host family that's poured into him and kept him going. His journey is certainly as unique as I've been around.

Q. Related to the question about the mid major scheduling, I think there's a presumption going into this tournament that money would kind of make this very chalky. It's not necessarily. There's certainly a lot of teams are at least playing with each other if not winning the games. What is the equalizer? Why do we see that? Is it just hunger and -- that's what Coach Izzo was pointing to, lack of entitlement.

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, I think -- look, money doesn't guarantee you stuff. No matter how much money is spent, winning always comes down to the same things. It's always about the team where the sum is greater than the individual parts. It's still about playing for each other and sacrificing and a group feeling responsible to each other.

No amount of money would ever change what actually drives winning. And you see some teams -- and I haven't studied it -- but I think you can see teams where it's like five independent contractors playing. And the good teams, the sum is always greater than the individual parts.

I just think you're seeing also more guys staying in college, which has created more of a trickle-down effect. You've got older guys in college, guys that didn't like school that might want to go overseas after two or three years. Well, college basketball is the second-highest-paid league in the world now. So there's nowhere to go unless you're going to the NBA where you're going to make more money than you would in college. So these guys are staying. You've got guys who could go to the NBA staying.

And I think guys are less patient to wait to play so you're seeing guys leave or go lower and try -- as opposed to waiting two or three years, their turn, that's more of an immediate gratification piece.

The talent level isn't as dispersed, but it's the teams, it's the groups that play for each other, feel responsible for each



other, and that the sum is greater than the individual parts that's going to win. And that'll be the case 50 years from now. Those things are incontrovertible.

Q. You just mentioned that you've been coaching college basketball for 28 years. This is your first time in the tournament. How rewarding and special is this for you?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, it's an incredible experience. It's been a long time. I spent most of my career in small college basketball at the Division II level, and I was fortunate to be in a bunch of NCAA Tournaments there. But obviously this is the biggest stage in college basketball. And to do it at the Division I level -- I've been trying to do a good job of as best I can when I have moments, take this in and not go so fast that I don't appreciate it.

28 years is a long time, and again, most of my career was spent at a lower level. And I loved that time, but it's made it -- probably because I've had to wait a long time, probably made this even more special than had I come in and had it right away.

It's been a really unique experience, it's been a great journey to go on. And the people always make it. Our team, our staff, the people at Saint Louis University have even enhanced it to a greater degree.

Q. The A-10 was front and center yesterday with you guys winning, obviously VCU, too. There's so much rich history in the conference. What would you say the biggest misconception of A-10 hoops is?

JOSH SCHERTZ: I think that it kind of goes back to how you look at Power Five and non-Power Five in our league. When you go and you lose a game, it's always a bad loss. The wins are kind of swept away. Where the opposite happens at Power Five. Every loss is a great loss and every win is a great win, and like I said, you're house money every night.

It's incredibly hard league to navigate. I think the Atlantic 10 has got incredible coaches, great players. Hard venues to win. You go try to win at Dayton, go try to win at VCU, go try to win at Saint Louis. You're getting sellout crowds every night. They're hard environments, you've got terrific coaches, players.

I don't think it's a coincidence that on a regular basis -- I know it happened two years ago -- that teams in the Atlantic 10 get in the tournament, and they don't just get in the tournament, they win games. Duquesne and Dayton back in '24. Again here with us and VCU.

This league puts you through the gauntlet. It prepares you for the NCAA Tournament, for the postseason. And I think that's the biggest misconception is that there's some sort of chasm that exists between our league and some of the other leagues. And I don't think -- are there differences? Of course. But the chasm is not nearly as big as what, again, the outside world would have you believe.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

