

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Texas vs BYU

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Portland, Oregon, USA

Moda Center

BYU Cougars

Coach Kevin Young

Robert Wright III

AJ Dybantsa

Kennard Davis Jr.

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by BYU student-athletes. If you have a question...

Q. With the kind of challenges you have faced this season with injuries, what things do you think you have done in order to still arrive in the NCAA tournament?

AJ DYBANTSA: I think we just persevered. A lot of teams deal with injuries, a lot of teams deal with a lot of things. We had about four season-ending injuries. We still persevered, still showed we're resilient, still made it this far.

ROBERT WRIGHT III: Like AJ was saying, we just didn't give up on each other, stayed together. I think it brought us a lot closer. We're just rolling at the right time.

KENNARD DAVIS JR.: Off what they said, sticking together, sticking to the game plan. Just growing together as a family.

Q. AJ, I know you and Robert are not that far apart in age. Playing with someone who has been in college longer than you, what have you learned from him this year?

AJ DYBANTSA: Especially him coming from the Big 12, he kind of told me what it was going to be like entering the Big 12 gauntlet. Kind of give me tips on the physicality, on the pace of the game. I think that's why I've been so successful in the league because I had guys like him and other vets on my team to give me some knowledge.



Q. Kennard, how much do you think your role has changed, since Richie has gone out?

KENNARD DAVIS JR.: Yeah, with Richie obviously getting injured, other guys had to step up, including myself. Richie was one of our vocal leaders. I'm kind of a quiet guy, so I had to start being more vocal, obviously picking up some of the things he do.

Q. Did you watch Texas play last night? What were your impressions of the Longhorns?

ROBERT WRIGHT III: Yes, we watched them play last night. We actually watched them while we had our team dinner.

They're a really fast-paced team. They have that big guy, he's really dominant down low. They get guys involved. At the end, No. 12 hit some big shots.

AJ DYBANTSA: Yeah, like he said, we all watched it. Impressed. I was impressed. They play super fast. It's an SEC team, their pace of the game might be a little faster tomorrow. But super impressed with the individual performances by guys. But it should be a good one.

KENNARD DAVIS JR.: Like all the guys were saying, they're impressive. They're obviously an unselfish team, play fast paced. Like coach said, everything is going to be hard to shot, hard to pass, so yeah.

Q. How did the Big 12 tournament help your confidence going into the NCAA tournament, to have a hundred-point game against Kansas State, great defensive game against West Virginia, then go toe to toe with Houston?

AJ DYBANTSA: Yeah, it just gave us some extra motivation playing those extra two games. It kind of gave us -- it's not a live practice -- but I guess some live bodies, what we can do on the offensive side, which was putting up the most points by any team in the Big 12 tournament at 105. It showed that we can hang with bigger teams like Houston, even though we didn't come up with the win, but we were neck-and-neck with them.



Coach said we had our best defensive performance against West Virginia. It helped us a lot.

Q. AJ, your recollections of the games you've played in this building on this floor at that high level.

AJ DYBANTSA: I played here twice, last year and the year before that for Hoop Summit, the Nike Hoop Summit, first year on the world team. We lost. That USA team was kind of tough to win that game. Last year we ended up winning.

I'm one and one here. I'll try to be 3-1 here by the weekend.

Q. AJ, talking about the Nike Hoop Summit, did you have any highlights from your time here in Portland while you were playing here?

AJ DYBANTSA: Definitely some highlights. I think I was the leading scorer for both games while I was on the world and when I was on the USA team. Winning last year was a good one. I think Arkansas played in Portland, I was with Darius Acuff on that team. It was just fun to be able to play on an NBA floor when you're in high school.

Q. AJ, were there any spots in the city that you were able to visit that you liked?

AJ DYBANTSA: In Portland? No, I've been in the hotel the whole time.

Q. (No microphone.)

AJ DYBANTSA: Yeah, we went to Nike. We had practice there.

Q. Earlier Texas was talking about NIL, just this world we live in, how BYU is in the mix for a lot of top recruits because you have the money to pay players. As players continue to be recruited in the NIL era, how much do you think a paycheck matters versus can you develop me and get me to the NBA?

AJ DYBANTSA: It depends on the situation with the player, in my opinion. A guy like me, I came from a great background, great parents. We always had money growing up. For me, my ultimate goal is the NBA. I picked BYU because they had the resources to develop me so I'm most NBA ready to get to the NBA.

But there's a lot of people with different situations where parents might not be as money or stuff like that. Other people might choose money, but if you're talking for me personally, I chose BYU because of the development process. It wasn't really for the money.

Q. AJ, you said repeatedly that Kevin Durant is your favorite player of all time. You just broke his Big 12 tournament scoring record. You're one of the top prospects for the NBA, whether you enter this year or in another year. Who are some of your other favorite players whom you've kind of modeled your game after and studied closely?

AJ DYBANTSA: Yeah, definitely all time, Tracy McGrady. Recently I've been into a lot of Kawhi Leonard, a lot of Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Anthony Edwards, I would say was the film I'm watching the most.

Q. You felt like BYU had the resources to develop you. How are you a better player now than when you first came in, regardless of when you go, NBA ready?

AJ DYBANTSA: In high school I definitely had a lot of bad habits. It probably didn't look like that my senior year. I was a lot bigger, stronger than guys, just a lot more athletic. I was able to get away with a lot of mistakes.

When I came to college, I was getting beat up a little bit. Thank God it wasn't on camera for the most part. I was getting beat up a little bit.

K.Y. just came with me in the film room, along with other guys. We have a great strength coach. Danielle, who's a great nutritionist. So I'm trying to get my body ready and stuff like that. I'm just way more prepared, way more quick-minded, a little stronger, just a little better.

Q. (No microphone.)

AJ DYBANTSA: Some of my bad habits? Off the dome, just taking offensive possessions off. Like I would just sit there, walk a little bit. On the ball wasn't my strong suit. I kind of improved that this year, my ball defense.

Q. Rob, I can't help but think about that tooth that you almost lost. How is your mouth feeling? Have you recovered from that?

ROBERT WRIGHT III: Right now, I got a wire on my tooth right now. I think I'm going to have it for like another month or two. I guess I got to wait to see what the dentist says. It was really painful in Kansas City in the Big 12 tournament. It's kind of died down a little bit. But here and there it just feels a little crazy, yeah.

Q. Having played with Baylor last year in the tournament, is there anything to this kind of getting your feet wet, getting the rust off, the jitters out of the way, which Texas was able to do yesterday? Anything



to that, giving them an advantage?

ROBERT WRIGHT III: No, I don't think so. I think in March every team is hungry and wants to win. It ultimately comes down to who wants it more in these type of tournaments.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time. Best of luck tomorrow.

Coach Young, welcome to Portland. We'll start with an opening statement.

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, just excited to be back in this tournament. I've been pretty vocal about how much I enjoy this tournament, the way it captivates the whole country. Feel fortunate to be here. Portland has been great to us so far just as a host city. I know our guys are excited.

Had a long night obviously after figuring out who we were going to play. But feel good about our preparation and excited for the game tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question...

Q. You've talked about coaching three iterations of your team. What did you hang on to? What did the players hang on to to get through those moments to get to this place?

KEVIN YOUNG: I mean, I've talked about it before, but I'm big this time of year on you can't just make stuff up. You have to rely on the things you've done throughout the course of the season. With our team right now, that season's been shortened just in terms of the iteration of this team that we're playing.

The thing they've sunken their teeth into are things that allow you to win in the postseason, which is defense, which is rebounding, which is playing together offensively. That's what this group's found some success with. So those are the things that we're trying to carry over into the tournament.

Q. 22 years ago you're playing Division II against Kennesaw State in the Peach Belt tournament. Your brother is a Kennesaw SID. Kennesaw's coach is an ex-BYU interim head coach and assistant coach. We fast-forward, you're now coaching BYU, your brother is on your staff. You end up with Kennesaw in the same bracket of an NCAA tournament. Talk about the full circle nature of your career to get to this pint.

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, I mean, careers, especially mine, mine is a windy road. Many of them are. There's no real

straight lines to head coaching roles.

For one, I feel old that that was that long ago. Yeah, I mean, basketball's such a cool sport and the things that you're able to do career-wise, like I said, where you're weaving over here, weaving over there. When I was walking through the tunnel, I saw the Kennesaw State nameplate up there.

It's cool. A lot of good memories I think for me when I think back to, like, my playing days and seeing them now here and I'm here. It's just kind of nostalgic.

Q. You've talked about adjusting to the college game from the NBA. What lessons can you take from last year's tournament run and the success you had?

KEVIN YOUNG: I mean, like similar even to the NBA Playoffs, like, you really just have to focus on what's in front of you. I think that's the biggest and number one thing for me, just focusing on the task at hand and not worrying about what's to come. That cost me, in my NBA life, I think a Playoff series or two, we were looking too far down the road.

Even within the game itself, you know, like the two games yesterday, both teams probably that had a lead felt really comfortable probably at one point. You blink and they're about to lose the game. I think just a constant level of focus on the task at hand is super important.

Then kind of what I said earlier, you can't make stuff up this time of year. I think you got to be really careful with that as a coach. Yeah, sure, you might see some things on film, if we did that, this, it could take away their X, Y, or Z. I think you have to be super careful about doing that and just having the guys trust in what's gotten you to the point you're at.

Q. Any Big 12 comparisons to Texas?

KEVIN YOUNG: I think from a personnel standpoint, yes. You can point that this guy plays like so-and-so, this guy plays like so-and-so in our league, which we have. The big fella, might as well be wearing an Arizona jersey in terms of how he plays.

Like Pope is a great shooter off the dribble. He reminds me a little bit of Anderson just in terms of his shooting piece.

Then Mark and Swain, I think Swain is a lot like AJ, to be honest with you. Just a big wing that can do a little bit of everything.



So I think we're focusing more I think personnel-wise. Style of play, they are what they are in terms of post-up heavy, iso heavy, trying to get to the foul line, that kind of thing. I don't know if stylistically I would compare them necessarily to anyone in our league. In terms of their personnel, we've drawn those comparisons.

Q. You've played in a lot of showcase, stand-alone games throughout the season. How do those experiences benefit your team in a high-pressure situation when you've been there, done that in terms of exposure?

KEVIN YOUNG: I think there's just comfort in the known, you know? I guess part of the reason why we want to play in those games, just to give the guys the experience of playing in NBA arenas, playing in showcase type events where everybody's watching and talking about you. So it's not something that you have to get used to already. I think our guys have a comfort level.

That's the beauty about guys like AJ and Rob. Obviously this is March Madness, it's a one-of-a-kind event. Those two guys in particular have been playing in big events their whole life. I think they're accustomed to it.

Q. I walked back with the players to the locker room, chatting with AJ, and we're being tracked by five cameras the entire time. You've been around this, but how do you make sure that someone like that who is super famous and has a lot of attention, has time to process everything that he's learning as a player on his own and not constantly be in the spotlight?

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, that's a great question. I know the feeling when you're walking around with all the cameras everywhere.

For me that's been a process of just watching him in that spotlight, so to speak. I think he handles it so well that I don't worry about it. I mean, I had a conversation with his dad before the season even started about how much noise was around him and things of that nature.

If I felt like the cameras and this and that were a distraction, I would be a little bit more hesitant to welcome some of that stuff around. Like I said, I think he handles it all really well. He's a mature kid. I don't even call him a kid. He doesn't seem like a kid. He seems like a grown man honestly.

Just the way he handles himself gives me a lot of confidence that he's able to understand that that comes with the territory in terms of the caché that he has. But it never really affects his ability to go out and perform in the

game. In some ways I think it actually helps him perform better, to be honest with you.

Q. You won two Big 12 tournament games, went toe to toe with Houston. How do you feel about the team's identity and how it's grown last week into this tournament?

KEVIN YOUNG: I think the Texas Tech game at home at the Marriott Center was a massive jumping off point for our team. I think the Iowa State game was going to be that. We beat them. I've talked about how poorly we played after that. We had to find other moment. I thought the Texas Tech game was that moment. Gave us a lot of confidence going into the Big 12 tournament.

I think the thing for me I liked the most about the Big 12 tournament was on the first night we broke the Big 12 tournament record for points in a game. The next night we had our best defensive performance of the season. In the night after that, you're in a three-point game in crunch time against a Final Four-contending team.

I think there's a lot of things that gave our guys confidence. That's kind of what I shared with them. I don't really have to say it. I don't think, I know that they feel it, they feel confident. They understand why we were able to do those things. So it's easy to replicate when you know why and you're confident, why your season's kind of turned around.

Q. AJ said part of his decision to go to BYU is that he felt you guys had the resources to develop him into an NBA player. He made a comment about how he had bad habits that were not NBA-worthy. What do you feel those bad habits were?

KEVIN YOUNG: I think the big thing with him that I tried to talk to him about, a lot of it wasn't even basketball related in terms of skill set stuff. It was approach. It was demeanor. It was body language. Like, just a killer mentality. He's obviously super talented. Most times he's the best player on the floor.

I think sometimes early he would show too many reactions. I said, Hey, man, every great player I've been around, there is no reaction. They get the ball, get a bucket. That's their reaction. They get a stop.

I think there was too much looking at the ref or there was too much flailing, so forth. I think he's for the most part nipped that in the bud. That's probably where I went with him straightaway.

I think about halfway through the Big 12 slate, I think he either got tired, hit a little bit of a wall. I said, Brother, wait



till you get to the NBA. You haven't even played a fourth of your season yet. Get used to it.

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I think he's still learning. That's where his age does show, what it takes at the highest of high levels.

In terms of basketball, I think just he's a very good decision maker. Sometimes he has to learn how to do it a little bit more consistently.

Then kind of in that midyear slump as I call it, I thought his defensive energy, there was a lot more to be desired. We challenged him there. Just taking the coaching a little bit harder. At one time I had to pull him aside. I said, Hey, man, when you get to the NBA, if an assistant coach tries to correct you on defense, even if you think you're right, don't say anything. Say, Okay, coach. Some little things like that.

He's so coachable. He really is. That's probably the thing I love about him the most. He's very, very coachable. He wants you to coach him hard. He allows you to coach him hard. He responds to what you ask him to go do.

Q. I asked Sean Miller if there was a player that AJ reminded him of. He said I really don't think there's anyone you can talk about because position-less. Then he mentioned LeBron. What do you think AJ can learn from studying LeBron?

KEVIN YOUNG: If you're going specific to LeBron, I think LeBron, I've had several Playoff series against LeBron. When you go through a Playoff series, that's when you really get to know players. Because all the prep, all the film you watch leading up to the series and then obviously in the series itself, when you do it multiple years in a row, you feel like you know these guys like the back of your hand.

I think the thing that's so impressive about LeBron that AJ can learn from is the decision-making, the passing. He's so gifted in that area.

I think they're very similar in transition as well. Imagine AJ when he puts on about 20-some-odd pounds of muscle, him coming downhill at you like LeBron does. I can promise you, you don't want to be on the other end of that, having seen it in person. I think those are probably the two areas.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very. Best of luck tomorrow.

KEVIN YOUNG: Thank you.

