

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Idaho vs Houston

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

## Idaho Vandals

## Coach Alex Pribble

### Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Coach Alex Pribble from Idaho. We will open it up with an opening statement from Coach Pribble.

ALEX PRIBBLE: Hello, everybody. Honored to be here. It's been a special stretch here for the Idaho Vandals. In Oklahoma City, with our team, having our women's program representing in the Women's NCAA Tournament just 30 miles away, just a great time to be an Idaho Vandal.

This year has been really special for us. We felt really good about our team from the start. We feel like we have an older, more experienced, more mature group, and it really clicked for us at the end of the year. We ended up playing seven games in 13 days down the stretch to earn ourselves a chance to get to the Big Dance, and we're playing our best basketball at the right time.

So love our group. Really excited about the opportunity. We have a huge challenge against the Houston Cougars team that we know kind of is the epitome of toughness and resilience and physicality, and it's just going to be a great challenge for us, and we're excited.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. You just hit on it, but their style and their physical nature, how difficult is that to sort of prepare in such a short amount of time? How do you feel like your team can match up in terms of that physicalness?**

ALEX PRIBBLE: Yeah, it's very difficult. Your scout team is not going to mimic the physicality of Houston. Coach Sampson does such a great job, again, just with the identity of the program. There's actually a young man that I had the pleasure of coaching named Cameron Tyson. He went to Idaho as a freshman, and then he ended up going to Houston. When he came back -- I actually coached him

at Seattle University. When he came back to Seattle, he was a changed player. The toughness that he had, the chip that he played the game with, in terms of chip on his shoulder, you can just tell that what Coach Sampson does with everybody in their program is really special. It's the reason why their program is studied so much, and a lot of coaches look to that program in terms of how they practice and just their day-to-day standards to learn.

For us, a huge growth, the reason that we're sitting here today, is that we've become a tougher team. If you look at our defensive rebounding numbers, we weren't a great defensive rebounding team the previous two years. We made that a point of emphasis this year, and now we're the No. 5 defensive rebounding team in the country.

So what better way to test that identity than to play against Houston, who that's what they're all about.

So huge challenge on our hands, no doubt about it, but we're excited for that challenge, and I know our guys are going to put their best foot forward.

**Q. The type of pace that your team likes to play, how does that compare to Houston's? Do you think that could help you if it is a difference?**

ALEX PRIBBLE: Yeah, that's a good question. It's going to come down to a possession game, in my opinion. We have to first and foremost take care of the basketball. So regardless of pace, valuing the ball, playing fundamentally sound offense, making sure we have the right spacing, that's going to be the priority.

Now, if we are able to generate shots quickly, for example, if they played a trap on us and we're able to get the ball out of trap and earn a great shot, we're going to take it. It's not about waiting until the end of the shot clock. It's about taking care of the ball and generating good shots.

Traditionally we've played with pretty good pace and pretty good spacing, and an early open three is a good shot for our team. We've set the three-point shooting record the last two years at University of Idaho. And if we're going to hang with Houston, we're going to have to make some shots.

So we're not going to play on our heels. We're going to go and be aggressive, but it starts with taking care of the basketball.

**Q. You have experience in the NCAA Tournament, not only as a player back with Cal, but also you made two of them as a coach at St. Martin's at the D-II level. What do you bring from that? What can you kind of pass on to these guys, both from the experience of being there as a player, but also as a coach and making a run to the Sweet 16 a couple of years ago?**

ALEX PRIBBLE: Yeah, good question. There's two sides to this, right? There's the side where our guys worked extremely hard to get here, right, and I want them to enjoy this experience. I spoke about it earlier, I had the conversation right when Selection Sunday ended, I talked to our guys about soaking this up, journaling, staying present, making memories, enjoying the moment.

Then the flip side to that is our guys 100% need to be prepared to play their best basketball game of the year, and so the good thing is I don't have to worry about the competitive side with our group, meaning they're going to show up and play with the fire, they've had kind of an underdog mentality this whole year. So I do think you can kind of see both sides of that.

In terms of my experience, the one that I'll actually rely on the most is when I was an assistant coach at Eastern Washington University. It's the last time I was coaching in the Division I NCAA Tournament. And that experience -- I learned that sometimes it takes a few minutes, maybe the first media timeout, maybe a couple of media timeouts, to settle in. And you just gotta coach the game possession by possession. You can't worry about the outcome too much early in the game. It's just next play, what adjustments do we need to make to try to be successful offensively or defensively those next four minutes.

So that's the approach we'll take. We need to learn early in the game. Similar to the question that I was asked earlier, we're not going to be able to have our scout team mimic Houston's defensive pressure right away. That's just not what's going to happen. But we do talk about spacing, and then after the first four minutes, hopefully our guys can kind of settle in a little bit, and that will be the goal.

**Q. You mentioned it at the top, but how cool is it for both programs that you guys are here, the women are right down the road in Norman?**

ALEX PRIBBLE: Yeah, it's a special time to be an Idaho Vandal. We've been talking about it. It's funny, the start of the year we played at Washington State University, kind of

a regional rival for us. And the women played earlier in the day, and they knocked them off, kind of put the pressure on us to do the same thing and started with a sweep over a big regional rival.

And then all the way until the last game of the conference tournament when the women won earlier in the day and we had to come in and kind of finish it off. It's been really special. We have a very good relationship with the women staff. We share an office space. I watch practices of theirs when I can, pick their brain about basketball. They do the same with us. They watch our practices. We work together a lot.

I got great respect for what they do, so to see both the men's program and the women's program have success at the same time, it's just -- it's really special. And to have them just 30 miles away, it's almost like it was prewritten, you know, like this is the way it should be.

Yeah, just really happy for all the Idaho Vandal fans. We expect a solid turnout because the fans can come here and watch us play Thursday, watch the women play Friday. They could take an Uber between the two venues, if they need to. Like what a special deal. It's pretty great, yeah.

**Q. Coach Sampson has been in the game a long time. Have you had any interactions with him in the past? What do you kind of glean from his experience and how long he's been doing it at such a high level?**

ALEX PRIBBLE: He's a Hall of Fame coach. I don't know him directly, but I tell you what, I've studied his program a lot. I've learned a lot from watching their game film. That's the kind of coach you want to be able to coach against. What a great situation to be able to go and put a scouting report together and kind of battle against a coach like him.

I know he's in the Palouse, and there's a lot of people I've heard from, a lot of former Vandals who talk about growing up going to the Cougar Camps when he was over there. If I get a chance to share a moment with him, maybe I'll ask a little bit about his experience on the Palouse. I know he's impacted a lot of lives out there.

Coaching on the Palouse, it's really special. This whole year for us has been about honoring Coach Don Monson, who he is Idaho basketball. To be able to learn about the tradition of Idaho, and back in the day when the two teams are playing against each other, you know, the Cougars and the Vandals, it's just got a great legacy. I'm sure he remembers the time in Palouse. If I get a chance, I'll definitely ask him about it.

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