

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Houston Cougars

Coach Kelvin Sampson

Kingston Flemings

Milos Uzan

Emanuel Sharp

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Houston student-athletes Kingston Flemings, Milos Uzan and Emanuel Sharp. Questions.

Q. Emanuel, there's been a lot of turnover, but I think you might be one of the only guys off of this team still around that played in 2024. Maybe JoJo. What do you remember from that game? Obviously, there's enough you can take from it, but it's kind of --

EMANUEL SHARP: You're talking about the A&M game? Every time we play A&M it's real competitive. Just great basketball. A lot of energy. Just coming out, competing, the same thing we do every game. Just having the right mindset.

You know, they're a great team, great coaching staff. Just make sure we're going out there and playing our brand of basketball and executing the scouting report.

Q. Is it difficult to game plan to scout a team like A&M that plays lots of high-possession, fast, high-pressure like that?

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Yeah, I think playing any team in the tournament is going to be difficult to scout. They made it here for a reason. We have great coaches, so they do a great job of doing it. We try to follow after them. We know they play a lot of people, ten guys before the under-8 media. So they're a hard-playing team. They're going to press full court. But I think our coaches do a good job, and they'll have us ready and prepared for the game.

Q. How do you game plan for the tension between them wanting to play high-possession, fast, and y'all being one of the lower possession teams and wanting to kind of slow things down?

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Personally I don't think we want to slow things down. I think we just play defense so the possessions are a little lower, but we know they want to pick up the pace, pick up full court. And, I mean, we're going to play obviously. They play super hard. As long as we're composed as point guards, guards, and we don't turn the ball over, we should do a good job.

Q. Milos, wanted to ask you about your relationship with Pop and what it's going to be like facing him tomorrow night?

MILOS UZAN: Yeah, that's definitely my brother. We grew up together. But, I mean, we're competitors. So tomorrow we know it's a battle tomorrow. No, for sure, a lot of us have friends that we play against, but when you get in between those lines, it's definitely the score, so we know that.

Q. With the friendship you have with him, have you watched any of the A&M games in passing this season?

MILOS UZAN: Definitely. They play a unique style of basketball. Ten guys. They play press the whole game. It's definitely something that we haven't played yet, so it's going to be exciting.

Q. Emanuel, rare to see so many freshmen have major contributions all year for a Kelvin Sampson team. What advice did you give to these talented freshmen about how to prepare for playing for Kelvin Sampson?

EMANUEL SHARP: Well, I mean, there's only so much you can explain to them before they really get in that fire, but you know, just telling them not to -- the first thing I tell them is that you can't get out of it. Whatever is coming is going to make you better, so just embracing it, not trying to run from it, get out of it. Whatever he throws at you is for the better. He brings the great out of every player that he coaches, as you can see.



You know, they're great guys, great mindsets. They're sponges. They learn every day, and they come to practice with the right attitude. And that's really all Samp wants out of a player, is to have the right attitude every day in practice. These guys have that. They've meshed well with this program, and they're going to get us to the finish line.

Q. I was going to ask, being in this facility, it's almost like legends have been played here. We also saw NBA championship won here in this building. Does that inspire you at all?

EMANUEL SHARP: I'm not going to lie, I've not thought about that. I'm here to play in March Madness.

It's an honor to play in the same gym as some of the greats. I mean, yeah, but I'm not going to lie, I've not thought about that. I'm here to win March Madness games.

Q. Emanuel, you had a great game yesterday, whole game, five players scoring in double figures. We've heard you say that you guys haven't played your best basketball yet. Moving forward, in your opinion, is playing your best basketball something that you guys haven't done yet, or is it excelling in what you are already doing?

EMANUEL SHARP: Yeah, I think we're trending upwards. I feel like yesterday's game was steps in the right path, and I think we're right where we want to be at this point of the season. You know, getting better as the season is coming to an end is perfect for us. We're taking each game in this tournament to get better. We have another opportunity tomorrow, and we're going to use it to the best of our ability.

But, yeah, it's exciting knowing that we still have room to grow. We haven't even reached our ceiling yet, so I guess that's a positive looking forward and seeing how we can get better.

Q. Emanuel, why have you been so good against Texas A&M?

EMANUEL SHARP: I mean, I don't know. Knock on wood. I don't know. It's the competitive nature that brings out the best in all of us. It's not just Texas A&M. It's nothing specific about Texas A&M. We just happen -- I guess coincidences.

But like I said, we come out and we compete. Whoever ends up playing well, you know, that's who that falls upon, but I'm more worried about us winning the game versus

how well I played. I could care less about that whether -- if we get the win. Yeah, I'm excited to play, and I'm excited to see how this team meets the challenge.

Q. Kingston, watching A&M on film, they have a lot of smaller guards that can get in the paint. They draw fouls, get to the free-throw line. How important is it for you guys to play without fouling their smaller guards?

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Yeah, for sure. Coach talked to us a lot about it, playing without fouling, not reaching down to get in the paint. We have Joseph Tugler in the paint, so us reaching down to give him two free-throws at the rim, we have to make them finish over JoJo, over Chris, over Kalifa. When they can do that, they hit that shot, kudos to them. Giving them two free-throws at the -- that's not a good thing.

They get downhill really hard, so trying to stay in front, to the best of our ability, and funnel them to the paint where JoJo is at and don't foul them. Make them make tough shots.

Q. If I could go back to your friendship with Pop. The way it was told to us that he signed here, he was committed. Your decision to withdraw sort of set in motion him looking elsewhere. Is it kind of ironic now that a year later you're here, he's here, just the opposite teams?

MILOS UZAN: No, it is kind of crazy the way it played out. Yeah, no, I mean, he wanted to come here. I mean, it kind of just -- when I decided to come back, it kind of just wasn't enough. It wasn't enough space, honestly. We had already roster set a little bit. He had a good plan B, for sure.

Yeah, it's crazy the way it works out. I'm glad it worked out for him. It worked out for me. Shoot, it's exciting, though. Exciting to play him in this tournament now and go and compete.

Q. (Off microphone)?

MILOS UZAN: I did, man. It's good for my guys right now (smiling).

Q. This could honestly go to any three of you guys, because you guys all had your own individual runs yesterday. Kingston, you hit your first six shots. Emanuel, you hit your first three threes. And, Milos, you were going back and forth between floaters and threes. How do you guys decide whose turn it is to core score? Is it a match-up or the play that you are running? How do you decide who is going to take the

shot?

EMANUEL SHARP: You got it, King?

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: I don't think it's one of us decides. It's kind of just whoever has it going. We get a rebound, we push. No matter which one of us three have it, or if it's Merc or someone else, we're just trying to push the score.

In that team, they're a deep drop. We try to get to the traps that we have. If this game is a little differently -- I mean, obviously, they trap, so when we're getting out there, try to beat the trap and everything like that.

I think it's not one of us that chooses who scores or anything like that. We kind of just go with the game flow and do the best we can to score, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all very much. Appreciate it. We're now joined by Houston Head Coach Kelvin Sampson. We will start with a statement and Coach and then get to questions.

KELVIN SAMPSON: I'll just take questions.

Q. With the way that Bucky McMillan -- his style of play, does that present challenges in scouting and the tournament format that's so short between games?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, the coaches are really good at having their teams play through their vision. Bucky does an awesome job of disrupting the game. That creates a lot of challenges. I don't think anybody in the Big 12 -- I'm not sure we played anybody nonconference. Arkansas, Florida State, none of those schools -- Florida State a little bit, but not to the extent that Bucky does it.

They're committed to their style, and they're really good at it, too. St. Mary's is a good team, and they just dominated that game last night.

Q. Second time in three years you are playing here in the NCAA Tournament, but totally new team for A&M. A lot of new faces for you guys. Is that strange, funny, weird? Do you just chalk that up to that's how college athletics is today?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, I would say the latter.

Q. Kelvin, when you look back at when Pop was going to be joining the program, why was he a good fit? I guess in the limited time you've been able to look at the film of A&M, has he evolved at all? How has he evolved since joining that program?

KELVIN SAMPSON: First of all, Pop is a great kid. He's really talented. Can play the point or the two. He's really a natural combo guard, but he has a high basketball IQ, so he can play the point.

What was the rest of your question?

Q. (Off microphone)?

KELVIN SAMPSON: He got hurt last year when he was at Creighton. He had a bad hip injury that held him out from -- I think that was December, right, when he got hurt, something like that, all the way through the summer.

I remember talking to Frank Haith, and he said he had gotten another injury. I don't remember what it was. I knew that once he got healthy, he was going to really help A&M. Pop is good. He's really talented.

Q. Kelvin, what's the most challenging aspect of teaching players to defend aggressively without fouling?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't know. I've never been able to do it. I'm not very good at that.

Q. You do a great job of being aggressive and defending without sending everyone to the line all the time.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, I don't know if I can say it's a key, because I don't think it's a learned skill. I don't read books or watch other coaches how they do things. I think we all do what we do.

I was a head coach in college when I was 25, so I didn't really get to learn from anybody. I was a head coach in the Pac-10 when I was 31, so I think when you get your head beat in as much as my teams did, early on you just -- it's more of a reflex.

I thought the way that we could balance the playing field with Arizona and Stanford, UCLA when I was a young guy, we just had to be tougher and play harder, play better together.

Things that are hard to do, but you know, we were able to do that. I had some years there where -- the last four years at Washington State, we got to where we could play with all of them, but I think the core tenets, the core values that I have always valued over the years were teaching our kids the difference between playing hard and competing. It's always been important to me. It's hard to do. If it was easy, then more teams would do it. There's a lot of

coaches out there that are really good at it, though.

Q. Earlier today Bucky was telling a story about you recruiting one of his players when he was coaching in high school in Alabama. What's it like for you to be coaching against a guy in the NCAA Tournament where just a few years ago you were all in those roles?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I'm trying to remember who that was. Did he say who it was? Oh, yeah. That's right. That's right. I do remember that.

I think what I remember about that was practice started at before 7:00, like 6:30 in the morning. I got there early before they opened up. My dad was a high school coach for 30-plus years, so I've always had an affinity for high school coaches. To me that's -- you are doing it because you love it. That's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a high school coach. I didn't know I could be a college coach.

Bucky's -- that was a great hire by A&M. He's unique. Of course, all coaches are unique, right? Not everybody is alike, but I think he fits. I was also a big fan of Buzz too. I liked Buzz. I thought Buzz was great for A&M, and I think Bucky will be too.

Q. I see Rashaun Agee is a big guy. I think that's kind of a guy -- a U of H type, big man, tough, the way he rebounds, and his leadership. I wonder if you see the same thing, and what do you see in general when you watch Agee play?

KELVIN SAMPSON: He shoots threes a little better than ours, so we don't have guys that can do that. He is tough. I've never understood the undersized thing, but doesn't matter what size you are. I happened to have watched Barclay in college. He wasn't undersized. He was just better than everybody else.

But he's tough, really good scoring instincts. Perfect find for them, too. Most coaches recruit to their -- through their lens. It's not like somebody has a vote on it. Our big guys are the way they are because that's the way we see the game. We coach our kids the way they play as it relates to how we want to play.

The way Bucky's teams play, they like to get after you, press you, make you miss, make the game uncomfortable, make it unconventional. They're really good at that. All these people that dream of having a team with a 7-footer, he would be wasting his time at A&M.

Q. Yesterday in the first half, I believe four minutes left, Mercy got the ball at the top of the key, and I think

at the time Kingston was 4 for 4 from the field. Mercy was looking to pass the ball to Kingston, and Kingston told him to drive, and Mercy scored a layup, and he got ten points. Can you talk about what you have seen from Kingston as an on-the-court leader as he's grown this season?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Our kids respect Kingston. He doesn't miss practice. He's there every day. He's a wonderful young man. He has a great mother and father, as do all of our kids. I think Kingston handled this the right way when he got here. He was perfectly fine deferring to Milos and Emanuel, Ramon.

He watched those guys win a Big 12 Championship last year. He watched them win a Big 12 Tournament. He watched them win -- what region were we in? Midwest? Midwest. He watched them win the Midwest Regional. He watched them beat Duke. He watched them go all the way to the championship game. So, of course, he's going to come in and try to earn his place. But he did it the right way, which tells me he was raised the right way.

There was a lot of smart people that aren't very smart. They think they are, but they're not. Kingston is a really smart kid that's really smart. He has no insecurities. He's very comfortable in his own skin, and I really respect people like that.

Q. Kelvin, have you learned anything about yourself, coaching a younger team like this?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I think coaches -- we choose the team we coach. It's not like I didn't want to coach this team. I knew that going into the season that Kingston wasn't going to be my biggest challenge. It was going to be Chris, because Chris is not a four. He's never been a four. He's a five.

We've had challenges playing against teams that have three-point shooting four men or fours that really drive, because he's never done that. He's always played 15 feet and in defensively. So we've had to build a system around him. A lot of it early was predicated on when he gets beat, not if. So when he gets beat, guess where (inaudible) has to be.

He's just improved. You know, I was doing a radio interview. Emanuel Sharp has never played on a team that didn't win 30 games. Every team he's played on has won 30 games. 30, 30, 30, 30. Now he's in his fifth year.

But he never played on a team that had freshmen other than Jarace Walker. But Jarace was a four. He was a four. He probably could have been, you know -- when I



was talking to the Pacers before the draft, they thought he had a chance to be a three.

Well, nobody is going to say Chris has a chance to be a three. But Emanuel, Milos, JoJo, and Ramon, especially those veteran players have been around a bunch of winning over the years. I think they've done a great job for Chris. They've been really good for him.

Sometimes the coach gives too much credit for stuff like that. They've been real patient with him on nights when he wasn't very good early. There was a lot of nights that people get conditioned to thinking a team is great or going to be great every year every night. Well, that's not the way it works.

The nights we struggled the most were the nights Chris struggled the most. He had a hard time guarding a guy at the three-point line. He had a hard time getting in the stance. I had to explain to him the difference between the pencil and the eraser. Chris plays defense like the pencil, and I wanted him to play defense like the eraser. He got better and better and better.

You know, we played Dybantsa from BYU twice. There's nobody in America that has a kid like him. He's 6'9", two guard. I haven't seen anybody like him. He lit Chris up some, but Chris had a lot of really good possessions against him.

You get switched off on Darryn Peterson. It was two of the first -- might be the first two kids drafted first and second in the draft. Chris had to guard him on the perimeter. He's never done that before. Just real pleased with his progress.

Chris is six years away from being really good at basketball. Five or six years. Five or six years. Everybody says they're pros. They're not pros. Just because they're getting drafted doesn't mean they're going to be pros. Look how good Kingston is going to be. They're both 19. 19. They're starting on a team that finished top 10 in the country, second in the Big 12. They're freshmen. They were in high school last year.

So as they've gotten better, the more consistent our team has gotten consistent. We're also playing another freshman rotating with Chris, Chase. He's a freshman. Not many teams are playing three freshmen. I don't want to tell you what I really think about that, but it's been -- this year has been our most challenging year with all these freshmen.

You know, most schools live in the portal. There's nothing wrong with that. I mean, we're probably going to be in the

portal this year more than normal, I would think. I don't know. But, you know, when you only have four kids transfer in 11 years, we just always grow our own food. Go out to the garden, pick it. We don't go to the grocery store and shop on aisle 8 or aisle 10 or aisle 12. We just go in the backyard and pick our beans or get our corn. That's what we've always done.

If you do it that way, you're going to get caught young sometimes, and we did this year. I mean, this is -- we played four freshmen a lot of major minutes. Harwell early played a lot of minutes. Chase here lately, a lot of minutes. Flemings and Cenac.

But I give a lot of credit to them, not to me or our staff, although our staff has done an awesome job. I give a lot of credit to our veteran players, because it's been a struggle a lot of nights with those guys, especially defensively.

Q. We saw a clip go viral with you and your grandsons running, and we caught up with Ms. Sampson, and she talked about how Idaho was the fight song y'all learned. I want to know what does having your family being here and what does that mean to you?

KELVIN SAMPSON: She said what about Idaho's fight song?

Q. That it's one of the first fight songs you all learned.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Idaho, Idaho, something, go, go, go. Idaho used to tattoo us, though. They were good. My first year at Washington State Tim Floyd was the coach at Idaho. We're only seven miles away.

So about 10:30 at night somebody knocked on my door. I looked out there. It was Tim Floyd. Back then we had brief cases. We didn't have backpacks. He had his briefcase and wanted to talk ball. He came in and we cleared the table and talked ball until 1:00, 2:00 in the morning.

Two years later he left. Here comes Larry Eustachy. Same thing. He come to practice, sat up there, and watched us practice. After practice I go sit with him, talk ball. Two years later here comes Kermit Davis. Same thing. He come by, watched practice.

Back then the NCAA wouldn't allow you to hire your own kids for camp, if you can believe that. We would hire Idaho's players at Washington State. Idaho would hire our players.

But I go way back with Idaho. I have a lot of respect for people in the Palouse and great people of Moscow, Idaho,

and Pullman, Washington.

The grandkids... I'm old. It's a young man's game. I'll be out soon enough, but being able to -- where with my kids and have grandkids around, it's been the best thing about this job. It's not all the winning. You know, when you win a lot, you win a lot. I appreciate that, but I understand how hard it is to do.

Having Kellen has been a Godsend, because he's so good at it. Some days I just get tired of hollering at Cenac to get in the stance. I just say, You take him, and I'll go. Let's see, what time does Maisy and Kylan get home from school today? Yeah, so I'll go play the afternoon with them and let Kellen handle Cenac and Fleming and Harwell and Chase, all those freshmen.

But everybody needs to do that occasionally, have four freshmen on their team and run the gauntlet of the Big 12 with them. Everybody should have to do that at least once. I did it once (laughing). I don't plan on doing it again, but I did it once.

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