

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena

Yale Bulldogs

James Jones

Matt Knowling

August Mahoney

John Poulakidas

Media Conference

Yale - 78, Auburn - 76

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

JAMES JONES: Yeah, I don't know if that's the best win in Yale basketball history, but I will tell you that's the best basketball team that we've beaten in Yale basketball history, as far as I'm concerned. Auburn is one of the better teams in the country. I couldn't believe that they were a 4 seed in terms of what they have been able to do with their metrics. Tremendously talented, very-well coached, and in watching this 'em play, I was trying to find out a way and an avenue for us to be successful. I don't know that we went down the avenue I was thinking about, we didn't make free throws and we turned the ball over, but the guys just had enough guts and enough sticking together and staying together to give us a great victory and I couldn't be prouder of my guys. I know everybody says that, but I actually really mean it. I couldn't be prouder and I couldn't love these guys more than I do right now of the.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. John, 28 points. Lights out out there. Talk about how you were feeling in that moment, just the whole March Madness.

JOHN POULAKIDAS: Yeah, obviously it's a great opportunity to be here. I think after I hit my first couple shots, obviously the flood gates opened. But I'm just so



glad that we had this opportunity first and could capitalize on it tonight.

Q. August, Matt, you guys are the seniors on the team that just won your second March Madness game in school history. What's it mean to be those guys?

AUGUST MAHONEY: It's a dream come true. Every basketball player grows up watching March Madness the day they're old enough to know what it is. You see Cinderella stories every year and you see the underdog win some big games. It's a dream come true when you come to a school like Yale to not only make it, but to win that game. And as a senior, this is my last chance. I don't have a grad year. And to do it with this locker room with these guys that each and everyone I love so deeply and I look at 'em as brothers. It's not going to -- it hasn't hit yet, but I'm sure when it's all said and done, I'm going to look back and be really proud. And yeah, it's just really special and I am at a loss for words a little bit.

MATT KNOWLING: Yeah, piggybacking off that, obviously, it's an amazing feeling, but we're not done. We're going to celebrate this one today, but we have more work to do on Sunday. We don't want to stop here. We want to keep going, so....

Q. Beyond what it means for the Yale community, this is the second straight year that the Ivy League champion has beaten a Power 5 champion in the first round of the tournament. What do you think that says about the caliber of play in the league? And then, given they also - when Princeton went to the Sweet 16 last year, how much do you guys kind of pay attention to that and feel like you guys are capable of doing some similar things?

AUGUST MAHONEY: It shows how good our league is and how good we were. Like you said, Princeton made the Sweet 16 last year and we were at home, they beat us in the championship, and each and everyone of the guys in the locker room were just itching to get our opportunity, and our opportunity presented itself. We know how good we are, so we believed -- every single person in that locker room believed that we were going to get it done and we're



not done yet.

JOHN POULAKIDAS: Yeah, we have a very undervalued league. I know everybody saw what Princeton did last year, obviously, and even this year, they had a tremendous season. Cornell almost went up to Ohio State and beat them. So we have a really undervalued league and for us to come into this building today against a top-10 team in the country and perform how we did, I'm very proud of everybody in our locker room.

MATT KNOWLING: I think they covered it. We can hoop and we know that and now to two years in a row we've been able to show the country that the Ivy League can compete with anybody in the country. So to be able to be a part of that this year and to get a win in the NCAA tournament is pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss these three and turn questions to Coach.

Q. I was informed that your guys' band wasn't able to make it, so the University of Idaho's band stepped in. Just kind of what they were able to provide for you guys out there tonight. They got a lot of work in in a little bit of time to be able to be up here today.

JAMES JONES: Yeah, I saw them out there and they had their sheets so they knew the music in terms of what to play. It was great. Having that atmosphere and the people coming out and support us, there's nothing better than that, and we can't appreciate them more than to be Bulldog fans. And a lot of times when you're on the road and you're the underdog, a lot of times the crowd goes in your favor and that helped a little bit tonight too.

Q. I asked the players about what this says about the quality of the league. Can you kind of address that in a similar way?

JAMES JONES: Yeah, I was biting my lip ready to talk about that.

So the league is really good, and because of the metrics and how it works, we don't necessarily get an opportunity to be seen in the same light. We really struggled with schedule. We were fortunate to play Kansas and Gonzaga on the road this year. But I can't tell you the last time we had a quad 1 team play at Yale. So it's hard to get those wins, especially if the only opportunities you have are few and then they're on the road.

So our league plays at a very high level, very good teams, very good coaches from top to bottom, a lot of very good players from top to bottom. So it's no wonder to me why

we were able to do this and why Princeton was able to do it last year. I said this before, that two years ago we won the Ivy League championship and we played Purdue in the first round, but I think that Princeton was the best team in our conference and we were fortunate enough to win that championship.

Last year, I think we were the best team in the conference and Princeton beat us in the championship game and they went to the Sweet 16. So in my mind, we could have had two teams in the tournament good enough to win games. So very proud of our league and what we've done and hopefully it continues to move in the right direction.

Q. What does this say about the grit of this team and really the team culture? You came back from down six with seconds on the clock against Brown, this game trailing by 10, fought back in the game's final minutes. What's special about this team?

JAMES JONES: I'll tell you what, what's great about it is that I was out of timeouts in both games. So the guys were like on the fly and they had to figure it out and a lot of communication, a lot of leadership out there and toughness that you have to have. One of the things we talked about in the locker room before the game was that this is a very tough team that we're going to play. They're going to try to punch you in the mouth and they jumped on us 10-2, I think it was to start, and we were fortunate enough to dig back.

When you're resilient and you have an opportunity to come back in a game, so you kind of start believing, and I think our guys believed that, hey, we can get something done. In the ease in which it took to us score against Brown was nothing short of amazing, just the calmness of my team, and then the way we were calm tonight was really good and speaks volumes of how well they prepared and how hard they work.

Q. Samson, a guy who hasn't played many minutes all year comes in, the biggest minutes of the season, has a key block. What impact did he have?

JAMES JONES: Yeah, Samson's a tremendous player and he's a better person. Someone as good as he is that doesn't have an opportunity to play because of the men in front of him would be very difficult for them to swallow. But Samson comes to being practice every day, he gets extra practice in, and he's going to be ready for us down the road. I look forward to him being a bright and big part of our future.

Q. Now San Diego State's up next. What do you know about them and what does that preparation look like?



JAMES JONES: I know who their coach is. Brian Dutcher is a good friend of mine and a really good coach and done a great job. They obviously were in the Final Four last year. I don't know much about their team yet in terms of who they are and their personnel, but I'll digest them over the next 48 hours and we'll be ready to go. One of my assistant coaches, Justin, has the scout, so he'll give me some pre-work, so I'll take a look at that tonight and we'll have a practice tomorrow and we'll be ready to go.

But this time of year it's really based on what your principles are and what you've been doing all season long. The opponent obviously matters, but we've played against almost everything, so all we have to do is really get ready to tweak whatever we do for San Diego State.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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