

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Idaho Vandals

Coach Alex Pribble

Kolton Mitchell

Trevon Blassingame

Biko Johnson

Media Conference

Houston 78, Idaho 47

THE MODERATOR: We have joining us today's Trevon Blassingame, Kolton Mitchell, Biko Johnson and Coach Alex Pribble, who will start with an opening statement.

ALEX PRIBBLE: Not the result we were looking for, obviously but at this point I'm just filled with an extreme sense of pride and gratitude. I think our guys really battled to put themselves in a position where they could play in March Madness. They played 7 games in 13 days leading up to this, an emotionally draining run through their conference tournament. You know, you get paired up with a team like Houston, you know, I think a lot of teams would have kind of backed away, and I don't think our guys did at all. I think they fought for 40 minutes. I thought they gave everything they had. They emptied the tanks, and I'm just really proud of them.

If you would have told me that it would have been pretty even in terms of the possession game, that we would rebound the ball fairly evenly with them and that we'd take care of the ball the way we did, I think we would have a fighting chance. But unfortunately, we didn't shoot the ball very well, and you have to credit them. That's a heck of a ball club.

The identity, the toughness that they play with is special, and then if they shoot the ball the way they did tonight, they're going to be hard to stop in this tournament. So credit Coach Sampson and his guys they did a great job tonight. They made us pay for every mistake that we did



make, but I'm just very proud of our guys and grateful for the year that we just had.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for our student-athletes.

Q. You guys came out shooting the ball well, playing tough defense. You forced a turnover on that -- (technical difficulty, no audio). In these games you see maybe the lower seeded teams kind of shy away from that. What went right in those first couple of minutes that set the tone for you guys early?

BIKO JOHNSON: I would say we came out in attack mode. We were ready. We were ready to fight, ready to compete, and we were just standing together in the first four minutes, which is why the score was what it was.

Q. Kolton, you had high 14 in this one, had a couple of big threes, one where you got fouled and made a four-point play. When you are hitting those shots in these games, does it feel different, especially your first experience playing in this game, or are you just playing basketball? What was kind of that whole atmosphere like for you?

KOLTON MITCHELL: Yeah, the atmosphere was great. It was sweet to be able to play in an arena like this, but once you're on the court I feel like it's the same anywhere where you are playing. The hoop is still the same and everything, so once you get in that zone, it feels like just like basketball.

Q. Tre, your second appearance in the NCAA Tournament. You told me yesterday not a lot of guys get the chance to play in this two times. What was this like to be able to be here with Idaho and then be kind of that sounding board for this team the last couple of days?

TREVON BLASSINGAME: Yeah, man, it was a true honor, honestly. I love this community. I love this place. These guys on this team are my true brothers. Like I said before, to Coach, to my teammates, like, having this opportunity with you guys would be the best thing in the world because I truly love you guys, and I truly feel like we've built special bonds, so I'm just super grateful for the



opportunity, and it was a true pleasure.

Q. 1,000 points on the career. What does that mean to you to be able to do that in an Idaho jersey?

BIKO JOHNSON: It's really special. The coaching staff took a chance on me. I've been to three different schools in, like, three years. It's been a wild journey. I'm just super grateful.

Q. Kolton, moving forward, obviously you guys have seen the Big Sky. It's really hard to do this year after year. It's kind of a rotating door in this conference. What needs to be done for you guys to sustain success? You know, you saw the women's team up in the stands. They've been to this dance four times in the last 13 years. What do you guys need to do to make you and Idaho men's basketball that perennial kind of favorite in the Big Sky?

KOLTON MITCHELL: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is just the culture. The three of us have talked a lot about just building our culture here, and I think our foundation and our culture has been built. We have a championship culture now at Idaho, and the expectation is the expectation. You know, we expect to win championships now.

So going in, the guys who we'll recruit and get here are going to be expected to work their butts off, and if it's not a championship, then that's down to our standards going forward.

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and dismiss the student-athletes. Questions for Coach.

Q. What were you telling them in the huddle, and was that more of a reflection of your coaching or just the pride that these guys have in the school?

ALEX PRIBBLE: Kolton was just talking about our culture. One thing that we define within our culture is mental toughness. If you were to ask any of our student-athletes what is mental toughness to us, they would be able to tell you, it's the ability to focus on the next and most important thing.

So when we're in those huddles, they have the ability to not worry about the past, not worry about that last possession, if it was a turnover or a mistake, and then just focus on that next play, right, that next-play mentality. I think we have a group of young men that really understand that, are mentally tough.

I think in those huddles they're already talking about the right things before I get to the huddle, right? So we have

the ability to just focus on that next play, try to make the adjustments that are needed to be made. And, again, we didn't have to coach effort. I felt like the guys gave everything they had tonight. It was more about what adjustments in our ball screen coverages could we make, what adjustments in our rim protection could we make to try to take away their rhythm, which was tough tonight.

Q. Coach Sampson started off his press conference first thing by giving you guys credit on how hard it is to do what you guys did in Boise, to come in here and play with effort against a really good Houston team. What do you glean from a coach like him and the career he's had and just hearing those words and what you can take forward in your young career?

ALEX PRIBBLE: Yeah, you know, Coach Sampson is a special coach. He's a Hall of Fame coach for a reason. His programs are studied by coaches like me, right? I've done everything I could to try to get some of his practice film and his game film and pick his coaches' brains about the way they generate such a unique identity in college basketball.

Anybody that wants to make their program tougher, they look at Houston. Anybody that wants to make their program more physical, they look at Houston.

To hear that Coach Sampson had some respect for us playing with a level of physicality and toughness, that's special, because I think our guys have worked really hard to improve that part of our identity, right?

We went from being the 300th best defensive rebounding team in the country last year to before this game being the fifth ranked defensive rebounding team in the country. That doesn't happen without a level of physical toughness.

So to be able to really put that on display against Houston, you know, is a special thing. Coach Sampson does an unbelievable job. If I run into him in the offseason sometime, maybe I'll pick his brain a little bit more about this. There's a lot you can learn from that program, but yeah, you have to give them a lot of credit.

They also shot the ball extremely well tonight, which if you can find that defensive physicality, intensity that they play with guys that shoot the ball the way they did, they're going to be hard to beat.

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