

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Samford vs Kansas

Friday, March 22, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

**Samford Bulldogs**

**Coach Bucky McMillan**

**Rylan Jones**

**Achor Achor**

**Jaden Campbell**

Media Conference

Kansas 93, Samford 89

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Samford head coach Bucky McMillan, Jaden Campbell, Achor Achor, and Rylan Jones.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

BUCKY McMILLAN: We played a great game. We knew what it would be, them trying to impose their will on the inside. We tried to space and play fast and make threes.

I had no doubt in the game if we could get it to single digits, in my mind, under the 10-minute mark, I thought we would win. Kind of been in these spots before where we have big comebacks, we have the juice at the end of the game. I thought we had it. Play here, play there, could be different.

I thought our guys did things pretty good tonight on the offensive end. Weren't great from the free-throw line. Other than that, I can't ask for any more out of these guys. Their effort, their heart.

Kansas is a really hard team to stop. They're really big, hard to stop. We couldn't stop 'em. We couldn't. But our guys were resilient and we were right there till the very end. I think A.J., we get a foul on that, and I don't know if it was, I'm not saying if it was or wasn't, we get the ball in a situation on a five on four, and we're right there.

So my point is the game is that close. See what I'm saying? It can go either way in that spot. We didn't come



out on the right end of it.

I told them in the locker room that I wish I could have helped them more because this is a group I enjoyed coaching so much.

The end.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. Achor, can you talk about what was going on physically?**

ACHOR ACHOR: Yeah, I was cramping. I felt like I couldn't quit on my team. These are my brothers right here, left to right, the guys back in the locker room. I felt like I couldn't give up on them, so...

**Q. Rylan, obviously a tough loss. You got to play in your home state. What was it like?**

RYLAN JONES: Yeah, man, it was something like I can't describe that feeling. I grew up here, 22 years. Chose to go to Birmingham, Alabama, trust in Coach Bucky, these guys. We had a historic season for Samford. To come back here and be able to play in Salt Lake City, I just can't describe the feeling.

I could feel the whole stadium at the end. They were behind us. I had a lot of family and friends, Utah family, Utah State family, Logan High, Olympus, everybody supporting. I wish we could have got it done one more time in front of all these people.

**Q. Jaden, what is it about Bucky ball that let you guys know you weren't out of it despite being down 22?**

JADEN CAMPBELL: When we play Bucky ball, it's all about trusting each other. We knew if we continued to play hard, we'll eventually make some shots. We wanted to keep up the pace to try to give us the best opportunity we could to come back. We fell short, unfortunately.

I'm glad I was able to do it with the guys next to me.



THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse our student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach.

**Q. That's an example of what this week has been like, an experience. What they did to come back, that kind of defines your season.**

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, I mean, I think our guys really believed they were going to win. I even felt at halftime, if you would have asked me, I was very confident we were going to win. Then when we cut it, we had all the momentum, I thought we'd win. When we didn't win, I was shocked we didn't win.

I think that's how they felt. That's not a -- Kansas is a very good basketball team, well-coached, great players, we know that. That's just a response to how these guys are. They just kind of find ways. The way they practice, they go at each other so hard.

I hurt for them. What you saw there is something that a lot of people won't forget. They're not a group that's going to pack it in. I think no matter what the outcome was, they made our university proud.

**Q. This game had just about everything. A record-breaking season for your program. You've said this is the best team you've ever coached. What are your thoughts on a record season for Samford? How much does this program and school mean to you?**

BUCKY McMILLAN: It's a great season. I mean, I think it's got to go down as if not the best, certainly one of the best teams. I would probably say I don't know too many teams that would have beat this team in the history of our school.

Sometimes it takes a group to break through the NCAA tournament. For the young guys to see it, when you're here next time you're able to advance. I do think we'll be back here. I do think we'll win here.

You'll see this. In this tournament, like, Kansas may make a run, you never know. It's kind of survive and advance. We came up a little bit short. But these guys will always be remembered.

I'll say this about these guys. All these guys came here: Jermaine Marshall, Jaden Campbell, A.J. Staton. They came here -- A.J. Staton came, trusted it. Jermaine Marshall and Jaden Campbell came here first year when we were 6-13 and like, you know, we lost to an NAIA school. Now they're here playing Kansas. We're a shot away from winning, you know what I'm saying?

That's pretty cool that they got to do that and build this program, get it to where it is.

**Q. I don't know if you checked your phone yet, a lot of people talking about that block. What is your thought on what you saw?**

BUCKY McMILLAN: It was weird because we were in a weird spot with 38 seconds left, the shot clock is at 30. We were at a decision to play it out or try to trap and extend the game. We're used to trapping, putting heat on teams. They got it out and they got a dunk, but it was quick. I can't remember what happened. I think they got a dunk, but it was quick. We had to run the front court.

We came back, end up scoring somehow. You do that so that you have more opportunities for things like that to happen.

I have seen the play. I thought A.J. made an incredible play on it. You know what I'm saying? I'm not faulting the call. Some people can see it different ways. But I was really proud of our guys' ability to go make a play.

At the end of the day A.J.'s recovery there, there is no whistle... There's no whistle, we're going to have a number's advantage to go the other way to advance to round two. That's how close the game was. That's how well our guys played. What was the maximum we were down? We were down by 22. We're going to have the ball there with a great opportunity.

It is what it is.

**Q. What went into playing Achor and Riley at the same time?**

BUCKY McMILLAN: Great question, man. Obviously Jermaine was in foul trouble. We could not combat their size. We played them both together so we could have better matchups. When we do that, it's going to be a little bit more of a halfcourt deal.

Riley played unbelievable. As a freshman in that spot, to come out there and have 15 points and go 4-4 from three. We knew we could do it on the offensive end, but they hadn't played a ton together defensively.

Their size, their fours and fives weren't shooters, so it allowed us to play those guys and use our size to negate some of their size. It helped. It was big. We had to have it from Riley tonight. That's one of the major reasons we closed the gap in the game.

**Q. What did you think of the crowd in tonight's game,**

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**impact it had on this game? In particular did Rylan warn you about this kind of crowd?**

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, I knew if it would be close we'd obviously have our people, but we probably would have Gonzaga's people. That happens a lot in these tournament games, they want to pull for an underdog in that spot.

When we had it going crazy, we talked about it before the game, talked about it at halftime, keep it close to single digits, this crowd is going to be lit in here and the game pressure will shift. There's going to be added game pressure there.

That was too much fun. We just appreciate everybody rallying behind our group.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Thank y'all for covering, man. I appreciate it, everybody, particularly those that came from Birmingham. Really appreciate it. Means a lot to us and our program. We'll be back here. I appreciate, y'all. Thank you very much.

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