

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas A&M vs Houston

Friday, March 20, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Bucky McMillan

Rashaun Agee

Rylan Griffen

Pop Isaacs

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Texas A&M student-athletes, Rashaun Agee, Rylan Griffen, and Pop Isaacs. Questions.

Q. Rylan and Pop, can you speak a little bit about Rashaun's leadership on this team and how much he's meant to this program this year and what more people understood about him?

RYLAN GRIFFEN: He's been huge. Great leader. Great player. We all know without him we wouldn't be where we are right now, so great player, great leader, has a great future.

POP ISAACS: Yeah, just to harp on what Rylan said, he's a great leader. Does a great job with the guys day in and day out. Better than, like, just the basketball player. He's a great person to be around every day, which helps a lot.

So Rashaun has been great all year, for sure.

Q. For Pop, seems like this last month you've hit a stride. What's allowed you to really stack some good performances lately?

POP ISAACS: Yeah, I mean, just losing myself within the game. Just trying to do the little things that, you know, translate to winning, and everything else will take care of itself. I think I play my best basketball when we have to win, and I know the last month we had to win some games. I feel like my teammates did a great job too, so yeah.

Q. To really all three, we'll start with you, Rashaun, in this new era everyone either connects or they don't when all these groups come together. Everyone has said you guys connected early, and obviously we've seen the results. Tell me how and why this group got so connected so soon and it has stayed together?

RASHAUN AGEE: I will say just the belief in each other. Understanding what we came here to do. I mean, a lot of us is one and done, so just understanding that we came here to win. In order to win, you got to play together. It's not a one-team sport. We're not playing tennis. We're playing basketball. It takes five players. It also takes other people on the bench bringing energy, so...

RYLAN GRIFFEN: Yeah, I feel like just Coach did a good job of expressing how important it is to be together. Even if you're not the biggest or the most talented, if you are together, that will take away a lot of the other stuff. He did a really good job of making sure we bond and had connection on the court. If we weren't together, I don't think we would be here today.

POP ISAACS: Yeah, I'll just say the mindset of the team, honestly. There's great people on this team, and that helps with those type of things. I think everybody came in with a mindset just with one common goal, and that was to win no matter what it was.

We have a bunch of great people in our locker room, and that helps a lot.

Q. Rashaun and Rylan, does Houston -- are they comparable with anybody that you played this year? What do they present defensively, just the way they do things and kind of the style that you guys play offensively?

RASHAUN AGEE: I mean, in particular not exactly like other teams, but the way (indiscernible) some teams we played in the past, but they're a great team. Defensively they do a lot of good things, but we've played somebody kind of similar to them.

RYLAN GRIFFEN: Yeah, I will just say they really get after you defensively. They have a great reputation of being a great defensive team. So just making sure we don't give



them points by turning the ball over will be really, really key for us in this type game.

We all know they're physical, and they're going to have intensity, so just about matching that and playing our best basketball.

Q. I know you guys recently had a Zoom meeting with Alex Caruso, and I know he's been around the program obviously for years dating back to his days. How cool is it also -- this is for all of you guys, by the way. How cool is it to hear from him before these games, and also, how cool is it to do it in his home -- not his hometown, but where he is playing right now, winning the championship with the Oklahoma City Thunder?

RASHAUN AGEE: Just to hear from him was great. To hear from somebody who has been in our shoes before, but also, you know, has fought, and he's had a long career. He's also playing for OKC, and he won a championship.

But, man, just to do it the way they did it, I know they had a stretch where they came back and played here, and they ended up going to the Sweet 16. It was just great to be able to also play here and see what they did.

Q. Pop, given your relationship with Milos, are you excited about this match-up? Do you wish that maybe it wasn't happening now, because someone has to lose?

POP ISAACS: No, I'm excited. Me and Milos talk all the time throughout the season. That's one of my best friends. I'm super excited. We've played against each other a few times in college. Those games are always fun, always great battles. We played with and against each other all the time growing up. We're super close, and I'm excited. I'm sure he is too.

Q. This can be for any of you guys. How do you plan on maintaining the same physicality you had against St. Mary's, against a team like Houston?

RYLAN GRIFFEN: We just have to come out with the same mindset. Same mindset we had against St. Mary's is the same mindset we need to have next game.

Q. Rashaun, a lot of you guys are all new, so you didn't really know each other. I wonder how you became the leader of this team? How does that happen? Is it your age or play on the court, or how does that happen?

RASHAUN AGEE: I would say it's my voice. I feel like my voice carries. I just come in with kind of exciting energy

throughout practice, throughout, you know, games. I mean, it kind of just is --

RYLAN GRIFFEN: He just talk a lot. Let's not fool y'all. Age plays a part in it too. Let's not fool. Don't let him fool you. That's a big reason. Unc over here.

Q. Rylan, what have you seen from Houston's guard play and kind of the match y'all have with them tomorrow?

RYLAN GRIFFEN: Obviously they got one of the best guard groups in the country. We play -- Arkansas is up there. Alabama is up there, too. They're right there with those guys when it comes to guards. We all know they have guards who can pass, dribble, and shoot. They can get downhill, and they're really, really fast guards. They can shoot from anywhere. They're going to be a really tough match-up.

Q. Rashaun, the team coming together with a lot of people in their last year, people coming out of the portal, what was the turning point where this team really clicked this year?

RASHAUN AGEE: I feel like we clicked super early. We clicked in the summer, but I feel like our turning point was the first game of the year. We really got together a little more. Then we hit a couple of bumps and bruises. I feel like it just brought us closer together also.

Q. Rylan, as you guys had a chance to maybe dissect last night's game or just kind of think on it, what are maybe some of the little things y'all still want to fine-tune knowing you got a big game tomorrow?

RYLAN GRIFFEN: Just the mentality, the attention to details, and our approach and focus are pretty much what we saw and we need to try to do again for the next game.

Q. This is for either of you guys, but I know you guys weren't here, but did y'all happen to watch the game against Houston two years ago? Is that something that you guys have talked about at all? Just kind of maybe getting payback for that?

POP ISAACS: Yeah, I watched it.

RYLAN GRIFFEN: I watched it too.

POP ISAACS: No, we haven't talked about it at all.

RYLAN GRIFFEN: I watched it when it happened, though. I haven't watched it recently. I don't really remember what happened. I was watching. I think it was after one of my

games, actually. It was entertaining, though, for sure.

POP ISAACS: I didn't watch it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all very much. We appreciate it. We're now joined by Texas A&M Head Coach Bucky McMillan. We'll start with a statement from Coach and get to questions.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Howdy, Ags. Thanks to all the Ags who are here. What time do we play tomorrow? 5:10. Look forward to tomorrow night. Let's get 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What challenges do you think Houston presents defensively, and what's kind of stood out to you about them?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, they look like five Tyrannosaurus rexes out there. They're long, big, athletic, well-coached, and tough. But other than that, not many.

Ball screen defense is good. One-on-one defense is good. Post defense is good. They rebound really well. Bring back three starters from their Final Four team last year. So got experience. You know, know what they're doing and have been through a tough league.

Q. You had such an excellent defensive performance the other night. Do you just go in, hey, that worked, and let's just try to duplicate it? How much do you have to change your approach when you play Houston?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, I think we're adaptable in ways, but you know, I mean, I think we do have defensive adaptability that we're going to have to fill out to see what the game calls for and dictates. In general, you have seen us play this year obviously most of our games. We kind of have a philosophy that we go with. We kind of adjust from there.

Q. A two-part question about Pop. He kind of shared with us a little bit about his transfer recruitment last year originally committing to Houston. I'm curious if you could take us back through his recruitment and just landing him after he had kind of made some decisions, and then what have you seen from him the last few weeks as he's kind of hit his stride in his game?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, I won't touch on the recruitment as much. I'll let Pop stick to that, but obviously very glad we got him. Obviously there was some

movement on the other side, players going to the draft and players coming back and whatnot, so we had some decisions to make.

Biggest deal with Pop is that Pop got fully healthy. He started playing extremely hard, and to play for us, you got to play really hard, but you got to practice really hard. I don't think it was fair in the year for Pop to be expected to be the player he was when he was injured and to be able to practice hard. There was going to be inevitable growing pains where he could get back to practicing, that he could get back to playing well.

His growth has been on the defensive end has been tremendous. If you see him, he's a really hard-playing player right now. You know, he's doing things that win basketball games. Pop sees the game really well on offense. He's really a smart player. I've never questioned his offensive ability ever, but his defense has gone to another level, which has equated us to winning more games with him on the floor.

Q. Rashaun's leadership has been huge throughout this year and throughout this run. What do you wish more people understood about Rashaun?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, he may be listed a little taller than he is, so for him to do what he does at his true height, it's to have more double-doubles now in a season than anybody in the history of the Texas A&M basketball program, who would have thought that would come from someone who is -- I'm not going to say it, whatever tall he is. He gets mad.

That's like Charles Barkley, you know? You remember Charles Barkley? He wasn't the tallest, but he's like the Round Mound of Rebound. He would just go get the ball.

So I think you got to admire someone whose determination is what it is, and it's contagious to our team. But he's just a delight to be around. He's got such a great personality and is a joy to be around. There's energy vampires that suck the energy out of a room. He's the total opposite. He brings life to the party.

After he's done playing, me and Rashaun will be very close.

Q. Bucky, I've got two questions for you. One, when you were building your style of play this Bucky Ball, was it built with tournament success in mind?

BUCKY McMILLAN: We started -- I started playing -- coaching basketball when I was in college, and I started coaching AAU basketball. In AAU basketball it's only

tournament basketball, so one of my first teams we had it was a 17-under AAU team that used to go to AAU nationals, which was the big deal. We played how we played, and very undersized, similar to our team right now. We finished top 6 in the country, which was a big deal at the time.

We just kind of carried that over, and we went to high school basketball, and we had a great run in high school every year with a group that never had been to a state championship. We went to seven of the next states. Then we won the SoCon tournament.

If we hadn't done all that, from AAU and then to high school, probably would have done something different because we know basketball is a tournament sport. I don't know if I did it with that in mind. I probably did it to have a little fun and figure it out. You got to be able to win at the end of the season, and we've shown with what we do you can do that.

Q. Second question, how far does your relationship go back with Duke Miles and outside of the coach/player relationship, what is it like seeing him have tournament success in this region?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, Duke beat us in the state championship game. We were a top-25 team in the country, and so were they. He was a really good player. I know his mom, know his dad. I'm pulling for him.

He was one of the players I thought was really underrated coming out of high school. He's one of the best finishers there is around the basket. One thing about Duke, he's going to think he's the best player on the floor no matter what, and I'm saying that in a positive way.

Q. Bucky, when you put this team together a year ago or less than a year ago, you don't know how it's all going to work together and how it's all going to fit. Coaches love to say, oh, we're connected, but how did this team get so connected in such a short period of time?

BUCKY McMILLAN: That's a good question. It feels like when coaches win, everything is great. Oh, we got great kids, right? Oh, we've just got great leadership. Then when teams lose, it's just like, we're missing our leadership, you know?

This team has really been a joy to coach in terms of they're good people. Not a lot of these players were the key guy on their team at their last stop. It was foreign to a lot of these players, but they really are good dudes. Any problems we have, these guys are sweethearts. Like, I've

had more problems with guys at Samford that I love. These guys are really nice guys.

I think they were able to come together because they were good people. They have good families. When things would go awry, they were able to stay together. I think in college basketball everybody is pretty good at the start of the season, you know, and then all of a sudden adversity hits, playing time hits, and we lose a game, mad at the coach, it's all about me, selfishness takes over, and the team just tanks. We never had that because we had good people on our team that were about the right things.

I think they're competitive, and they're older. Even though had nobody on the roster, they're an older group. So they want to win because a lot of these guys, it's their last go-around. They've seen what it takes to win. You hear the saying, freshmen want to play, sophomores want to start, juniors want to score, seniors want to win. We have enough older guys that want to win and know that, look, like it or not, if there's an hour and a half scouting report, if we want to win the game, I probably need to focus on this.

Q. Before you came in here some of your players were joking about Rashaun's age. I think they called him Unc. How much has his age and experience at other schools, how much has that led to everything you talked about how great he's been on and off the court?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, he's got no worries. Financially he's getting Social Security right now, so he can just -- no worries when he's out there on the court.

No, he's great. He's mature. I like JUCO players. I really do, because a lot of people that came up and just made it from the start to D1 in the NIL era, they don't really -- they don't have the same appreciation when they get here. So Rashaun was a JUCO player at one point and then Marcus Hill played at Southern Union Junior College, which is a Division II junior college which is an hour south of Birmingham, Alabama. Those are two starters for us. Both Chicago kids.

Because of his age, he's had such a long route to get here. So he's so appreciative. I think the team knows he has the team's best interest at heart. I think his age has helped him with that because he's a very mature player and a mature person.

Q. Bucky, any interaction with Kelvin Sampson in your career? As a younger coach where he's at in his career, has there been anything you've taken or maybe seen in his coaching style that sort of has stuck with you?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, so Kelvin, Coach Sampson -- I'm too young to call him Kelvin, man. He can call me Bucky right now, though. He recruited one of my players in high school, Trendon Watford, who is a really good player. I remember he had just got to Houston, and he was recruiting him just getting there. I just remember talking to him on the phone, and he was talking about, look, we're just getting it going. We're going to get it going. I have no doubt in that phone conversation they were going to get it going.

Obviously I've kept up with them. I kept up with them well before he was there. I just appreciate all the guys that have been in a while for what they did for the game of basketball. Truly the guys that got in a while ago probably didn't get into it for the big bucks, just like us guys who coached in high school.

They've kind of paved the way for what it is today. Things you can take away from them, you know, they're so tough. They play so hard. They do have a culture, and he's obviously -- and I've always -- I pat myself on the back saying this, I've always thought long-term. You could tell he's a long-term guy.

When he got to Houston, you could say they are not where they are now. He probably could have taken some shortcuts to be a little bit better, but they probably wouldn't be to where they got to now. He just kind of thought long-term, and they've had obviously great success.

Q. Obviously you're at Samford when A&M and Houston played each other in the second round a couple years ago a couple of years ago. I'm curious if you watched the game and have any memory of it?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I've looked at the scores of it, the score of it, and I know the game occurred. I have not watched the game. I will probably watch it today, but obviously I know it was an overtime game. It could have gone either way. It was a high-scoring game for two defensive teams.

Q. Just kind of -- I know you haven't been a part of this rivalry or any history there, but does it feel different playing an in-state team in the NCAA Tournament at all?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I haven't really thought of that. It's not an in-league team. In-league it kind of feels different. Out of the league it doesn't really feel that way. I do know the next game is in Houston, so whoever has to take on the winner of this game in Houston, I'm sure one of us will have a home-court advantage.

Q. I know that you guys recently had a Zoom meeting with Alex Caruso, and I know he's been around the program obviously a lot since he last played here, but one, can you talk about what you saw from him as a player for the Aggies for you guys almost a decade ago? Two, what is it like to have a player of that caliber with that kind of pedigree to come back and talk to you guys ahead of the biggest moment of some of their lives?

BUCKY McMILLAN: AC is a winner. I think that's something that you all want your players to strive to be. He's from College Station. So Mitch Cole, who is one of our assistants, who I actually played for, he was an assistant when I played in college, and Darby Rich was a strength coach for us and was with him back then, and Kyle Keller who is an assistant for us now, was an assistant A&M back then, all coached Caruso. I've heard a million Caruso stories.

But I think that the thing about AC is that he was probably an underdog his whole career, and he talked to our team earlier this year. He talked about one of the biggest traits successful players have -- this is not talked about enough -- is he says that to be a great player, to make it at the highest levels, you got to have a self-awareness.

That's not talked about enough. I told my team that the other day. If I was going to play for Texas A&M tomorrow, I maybe could give them one minute, and I need to go pass the ball. You hear all the stuff about being confident and all that all you want, but if I'm going out there trying to score the basketball, that's a real problem. I need to go pass the dang ball. I can be confident in doing that.

What AC talked about when he talked to our team was having a self-awareness and be a star in your role. That's what AC was. That's what we talked with our team about yesterday. You get to this tournament right here, be a star in what you do and have the self-awareness of what you can do, because your teammates know what you can do, and you know what you can do, and you are pretty connected when you do that. I think AC, wherever he has gone, he's been a connector.

Q. Coach, after finishing your game last night and as you prep for your game tomorrow night, what are some strengths that you saw from your team yesterday that you would love to double down on tomorrow night?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I thought we were very focused in executing the game plan. I thought we rebounded, and I thought we treated every possession like it was the last possession. We took quality shots. We were able to play

off of two feet in the paint and not settle for anything, and everybody kind of starred in their role. That's got to carry over.

I thought we played with a reckless abandon and chip on our shoulder that we've played with at times throughout the year. Sometimes in SEC play you're going through war after war. You get beat down a little bit physically. I thought we were fresh.

So we're going to have to come out here tomorrow and put all that together again.

Q. You talked a lot last night about how great the defense played, but how would you assess offensively specifically how y'all did, and is there anything you would like to see be better coming up in this next match-up?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I just thought we were great decision-makers in terms of -- we were great decision-makers. No one was playing outside of themselves, right?

Sure, would I like to make more threes? Would I like to finish every layup? Yes, but I think that as long as we're getting the right shots and everybody is playing within themselves on offense and doing what they can do well, it takes care of itself.

We were a low-turnover team yesterday. Houston scores a lot off creating turnovers, so we got to be tight and tough with the basketball.

The last thing I'll say, we didn't let the last play affect the next play. You know? We really didn't. We didn't allow offense to affect defense. We got to the next play, and that's what it takes in tournament time.

Q. You touched earlier on that phone conversation when Coach Sampson was recruiting one of your players, and you were coaching high school. What does it mean to you to be in this position coaching against a guy like that, who was recruiting your players when you were at that stage in your career?

BUCKY McMILLAN: It's a good question. You know, you just don't really think of it like that, and it's a good question. I get asked that by my mom a lot.

The truth is, I've just never been the coach. I've never known who is on the other end. I don't really look at the game that way. We just do what we do, and I don't really look at it that way. You know what I mean?

I appreciate all those guys for everything that they've done for the game, but at the end of the day, I've never felt we've won a game because I've out-coach or that I've beat the other coach or vice versa. It's really you focus on your guys and getting them ready to roll.

The one thing, I have coached so many games, I probably coached about as many games as anyone in college basketball. Because I coached high school. I coached 200 games a year, the JV, the varsity, all in the summer, AAU all the time. I think a lot of these guys when it's their first or second, third season, it's like you versus that guy. That's really not how it works.

Q. Bucky, Houston leads the country in turnovers per game. Fewest turnovers per game. Has one of the slower paces. What challenge does that present you guys with how much you guys want to force turnovers and speed things up? What has made them so effective at taking care of the basketball?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, they got good guard play. At the end of the day, if you got good guards that helps you handle the basketball, they have clarity in what they do, they're tough. You know, challenges, obviously how are you guaranteed to stop another team? You don't let them get a shot off, right? That means you do turn them over.

I mean, they're strong. They're tough. That's just the way when you get deep in the tournament good guard play is. But, you know, you still got to be us. St. Mary's obviously had good guard play, a low-turnover team, and we were effective in containing those guys as much as we could. We got to be us and let it rock.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports