

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas vs Gonzaga

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Moda Center

Texas Longhorns Coach Sean Miller

Jordan Pope

Dailyn Swain

Tramon Mark

Media Conference



DAILYN SWAIN: He's a huge force down low. Great post scorer. He can also shoot it a little bit. He's a big challenge for us, especially with our big mantra trying to keep out of foul trouble.

They're also a well-rounded team. Our scout has definitely focused on him, but they have a lot of great talents, as well.

I think our game plan will work as long as we follow it, yeah.

Q. When you have looked at the film from the First Four and last night, what has changed with the defense for you? Has it been the physicality, the communication?

JORDAN POPE: Aside from desperation from not wanting to go home, I think just our discipline, our playing really, really hard with a lot of effort compared to a couple games in the past. Making sure we're all on the same page, we're all connected on one string, whether that be we're in gaps, in the right coverage, executing coach's game plan.

I think in the last few games we did a good job displaying that. I think if we keep doing that, it's really tough to beat our team in any game if we're able to execute like that on defense.

TRAMON MARK: Yeah, definitely our effort and execution. I would say our defensive principles, they've stayed the same. It's just like Jordan said, the fact of not wanting to go home, wanting to keep playing, keep this thing going. Definitely our effort and execution has been taken to another level.

DAILYN SWAIN: Yeah, I would pretty much say the same. It's really been our attention to detail with the scouts following personnel. Exactly like they said, just that desperation of not wanting to go home, I think it just makes us that much more locked in.

Q. We haven't really heard you talk about John Clark this season because he's been redshirting. What have you seen from him in practice? What can he bring to the game next season?

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Texas student-athletes. We will at this time open it up for questions.

Q. Tramon and Jordan, could you talk about what is special about Dailyn's play-making ability. Jordan, he found you on a cross-court pass in the corner. What just makes that part of his game special?

JORDAN POPE: Just a player of his caliber and talents that draw so much attention with him getting downhill and scoring drives for himself. I think it opens up a lot of opportunities for his teammates. With a big-time player like he is, being able to have that vision to find open guys whenever defenses do collapse just goes to show his skill set and his willingness to pass, unselfishness, to make the right play, do whatever the team needs to win.

For sure it means a lot that he's able to make those type of plays.

TRAMON MARK: Piggybacking off what Jordan said, first of all, he's a great scorer. When you add that in with his play making, he's unstoppable. He's able to get real deep in the paint, be able to play up to, make a shot or make a pass like he did to Jordan Pope last night for a clutch three ball. Plays like that that we need and he's going to continue to make for us.

Q. Dailyn, I'm sure you guys have been scouting Graham Ike. What challenge does he present to your defense?



JORDAN POPE: He has a big personality. Fun guy to be around. From the moment he steps foot on campus to now, he's had tremendous growth. He's gotten a lot better, especially going against Matas and Nick and obviously Lassina all year, has definitely elevated his game. We've been able to see that in practice. I know the world hasn't probably really been able to see or know what his skill is. He's gotten a lot better.

I think his future will be bright if he sticks to it, for sure.

DAILYN SWAIN: I would say the same. I think he has a really mature approach. Obviously it's not traditional to come to college and redshirt your first year. That's not in everyone's plans all the time. I think he's took it very well. He's taken this year to learn a lot from guys like Matas in practice.

He's just a really fun guy to be around. He's never down, always happy, bringing energy to the gym. I think he has a lot of potential. He's super athletic, high motor. When it's his time to shine, he'll definitely step into it.

Q. Are you familiar with the number 11 seeds history in the recent NCAA tournament? Two of them have made the Final Four in the last half a decade. Do you follow that?

TRAMON MARK: Don't jinx us (smiling).

JORDAN POPE: I mean, I pay a little bit of attention, but not too much. It's March. If the right team starts clicking at the right moment, anything can happen. Any team can win; any team can lose. That's what March Madness is about. It's who is the better team that day of the game, not necessarily who has been better all season.

Like I said, that's what March is all about. Don't jinx us.

DAILYN SWAIN: We all say the same thing, the seed is just a number next to your name on the scorebook. It's just about who is the better team that night.

Q. Not too often, especially in college, do you play three games in the span of a week. Has there been any special preparation in recovery that have been different?

TRAMON MARK: I think our staff has been doing, like, a great job of keeping us healthy all season, especially around this time of the year. We've been doing a great job.

But I think as a group, as players, we haven't really been thinking about it. We're just going out there, playing as

hard as we can. We could have played today if we had to. It's just what we have to do. It's just about us getting better and us just going out there and competing.

DAILYN SWAIN: I would say pretty much the same thing. I don't know if it's our first time doing that this season. I know we've played a similar schedule, maybe three games in eight days, maybe seven, I'm not sure.

Like we always say, we're very grateful to be in this position to be student-athletes in college, get to play these big schedules, have access to all the recovery things that we have, all the travel.

We look at it more of a blessing than a disadvantage, honestly.

JORDAN POPE: Yeah, the same thing that they both said. Our team does a great job in keeping us hydrated, feeding us, recovery, massages, treatments, things of that nature, to help our bodies be able to maintain this level of competition.

But yeah, I mean, we played in Maui three games in three days. There might have been one stretch during conference where we maybe played three games or so in a week, week and a half.

No, we're built for it. We're all high-level, high competitive players. Couldn't ask for nothing better, to be honest, so yeah.

Q. Yesterday obviously the BYU faithful were loud. It almost felt like an away game for you guys. Gonzaga is probably similar. Does it affect the prep for you guys at all knowing you're going back to back and probably be kind of like the de facto away team?

DAILYN SWAIN: Not really. I think this team kind of enjoys being the underdog in terms of, like, fan attendance honestly. We like road games. We like that chippy environment, hostile environment. Even yesterday with the fans, when we came out, kind of they said, Texas men's basketball wasn't as loud as the BYU roar. I think it's just added motivation. We kind of enjoy that.

TRAMON MARK: Like, like Swain said, we play some of our best basketball on the road. It's just like another game for us really. We're just coming out there, no matter how many fans we have, no matter how many fans they have. As players, that's not really what we're worried about. We're just worried about getting a win.

JORDAN POPE: Yeah, since I've been in college, I've probably enjoyed road games or like road games a lot



more for reasons like just being able to shut up the crowd, going to someone else's arena and get a big W.

For tomorrow's game, it probably will be like a road game with all the fans from Spokane, I'm assuming, which will be fun. It's an environment we all want to play for and in. Let's see what happens.

DAILYN SWAIN: If I can say another thing. No matter where we play at, we always hear some Texas fans, for sure, whether that's family or just people who show up. We're super grateful for that. That definitely doesn't go underappreciated at all.

Q. Jordan, the other day you said that you were excited to show a lot of the Beaver fans that might be watching how far you've come since you played in Corvallis. Obviously your role on this team is a lot different. In your own words, how would you describe the strides you made over the last couple of years?

JORDAN POPE: They've been huge. I've been able to grow my game in many ways that I'm not sure I could have if I would have been in different situations and whatnot.

All the Beaver people, Oregon State, that was part of my journey. I was thankful for that. I don't think I would be at the University of Texas without them.

To be able to see my game elevated and transformed to where I was two, three years ago, it's been something special to watch. Given some of the big games and moments I've had, been able to be a part of, it means a lot. I'm not done elevating. I think there's a lot more for myself to get to. I'm looking forward to it.

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

We are joined by Texas head coach Sean Miller. Coach, we'll begin with your opening statement, then open it up for questions.

SEAN MILLER: Well, we're obviously thrilled to still be here in Portland and advancing in this tournament. Obviously we recognize the greatness of Gonzaga's program and the consistency year in and year out.

I think knowing that they're our next opponent, there's a beyond a healthy level of respect between myself and Mark Few, but also their program in general, to some degree. They're the standard of a lot of things. They've really been able to just, in this tournament, withstand the test of time. It just seems like, although the faces and names change, the results are very, very similar from one

year to the next.

We know we have our hands full. We have to prepare to be the best we can be. Hopefully we can continue to move forward in March Madness.

THE MODERATOR: Start up here with questions.

Q. Earlier in the season when you were struggling at the line, you said you doubled down when it comes to pushing the guys to be better at the free-throw line. When it comes to one guy with Matas struggling, do you let him be or do you double down with him as well?

SEAN MILLER: I think we addressed it. But I think most importantly, we started our free throw program, call it stripe work, as far back as early June. It's been a consistent way of working towards making each of our players more comfortable and better from the free-throw line because it's a big part of the game.

If you followed us this year, as you know, we get to the free-throw line and we've shot a very good percentage throughout the entire season.

I think maybe the nerves got the best of Matas towards the end. He's a 70% free throw shooter. It hasn't been an issue. There's been a couple games where he hasn't shot them as well. There's some other games where he was lights out making double figure in a row almost from the free-throw line.

We believe in him. We've kind of talked through it. My hope, like a lot of things in this tournament, as you get a game under your belt, maybe a second game, you start to ease in and feel more comfortable across the board.

I'm very confident that when he gets fouled, hopefully Graham Ike will be the guy fouling him, that he'll go to the line with a lot of confidence.

Q. Last night you talked about how resilient your team is. With all great teams, adversity is going to hit at some point. How do you prepare your team to fight through adversity throughout the season?

SEAN MILLER: Well, we talk about it all the time. I think learning from failure, not that losing a game is failure, but if you kind of look at it from that perspective. Mike Tomlin was a guy that I love to follow as a Pittsburgh Steeler fan, being from Pittsburgh.

He talks about learning from failure. Owning it, number one, which is really difficult. What is it that I can do better?



What is it that I'm responsible for? Then working collectively together, not only with your teammates but a coach and a staff to try to improve or fix whatever that problem or the thing that was more under your control than you realized. How do I get better?

The third is next opportunity, which becomes the next game. You follow that script, you try to do it as a player, a coach, a team. What becomes more difficult and challenging is just the external pressure of, if we lose another game, we may not make the tournament. I played bad. What happens if I play bad again?

Trying to keep the guys focused in that mindset of the present. As you lose, you get back. By the way, if you win, you have to keep moving forward, as well.

That's our way. I think it's served our team well. But at the end of the day I think the leadership that's on our team, the older players, those guys in particular have done a great job throughout the year just being resilient and bouncing back, getting ready for that next opportunity.

Q. I'm sure you're familiar with number 11 seeds having success in the tournament. Are there lessons to be learned from that? Do you talk to the players about that or is that something that's not...

SEAN MILLER: We certainly did. I was on the wrong end of one of those, Wichita State. They had Fred VanVleet, Ron Baker. Those two guys, if they're following March Madness and hear this, they'll shake their head. I was like in disbelief that they were an 11 seed.

If you remember, they were starters on a previous Final Four team. You look at both guys, they're NBA players. Fred, he's going to be like a 10- to 15-year NBA player. I knew right away. We watched them play Vanderbilt in that play-in game in Dayton. They beat Vanderbilt. I knew right away when we watched them and then played them that we were in trouble. It was as if they were the 11 seed and they were the 6 seed.

I do think there's power in playing one game, gaining confidence, being in the flow of the tournament, having one under your belt.

Look, we also flew out here across the country in the middle of the night. That isn't to your advantage. As the tournament goes on, I think we all settle in. There's so much parity in college basketball, that's what makes March Madness March Madness. I think in today's world, there's even more parity than ever before.

The difference between seeds, I don't think they're the

same as they were 20 years ago.

Q. Cougar Nation really showed out last night. It feels like you might have half of Spokane here tonight to cheer on the Gonzaga Bulldogs. How do you prepare your team to go into hostile environments? Is it any different than a regular SEC schedule? Any special preparations you make in practice?

SEAN MILLER: No, look, Gonzaga has earned the right to play in front of their home crowd because of the great season that they had and the seed that's protected. They should be playing in front of a great crowd.

If we move forward in the future and we're playing in Fort Worth or Dallas, Houston, I would think we would have that same advantage.

Our players have played arguably in the best conference in America, certainly one of them. You name the arena, I feel like we've been in it. Non-conference-wise, we were at UConn. You call on those opportunities when you only have each other.

I don't think that this truly feels like a true road game. Look, I've played in front of the Zags before in neutral settings. They travel well. They've got a strong program and a strong following. We have to be good. We have to play well. That's the challenge of advancing in this tournament.

As the circumstances unfold, you just have to always be at your best. I think that's our focus.

Q. Back in the '90s you were an assistant at Miami of Ohio. One of the people on your bench, an integral member of your team, was student manager and future boy band star Nick Lachey. Do you remember him being on the bench at all? Do you know who that is?

SEAN MILLER: Like, I know who Nick Lachey is. Could you run that back?

Q. He was a manager for you at Miami of Ohio for one season. Then he became a boy band star.

SEAN MILLER: I feel like I have great -- an amazing rapport and relationship with managers. I obviously wasn't the head coach. But you're the first person that's ever brought that to my attention. Wow, I apologize. Yeah, I may have to get his number and give him a ring.

Q. Do you or your family watch Love is Blind?

SEAN MILLER: I can't speak for my family, but I don't.



That's really a heck of a question.

Q. I believe this is your fourth year one with a program. Is there an art to year one? What have you learned that maybe keeps you even-keeled as you're going through the inevitable bumps in the first year?

SEAN MILLER: That's really an incredible question. Here's why. What once was as a first-year coach is no longer. Meaning first opportunity I had was at Xavier when I was an assistant coach and became a head coach. I think lack of experience, you learn a lot in that first year.

When I went to Arizona, the circumstances had unfolded where the program wasn't as strong as it had once been for a variety of reasons. You had to take over a program where there's a lot of streaks in place and you're going to be the guy who broke 'em, not in a positive but in a negative way, learn and grow from there.

Recruiting was much different. Just you had to recruit through high school recruiting. If you had a transfer, and there was very few and far between, they had to sit out a year, so you really couldn't bank on that. It was completely different in building it.

When I went back to Xavier, inherited a really experienced team that had knocked on the door of some good things but had never gotten through that door. But we had a good group, an older group, added to it. Magic happened. It was like we were in the Sweet 16 and we were a 3 seed. That doesn't happen a lot in year one. Those are the circumstances.

Here at Texas, last spring I think back, all of us who were first-year coaches last spring, you really don't have a single player because those that are already at Texas had the opportunity to leave. Quite frankly, you could see why they would want to. How you build it, you can go back and forth a million ways. The decisions you're making are so quick.

I think for that, what I really wanted to do in year one at Texas is get one foot on the ground, introduce kind of the culture that we want to build, the way we want to play, who we want to become.

Obviously at the University of Texas, it's about one thing, and that's challenging for the top prize in our game.

There is a progression. I don't know if anybody can do it in the first 6, 9, 12 months that you're at a new program. But that's the philosophy that we're going down, using this year as a springboard to bigger and better is clearly our plan.

I don't think there's anything that can happen to you in year

one that can --

(Temporary loss of Zoom feed.)

-- they've done an amazing job of rebounding at both ends. We didn't want, first of all, to get overwhelmed in that area. We wanted to hold serve. If you really look at the outcome of the game, that's probably the key area we were successful in.

I would say the same thing about Gonzaga. Although the faces change, the one key element for them is they really pound the glass. They limit your second shots. They work hard to get second shots. I think rebounding is always a key statistic playing them. We're going to have to be every bit as good as we were last night against them tomorrow.

Q. You have a lot of mid-major experience. You were at a mid-major previously when Gonzaga was a mid-major, too. Why do you think Mark has been able to elevate them to a Power Four school where we think of them as a modern day blue blood?

SEAN MILLER: I think one day down the road people will reflect back on what he has done at Gonzaga. It's almost like a movie that's too good to be true. How can you have that much success in Spokane, Washington, at Gonzaga for that long?

I remember when I went to Arizona a while back. Obviously Tommy Lloyd would have been at Gonzaga with Mark Few then. I remember really starting to follow them really closely because of their success.

I remember thinking like, God, when they lose him, or when these three graduate, I don't know if they'll be able to replicate what they have.

I think what you catch onto is their ability to build a roster, to recruit internationally, to make great choices that fit who they are, to get it right year in, year out, decade after decade. There's a lot of things they've done in an historic fashion of excellence.

But I don't think people give them enough credit for the talent, the roster building for that long of a stretch of time. It's incredible.

You can really learn a lot of lessons if you just look and follow how they've done it. Again, this year's another great example of a team that has the makings of a big run.

Q. A couple days ago Jordan said he was excited to be able to show some of his former Beaver fans how far he's come as a player. His role on this team is



different than he was at Oregon State where he needed to be the guy every single night. How would you characterize his progression as a player this year, his importance to the team?

SEAN MILLER: Well, my hope is that when Jordan's year ends, that he looks at it, we all do, it was the single-best year he's ever played in college. Even if it's not one statistic, points per game, maybe he averaged more at Oregon State for the reason you talked about, but when you consider the meaning to our team, running the team, being a true point guard, improving defensively, making big plays.

Like the other night, we don't beat BYU if he doesn't make the shot in the right corner. He's done that throughout the year time and time again.

I do think he's gotten better at learning what it takes to be a quarterback and a point guard, not just a guy out there playing. He has great meaning to our team. I think if you talk to the SEC coaches, they would tell you that Jordan Pope is a key factor to our success.

The other part I would just say, just an amazing young person. Excellent student. Gentleman. Great teammate. Very consistent with his demeanor. Sometimes almost too much. I want him to slap the floor. That's not who he is. He's very even-keeled. You really learn to respect that.

But he has great respect from everybody on our team that's affiliated with our program. You really hope to accomplish that type of thing in year one, to the earlier question, where you have an older player that has been through a lot of experience, but he really thrives in that one year with a new staff. I believe that Jordan is doing that right now.

Q. Particularly with your Arizona teams, when you had it rolling, their defensive identity kind of became your identity of what you were capable of as a coach. Now with this constant roster uncertainty, it's allowed people to see some of your range as a coach. How much have you enjoyed that? Were you ever bothered by any perception that Sean Miller coaches only this way?

SEAN MILLER: I wouldn't say I was bothered at all. I probably wasn't aware of it as much. But when I had the opportunity, or the opportunity presented itself for me where I didn't have a team, it allows you to reflect on the different things you wish or given the next challenge, when given that, that you can do things differently or better or change, adapt and evolve and grow.

Ironically, I doubled down and watched a lot of how Gonzaga runs their offense. Then obviously Tommy Lloyd, who was right there at Arizona, just kind of watching how he brought a lot of what Gonzaga did to Arizona, just how they thrived playing with amazing pace and movement and concepts.

I really wanted to move in that direction as a coach, and I did. I'm glad I did. Not that I have any or all answers at all. I'm not saying that. But I enjoy coaching offense right now. I like the way we play. As a matter of fact, as we're at Texas longer, I think we'll play with more pace and more movement. We're here today in large part because of our offense. I think that's what you're alluding to.

Look, I think to win a national championship or be the best, you have to be good at both. I don't think you can just lean real hard on one side. Even Houston, as great as their defense is, it's like historic, don't underestimate what they do on offense. They take care of the ball. They make shots. They run great offense. They do it to complement their defense.

We want to build both. I think that's what we're after.

Recently we played much better defense. My hope, fingers crossed, I hope to God that we can play the same version of that defense tomorrow against Gonzaga. That will give us our best chance.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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