

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Troy vs Nebraska

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Paycom Center

Troy Trojans

Scott Cross

Media Conference



A couple of people said, can we have the three-year bamboo, Coach, please? We were able to win 20 games that year, and that was kind of the start. We had been very, very fortunate and blessed. If we're fortunate enough to win this game, there's the 80 feet in 60 days.

It's a tall task. We're going to have to play our best basketball. They're one of the best basketball teams I've seen. The more I watch them, the more I see the reason why they've had success.

I mean, defensively, you would look at them and you would say, oh, they're not going to be that great defensively. They're not that athletic, not that tall, but then you watch the way they rotate. I mean, it's precision the way they play. They don't give anything at the rim. They close out to the 3-point shooters. They make it very, very difficult.

So as good as they are shooting the basketball, moving the basketball, I think the bigger challenge is just finding opportunities and ways to score. Our guys are capable. I think we're very similar in our styles, so it should make for a great basketball game. We're going to have to hit shots. I think that's what it's going to come down to.

Q. How do you feel like, in general, here in 2026 the mid-level conferences are being treated by the committee? I haven't done the research, but it looks like it's getting harder and harder for a league like the Sun Belt or Conference USA or American, whoever, to be a multi-bid league.

SCOTT CROSS: I think in the Sun Belt the only way that's ever going to happen is if somebody does, like Miami of Ohio, and wins every single game. You would have to schedule really, really good in nonconference in order to do that, but in the Sun Belt I don't see a team going undefeated in conference, because we're all too evenly matched, very, very similar.

I would agree with you in a lot of ways. I think we did take a step in the right direction with Miami of Ohio making it. A lot of people could make a case that Auburn or some other teams may have deserved to get in ahead of them. So the fact that they got in gives hope. If you have an amazing season in a mid-major league, you have a chance. It's a

THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, we have Troy Head Coach Scott Cross with us. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Cross.

SCOTT CROSS: Yeah, thank you. I'm just extremely thankful to the good Lord to have this opportunity. You know, last year we were able to get to the NCAA Tournament. Hadn't been there since 2008. It was like having a gorilla on your back. Having some really good basketball teams, but not being able to play in the dance.

It was surreal last year, and this year being able to do it in back-to-back years, it's been absolutely amazing. We have such a great group of guys that are extremely well-connected. They work extremely hard. I've said many times that I haven't left practice in a bad mood or angry, because our guys are such great guys, and it's the most fun that I've had coaching basketball up to this point.

We're very thankful to be here and can't wait.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I want to ask you this, because I think it may also apply to Coach Hoiberg. In terms of building a program, you've used the analogy before about a bamboo plant and how, you know, the fans need to have faith that it's going to grow. Can you explain that a little bit and how it applies in this day and age of college basketball?

SCOTT CROSS: Sure. Yeah, I said that. I think it was in year three. I said, you know, it's like watering the bamboo. You plant the seeds in year one. You water it, you fertilize it; it doesn't grow. Year two, you water, fertilize it, it doesn't grow. Year three, water, fertilize, doesn't grow. Year four, water, fertilize, doesn't grow. Then in year five it grows, like, 80 feet in 60 days.



big game for them. Today I think they play SMU, I believe. So a big game for the mid-major programs.

They've had an outstanding year. I'm thankful we got a 13 seed. Last year we got a 14 seed, so we did take a step in the right direction. I don't know that our NET -- our NET may have actually been a tad bit lower this year than last year. I feel like we're in a good position.

I was excited for Miami of Ohio. I'm always cheering for the mid-major guys.

Q. You always hear about the Big Ten's physicality. How do you feel about your team's overall physicality, and how important is that element to you?

SCOTT CROSS: Yeah, I would say when we're playing our best, we are very physical. We can be really, really good rebounding the ball on the offensive end of the floor. Defensively I thought in the conference tournament we were very physical, we were tough, we were gritty. We got to the 3-point line.

You could just kind of see a different level in our eyes. I do believe we'll get that version of us. Our guys know, you know, it's win or go home, just like it was in the Sun Belt Tournament. So I feel like we're going to play really hard and really tough defensively, but again, this is an offense -- Akron is one of those offenses that's a high, high level. I mean, we did play USC. That's obviously a very good offense. It's unique in the style they play and the way they move the basketball. Then the 3-point shooters, I don't think we faced anybody as good as a shooter as Sandfort. I was telling the radio guys I was watching it actually at 4:00 in the morning, and I hit slow motion, and I looked at the timer on there, and I believe he got his shot off in, like, .3 seconds, which if you can get your shot off -- under 1 is good. Probably .5 is elite. .3, that's, like, Steph Curry-type shooting.

You can't give him any daylight, but they're so good and precise in the way that they execute. It's going to be hard, but we've got to know where he is.

All their guys can shoot. That's what makes it even tougher. You start worrying about other guys, and it's a quick pin-down, and you turn and he's shooting it right in your face. He can shoot it from the timeline. A lot of potential problems, but I think the biggest thing is our guys have to be aggressive, we have to be physical. If we allow them to move and cut with speed, it's going to be hard. So we have to use a level of physicality to have a chance.

Q. Could you give us an update on Theo Seng? If you do have him, how big is it for you to have him back?

SCOTT CROSS: Yeah, Theo has practiced I think the last four practices for us. He has been able to go full practice, so he will be available in the game, barring a setback today or tomorrow.

He hadn't played in, like, three weeks, so it's going to be a little bit of a challenge getting him back into rhythm, but he will definitely play in the game, like I said, unless there's a setback.

He does give us that ability to really pick and pop. He's a really good team defender. He walls up. He's smart. So definitely gives us an extra option out there, both offensively and defensively, that should help our basketball team.

Q. Just hearing from Thomas and Jerrell earlier, it seems like there's a real sense of confidence with this group. How important is that in a game like this?

SCOTT CROSS: Yeah, I mean, you have to be able to win it in your mind before you can win it on the court. So we definitely want our guys to be confident. If they don't believe that they can win the basketball game, we have zero chance.

Our guys have, almost every one on our roster, either played in that game or they were there last year. The jitters, I think, are going to be less than they were last year. You have guys that are hungry for redemption, to play better, to shoot the ball better, to win a basketball game. Not going to be easy, but I do think our guys definitely have a higher level of confidence than we did last year going into the tournament.

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