

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Saint Peter's vs Tennessee

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

Saint Peter's Peacocks

Bashir Mason

Roy Clarke

Mouhamed Sow

Corey Washington

Latrell Reid

Media Conference



me. So I actually felt like St. Peter's was comfortable, and it was a good place, good environment for me. So I really didn't want to run away from that. I haven't had that in so long because I feel like I've been ripping and running.

Coach Bash came in, and he sold me. It worked out for the best. I'm happy I did it, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Q. Corey, when you came in last year, first year coming in, how much did you hear about that versus how much was it, okay, new staff, new roster, trying to remake things differently? Is it hard to appreciate that while also trying to build something new?

COREY WASHINGTON: I've heard a lot coming in, but it was really just the guys that were here, JuJu, Jerry, Trell, Zay. They talked about it a lot, but they were like basically giving motivation, like you want to go here again, you want to do it again. It was a great feeling. You want to be a part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, guys. They took it easy on you today. Go get 'em tomorrow.

We're ready to start with Coach Mason.

Q. Obviously you took over for Shaheen at St. Peter's. Curious how much the elevated profile of that run two years ago impacted your decision for wanting this job.

BASHIR MASON: I'm born and raised in Jersey City. It was more so about being that hometown kid going back to his neighborhood school and being able to get us back on this stage here. I've known Shaheen since I was in seventh grade. I've known him for a long time. The job that he did was incredible. Our name recognition nationwide is recognizable anywhere.

So I don't know how much it necessarily played into it or it was more about just that hometown kid going back to his neighborhood school and seeing if we can keep this thing going.

Q. Following up on that, how much did that run -- how

Q. Do you see yourselves or have you thought about having the same type of Cinderella run you guys had a few years ago?

ROY CLARKE: One game at a time. I don't feel like we're thinking about that right now. Just looking at the task ahead of us.

MOUHAMED SOW: Just like what Roy said, get out in time, try to win that game. After that, we'll think about the next game.

COREY WASHINGTON: I'm just going on what they said, taking it one game at a time, either start thinking ahead, that's when mistakes start being made. You don't want that.

LATRELL REID: Survive and advance. We just want to come out and set the tone early on the task ahead of us, and then we'll let everything else work itself out.

Q. Latrell, after that run, a lot of guys left, transferred. You decided to stay. I'm just curious, why did you stay? Are you glad you did? What was the reasoning behind staying at St. Peter's when a lot of guys moved on?

LATRELL REID: For me, I was coming from junior college my freshman year. So I was moving around a little bit. I was in Kansas kind of far from home. Jersey was home for



much of that run has impacted your job, and how many of these kids, of the ones that you talk to, talk about that, or how much do you think that's helping you?

BASHIR MASON: Yeah, when you pick up the phone and call and you say St. Peter's, most kids say, man, I watched you guys make a run. I was cheering for you guys. You guys were doing a great job.

Once they stop ranting and raving, I usually follow it up with, hey, that wasn't me. I'm the guy that replaced that guy.

Q. Just going along with that run, I ask the players, and they say they take it one game at a time, and I'm sure you do the same. But do you ever think about, I guess, what's your thoughts about running it back and having the same Cinderella run?

BASHIR MASON: I felt it at our conference tournament. This is now year 2 for me. Both years at our conference tournament, I thought the fans, the support is great. That mystique of Peacock nation, that was a very real thing for me. I felt it.

Being here now in this environment, I'm excited. I'm excited about having this opportunity, this platform, and having that opportunity to say or to hear the Peacocks did it again.

Q. What stands out about this Tennessee team?

BASHIR MASON: I've been telling my team we're probably a version of them in terms of how we defend, how we rebound. But they've probably got a couple of NBA players on their team. Size, athleticism, everything is a little bit different. Dalton, we haven't played against a guy like him. It will be the ultimate test for us, but I think we'll be up for it.

Q. Obviously just turned 40 last month, but nearing 200 career wins, been around the block a little bit in college head coaching. Curious what getting an opportunity so young has taught you and how you've been able to learn as a young coach by being a head coach instead of working under people?

BASHIR MASON: The one thing that getting into this profession did to me, it cost me my hair early.

(Laughter).

No, I've seen it all in college coaching. There's things that I did early on that I wouldn't do now. You'll probably notice

my calm temperament during the games, and sometimes I'm probably joking with people on the sideline. They think that I'm crazy.

Being able to do this for a long time and being closer to 200 wins, there's not a lot that's going to rattle me. It's just if I can keep my players composed and in the moment of what's actually happening.

Q. How important is tempo in this game in particular on your side of things, limiting possessions?

BASHIR MASON: Huge. Huge for us. I think Tennessee is probably averaging 15, 16 more points per game than we are. We're coming off of a conference tournament run. We didn't give up 70 points. I don't even know if we gave up 65 points.

We want to try to bring them down in scoring and do that by controlling the tempo offensively and defensively.

Q. You mentioned Dalton. What challenges does he present for you guys?

BASHIR MASON: For our conference, for our level, he's a really, really big wing. I've watched multiple games. I've heard commentators say he's from 6'7", 6'8", down to 6'6". My wing players are around 6'3", 6'4". So instantly the size differences is huge.

But then just his confidence. That kid always has his foot on the gas, and he's trying to score, putting pressure on the defense. You've got to be ready to defend him for 40 minutes, 30 seconds, the entire game.

Q. This is more of a fun question. When you're thinking about breakfast meats are you putting Taylor ham first, or are you more of a sausage or bacon guy?

BASHIR MASON: I don't eat red meat or pork, so I'm more of a turkey bacon guy, turkey sausage guy.

Q. This is another fun question. Coach Hubert Davis talked about he really likes Lil Durk, and that's some of his hype music. What's your hype music before a game?

BASHIR MASON: You know what, I can't tell you one song that these guys are playing right now even though I'm young, but there's like -- there's two of them that I really like, and I don't know the names of the guys that sing them. The guys actually know I like them. So when I'm coming into the locker room, they tell our strength coach to put it on when I come in, and I start going crazy.

Q. Latrell is the only holdover who's still playing for you guys from that team that made that run. I know you weren't here, but what did you have to say to him when you came in, and how has he developed as a player? Does any of his influence from being here during that run carry over to your guys?

BASHIR MASON: You know what, I didn't do much talking to the returning guys when I came in. I wanted to introduce myself with the work. We got right to work on the court.

I wanted to see what they had. They wanted to show me what they had. And I wanted to show them what I was about.

But I will say Latrell and I had a conversation going into this year. I talked to him about, Latrell was a baseball player in high school who went to junior college to try to get a Division I scholarship. That didn't work out due to COVID. He ended up being a walk-on here at St. Peter's and starting games and being on our team that went to the Elite Eight.

What I talked to him about was going from that baseball player walk-on to now probably becoming one of the most decorated players in St. Peter's history if he could lead us back here, and I meant that. That kid took it to heart, and we're here.

Q. You mentioned Knecht. Obviously Zeigler plays the point for them. Aidoo has been pretty consistent. Their shooters have not been as consistent. As you look at them, first of all, you hope they're missing some shots, but do you kind of have to put the game in their hands as much as possible?

BASHIR MASON: They go so simple in terms of getting Dalton the ball, it will be tough to take him away. But we do want to load it up and make him have to play against our team defense and try to make those other guys make shots, specifically early into the game where I think it's going to be thick. I don't want him getting off to the greatest of starts and now everybody else sort of follow.

I'd rather him play the takeover role for 40 minutes.

Q. Just wanted to follow up on what you were just saying about that conversation with Latrell, how you told him, if you do this, this is what will happen, and you said he took it to heart, what do you mean by that? How did you see him do that over the course of the year?

BASHIR MASON: Specifically, I told him he needed to get as big and strong as he could, become a real extension of

myself and the coaching staff, not just on the court, but in the locker room throughout campus.

I don't know how good of an offensive player Latrell is or he was going to be going into the season, but I told him he should really focus on becoming Defensive Player of the Year. And in doing so, he was named Third Team All Conference and he was named Defensive Player of the Year.

He is, no doubt about it, the leader of our program.

Q. Obviously Armoni and Zakai are half brothers. What did you see his reaction being when he saw the draw, and what has he said about Zakai's game or what shows up on tape?

BASHIR MASON: Number one, I think -- I don't know why because these guys are crazy, but I think this is the matchup they wanted. We had a setup, and there were two rows, and I was sitting behind the players. When Tennessee popped up on the screen, our entire team pulled their cell phones out and started recording. When we got called next, there was a celebration.

Zakai got to this level because he's ultimately competitive. Armoni's with us because he's competitive. Although they're brothers and they spend a lot of time with each other and they probably talk a lot, I think they'll both be looking forward to competing against each other on this stage.

That excitement for those two has probably trickled through both locker rooms.

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