

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Portland, Oregon, USA

Moda Center

BYU Cougars

Coach Kevin Young

Robert Wright III

AJ Dybantsa

Richie Saunders

Media Conference

Texas 79, BYU 71

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll start with an opening statement from you.

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, congrats to Texas. They played a hard-fought game. Credit to Coach Miller. For them to play in the First Four, travel out here and do all the things that they did, that's impressive. They deserve all the credit. They made all the plays and did a great job.

I thought for our guys, I was disappointed in our first half defensive effort and intensity and rebounding. I thought that's where the game -- we knew the game was going to get won there. That's all we talked about, was the rebounding kind of coming into the game. That was a little disappointing. Not a little, a lot disappointing.

Then I thought our guys fought their tails off in the second half. In a lot of ways it was a microcosm of our season. We faced a lot of challenges this year, just like we did in this game. We battled back. That's the mantra of this group. They never quit. I'm really proud of the group.

It hurts obviously seeing Richie over there in his street clothes. He's been the heart and soul of our program since I took this job. I love him. It's awesome he's up here with these two guys.

With that I'll open it up.

Q. You talked about the rebounding a little bit. Was it



at all surprising to see in the first half where Matas had as many rebounds by himself as you had as a team?

KEVIN YOUNG: Absolutely. Our guys heard about it at halftime. Like I say, it was just super disappointing. We've been a really good rebounding team for most of the year, and in particular in our sort of resurgence at the end of the season.

We knew how good he was. You watch the tape, it's pretty obvious to see it. We challenged our bigs at halftime, not just the bigs, but the guards, too. I thought we did a much better job in the second half.

But yes, extremely disappointing that he basically manhandled our whole team in the first half.

Q. AJ, with that game, what did you like in the second half of what you were able to do to get back in?

AJ DYBANTSA: I just like how we persevered. That's kind of been our identity all year. We are a second half team. Obviously the first half was just shaky with the rebounding. But I'm happy that we fought back. We could have folded and lost by 20, but we tried to cut it down and make a push for the win.

Q. AJ, as your year at BYU comes to a close, how would you describe your time at BYU if this is the end?

AJ DYBANTSA: I love this place. I'm happy I chose here. I definitely made the right decision. I knew coming in I made the right decision. Ever since my visit with the coaching staff, how just a family atmosphere, talking to the academic adviser, everything about this place, I'm just happy.

As far as the season, it's tough dealing with that type of adversity, but I'd rather do it with nobody else.

Q. Richie, I know you didn't play in this game. Why was it important for you to sit up here with the guys?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: I mean, we've gone through a lot together. Tyson Jacques, media rep, that's one of my heroes in life. He asked me to be up here with these guys. I'd do a lot for that guy and these guys.



Just proud of my team for fighting, for staying together. It's been an amazing time being with them.

Q. Coach, there was a lot of hype going into this season for you guys. Being able to be around this team, AJ, what has he meant to BYU basketball? How would you summarize what the season has been, knowing it didn't end exactly the way you wanted it?

SEAN MILLER: I mean, disappointing, no question about it. I mean, we wanted to advance in this tournament. But so does everybody else. That's why you play the game. Like I said, that's why you got to give Texas credit.

In terms of AJ, I think I'll probably look back in 20 years and just have a lot of joy that I was able to be a part of his story, and to do it with guys like Rob Wright who's been tremendous all year. It's been fun watching these two guys, really, all three of threes guys come together.

It is what it is. At one point, this was the highest-scoring trio in college basketball. It's fun for me as a coach to sit back and watch three really good individual talents all come together and figure out how to play off of each other.

Obviously AJ gets a lot of the headlines, rightfully so. I thought there were moments in tonight's game where he looked like that Portland Trailblazer floor should have been down there. He looked like an NBA player because of the stuff he was able to do on the court. Him playing off of Rob, I thought their togetherness really grew throughout the season.

But in terms of AJ coming to BYU, man, it's been tremendous. Egor came in and set the foundation. AJ kind of took the torch. It's cool to hear him say how much he's enjoyed being here. He's going to be a Cougar for life. That's what is awesome.

That's what I told the guys in the locker room. That's probably my favorite thing about coaching, is you get a chance to make relationships for life. They go far beyond the court. Just glad that AJ is part of that, and so are these two other guys.

Q. Right around the final minute of the game, it looked as if you were trying to tell your team to intentionally foul Matas. Was that the case? Did you consider trying to intentionally foul Matas earlier in the game when it appeared he was having a big struggle at the free-throw line?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, we definitely were targeting him at the end. In terms of trying to do it intentionally prior to

when we did it, it's a little tricky because of the rules. You don't want to get intentional fouls, they get the ball back, and things like that. A little nervous about that.

But I thought we executed that strategy well. We just weren't able to come up with enough rebounds and stops to really have it benefit us.

He missed the one, we came down, got a little unorganized in our transition offense. They did a good job of getting back. We had a play drawn up. Our guys kind of went rogue in a good way. I thought they did a good job, Texas did, in their transition defense. Had we have scored there, obviously that would have been a big shift in the game. We were unable to convert that.

Q. AJ, how do you plan to attack the next few weeks as you make a decision on your future?

AJ DYBANTSA: Just talk to my family. My mom ultimately. She kind of is the big boss. She kind of makes the decisions in life (smiling). My family, I mean, just talk to her, see what she says. Y'all will get an answer in the next couple weeks.

Q. Richie, as your time at BYU comes to an end, what do you make of your legacy at BYU? What are some of your favorite memories?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: That's a big question, just in a few sentences.

I mean, it's been a dream come true. I mean, winning here has been one of my just... Looking back, I know for a very long time I'll remember winning here, just the joy that that brought me to be able to put on this uniform.

I think last year, that run was one of my core memories along with the Iowa State game. Don't know if you remember that. That was a really fun one.

Still trying to look back on this year and work through those emotions and stuff. But this has been a dream come true. I've loved it.

Q. When you look back on how this roster was constructed, how do you think that will impact your decisions as you build your roster for next season?

SEAN MILLER: I think it's hard to evaluate this year in terms of that question because, again, I'm not crying over spilled milk, things happen in life, you have to figure it out.

I want to say this before I answer that question. I'm just proud of this group. In terms of the roster construction, it



was constructed in a way that once AJ came, we were building it essentially around him and obviously Richie. That's why Rob was such a humongous get for us. Then we tried to build it around that.

We liked the level of maturity we had, number one. We liked the shooting that we had. I'm reminded of there's just no substitute for shot-making, end of story. We were 4 of 22 from three. We had a hard time shooting the ball the last couple weeks of the season. Our spacing was not where I'd like it to be. It's the cards that we've been dealt.

How this season impacts what we do, I think for sure just shooting is always for me something that there's no substitute for.

In terms of this year's team, it's hard to really judge what we constructed because we were never able to see it with five season-ending injuries, which is crazy.

I think there's not guys like AJ that come around too often, right? I think we tried to build it around a unique player.

Now as we fast-forward for next year, trying to get shooting around Rob and have some dynamic spacing like we did our first year is something that will definitely be under heavy consideration.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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