

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Yale vs Auburn

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena

Yale Bulldogs

James Jones

August Mahoney

Danny Wolf

Matt Knowling

Media Conference



distance I think your nine games. What's been working for you from deep? Is it just a matter of getting hot or anything else?

AUGUST MAHONEY: I think it's a mixture of just being confident and then also just trusting my teammates. Every lineup we put on the floor there's four other guys that can make a play, so sometimes I'm open and then sometimes I'm getting screens and when I come off screens, they got to worry about the person setting the screen. So I get a lot of clean looks and just credit my teammates finding me in areas that I can thrive in.

Also just trusting my work. I put in so many hours over the years to find myself in positions like this, so why be tentative and why not believe. So whenever I have a clean look, I shoot it with a lot of confidence, and like you said, last couple games they have been falling for me.

Q. Matt, what have you seen defensively on tape from this Auburn team, particularly their ability to defend on the perimeter?

MATT KNOWLING: Yeah, they're really great defensively, their full court pressure, their pressure on the ball, so we just have to be ready to go. Take 'em out of their offense, trust what we do, and be able to run our sets in a good scoring area. They have great defenders, really athletic, great size, great shot blocking, so we have to trust what the coaches are saying and trust our work at the same time.

Q. Danny, what have you seen out of Johni Broome? How do you defend a guy like that?

DANNY WOLF: He's a great player, he has tremendous size. I think it's just the same thing Matt was saying, they're physical, they're going to pressure the ball. We just got to stick with what we do and can't get into foul trouble early and got to trust our defense, got to trust each other. But, yeah, it's going to be a good fight. I'm excited for it.

Q. Matt, you guys are one of the best teams in the country at not turning the ball over. That's something that Auburn really tries to rely on on defense. What's

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the three student-athletes.

Q. I think you guys, by mileage, had the longest trip of any team in the tournament. What was your travel schedule looking like and now since you've been here, how are you all adjusting to being out here?

MATT KNOWLING: Yeah, so we left campus at 6 a.m. -- what day was that? Yesterday. 6 a.m. yesterday. We flew out here, got here, practiced, relaxed at the hotel a little bit, and practiced again today. So it was an early morning and then the three-hour time change is a lot. But we're getting adjusted and we're getting ready to go, so.

AUGUST MAHONEY: Also, we were in Spokane earlier this year, so I think that gives us a comfortability that other teams here don't have. So we're used to the area, we're staying in the same hotel we did when we played Gonzaga. Yeah, the flight might have been long, but we're used to the area and I think that's going to help us.

DANNY WOLF: Yeah, piggybacking off what they said, earlier in the year, and especially last year, we had a really difficult travel schedule non-conference and I think that just gave us a mindset of what's going to be needed. And just having the privilege of being able to charter and being able to spread our legs out on a five-hour flight it's a big plus, especially for tall guys, so, yeah.

Q. August, I know you're generally a three-point shooter, but you've been shooting especially well from



the key to being successful in that area and not having empty possessions a lot?

MATT KNOWLING: I think trusting each other and we've been playing together now three years pretty consistently, so knowing where we want to get the ball and trusting where each other are going to be. In practice we work a lot, we have a drill called Z passing, coming back to the ball, meeting the ball, being strong with it. So just trusting what we do and knowing where each other is going to be at.

Q. August, you won 15 of your last 18 games. What can you say about the confidence of this team and the importance of being a team that is sort of riding a hot streak going into March?

AUGUST MAHONEY: Yeah, our coaching staff did a great job scheduling our non-conference, where we were playing a lot of really high-level teams, so when we got into our conference, we kind of were really prepared for what was ahead, and like you said -- like Matt said, we've been playing with each other for two, three years consistently, so we're starting to jell really nicely now and it's always nice when you're playing your best basketball in March and I think that's where we are and I'm excited to play tomorrow and showcase that.

Q. The conference tournament expansion talks seems to have the offshoot of more power conference teams, making it less Low Majors, Mid Majors. Do you guys have any reaction to that? Obviously it's a dream for schools like Yale to get to this stage. What's your reaction to expansion that might favor more power conference teams?

MATT KNOWLING: I don't really know. I think it's great for a school like us to be able to compete in the Ivy League tournament and have an opportunity to go play in March Madness. That's what we look forward to all year, that's our goal all year. So I think it's good to continue to have smaller schools and smaller leagues be able to be represented in the NCAA tournament. No real other thoughts than that.

AUGUST MAHONEY: For me, year after year in the Mid Major, the small school proves that they can play with the big schools. Every year it seems like there's at least one or two or maybe even three small schools, higher seeds, that not only win one game but make a deep run. So I think that just proves that we belong here and other Mid Majors also belong here. It's a matter of just getting here. It's a dream of all of ours to be here, so it's a pleasure and we're all really grateful for it.

DANNY WOLF: I think especially nowadays that the talent pool in college basketball is so great and it's what makes March Madness special, is getting the platform for these players to shine and prove themselves against these bigger power conference teams. I think that taking away from that would do a disservice to what makes March Madness so special.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss the Yale student-athletes and we'll be back with Coach Jones in just a moment.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

JAMES JONES: We're excited to play in the tournament, excited to be here. Coincidentally this is our second trip to Spokane this year. We were fortunate to play against Gonzaga early in the year, so it's kind of old hat for us and it's a little bit of a familiarity for our team. Again, we're excited and looking forward to playing tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. I know you guys have played Auburn and this Bruce Pearl staff -- not same team, but in the last three years. How much of an advantage is there with that, if any?

JAMES JONES: I'm not certain how much of an advantage it is for us to play this team again. They're really good, they're well coached. The team we played several years ago, they were extremely talented. This team is talented as well. I'm not certain how many pros are on this team, but it's a really good team. They played well together. I haven't digested how long the team has been together in terms of sophomores, juniors, and seniors, but it seems like they have been together for a long time. They run a lot of different stuff and they do it really well. So we'll have our hands full for us tomorrow, but we look forward to the opportunity and the challenge.

Q. You guys have prepped for these moments in your non-conference schedule, traveling up here to play Gonzaga and then Kansas this year. Does that give you an edge kind of at the start of the game? You played against high-level teams and stuff like that. Yeah, how do you feel like that plays into it?

JAMES JONES: We have a veteran crew. We have four starters from last year and over the years, we've obviously played a lot of teams like that, so it gives our guys an

opportunity and a chance to understand how good they can be. This year playing Gonzaga and Kansas we had 15-point leads, I believe, in both games and we led Kansas at halftime. That doesn't happen too often in Allen Fieldhouse. So we feel good about what we're doing and I felt back then when we played Kansas if we got an opportunity to play in the NCAA tournament, that I like our chances playing on a neutral court against basically anybody in the country. We got anybody in the country with Auburn, so we have to be ready to play.

Q. San Diego guys, you got two on your team. What is it about San Diego and why do you recruit San Diego and just talk specifically about these two guys.

JAMES JONES: There's nothing about San Diego that's different than most places in the country for us. We just have to go places and turn over some rocks to try to find kids that are good enough academically and athletically to play for us. Fortunately, for us we found two really good players in the city of San Diego. Yassine and Devon are both tremendous young men. Devon's a sophomore. He hasn't had a great opportunity yet, but his opportunity is coming.

Yassine has done a tremendous job for us. I've listened to every game we've played and a lot of the commentators talk about he could start on a lot of other teams, he just happens to be behind a kid that's the best defensive player in the league. So really good players, really good young men, and they happen to live in one of the nicest places in the country. So that's one reason to go recruit there, because it's the nicest place on the planet.

Q. You mentioned the trip out to Gonzaga earlier this year. Your players also mentioned staying in the same hotel, now the charter flight. What did your travel schedule look like and how much did maybe the game earlier this season help you guys plan for -- I think you have the longest trip by mileage of any team in the tournament?

JAMES JONES: Yeah, for us, this is old hat. Last year we traveled to Hawaii. This year we traveled to Moncton, Canada, to play in a tournament. You don't know where Moncton, Canada, is, do you? Yeah, I was there and I still don't know where it is.

So our travel is -- we don't charter, and to come here on a charter was nice and easy for us. It's just a long flight, is all it was. So it was just like a bus ride to Cornell, basically. But, actually, it's a little bit nicer because all our guys had a full seat by themselves. So it was even nicer than a bus ride to Cornell. So nothing new for us.

Q. You guys have been to the tournament four times in the past -- or since 2016. That 2016 team obviously pulling the upset. What was special about that team and what can this team replicate to take another step in the tournament?

JAMES JONES: I think that the best thing I can say about the 2016 team is that they were really connected. We didn't have as much depth on that team as I think that we have on this one. We had three really good players, Brandon Sherrod, who is on my staff right now, Justin Sears, who was the Ivy League Player of the Year, and Makai Mason, and those three players took turns being the best player on our team.

So we have a little bit of that this year as well with our group. On a given day it's hard to tell who our best player is. So they were very special and they were connected. That was a huge thing in our favor. It was like a home game, though, for us playing in Providence. It was real close to our campus. I actually just rewatched a highlight video from that year and the crowd is all Yale. So I don't know that we'll have that here tomorrow. I hope so.

Q. I don't know how much you've watched the Tigers this year, but they have a couple guys in Chad Baker-Mazara and KD Johnson who like to instigate and get under opposing players' skin. How do you prepare your team for players like that, who like to instigate, like to get in people's faces, and stuff like that?

JAMES JONES: Yeah, we have one guy in our league like that. Actually, we have a team of guys like that in Cornell. So there's Chris Mann and Isaiah Gray. They could just change jerseys and they could be the same guy. So I think that Auburn wants to punch you in the face when the game starts. They want to come after you. So we have to be ready for that. Same thing with teams that we've played in the past. This won't be much of a difference. Our guys have been battle-tested and they'll be ready. But those two young men you talked about directly there, they're very good, they're tough, and that toughness helps the Auburn team to be successful.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach.

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