

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Long Island vs Arizona

Thursday, March 19, 2026

San Diego, California, USA

Viejas Arena

Long Island Sharks
Coach Rod Strickland

Malachi Davis

Shadrak Lasu

Greg Gordon

Jamal Fuller

Media Conference



JAMAL FULLER: 100 percent, same thing. I feel our non-conference this year, I feel we did a good job. So, yeah, first 64, I feel like it was an achievement.

Q. For any of you guys, did you watch any of the first four games? And did it leave you with any impressions?

GREG GORDON: I watched SMU and Texas -- sorry, SMU and Miami of Ohio. I watched Texas and NC State. They were all good games. I didn't watch Prairie View and Lehigh.

JAMAL FULLER: I think Howard-UMBC game was pretty good. I think both teams played really hard. A couple Canadians on both teams. Just a couple relations.

Q. What's it like to be here and get the chance to play one of the best teams in the country?

JAMAL FULLER: It's a huge blessing to be part of this.

Q. What stands out about studying Arizona? And what jumps out about them when you watch them?

JAMAL FULLER: They don't shoot the ball as great. What stands out is they like to have post entries and stuff like that. So we've just gotta get out there and make sure we cover that the best we can.

SHADRAC LASU: I think we gotta focus on us. We've got the scouting report, and we know what we've got to do. But overall, we've just got to go and play our game and not let them dictate how we play.

Q. Jamal and Greg, when you guys are watching the Selection Show, some teams got sent to Dayton and some teams got to be right into the round of 64. Did you guys feel strongly about either not going to Dayton or going -- do you wish you had gone to Dayton?

GREG GORDON: I feel like we put up a strong enough resumé to know that we belong in the first 64. If we had ended up going to Dayton, we still would have played and we still would have been easily as excited.

Q. This is going to be the first time seeing you guys play. What kind of team should they expect? How would you describe what kind of team are they going to see?

GREG GORDON: A run-and-gun type pace. We get up the court pretty fast. We take pride in our defense. We're going to do our best to not let anyone get comfortable and establish any property in our paint.

Q. Shadrak, the spread is pretty high. There's only been two No. 16s that have beaten a No. 1. What's it like going into a game when you're such a big underdog?

SHADRAC LASU: You've got to go in with the mindset that you're going to win. I think all of our guys have prepared all the way up to this moment for this game, and I think we all got the mindset that we're going to come in and win.

I just think if you come in doubting yourself, you're going to already put yourself back. All of us, we've got dogs from the top of the roster to the bottom of the roster. I think we're confident enough and we know that we're going to come in and do what we've got to do and follow the scouting report and come in and perform.

Q. Curious about some of you guys, what attracted you to LIU, and particularly Jamal coming from D-II and Malachi, I know you were at ASU? How did you



guys particularly wind up at LIU? What drew you there? What led you to it, et cetera?

MALACHI DAVIS: What landed me at LIU was me going to Arizona State, it didn't work out. Coach Strick, he recruited me and got me on a visit. And honestly it felt like home. Me being from Toronto, with the New York atmosphere, with the similar environments and diversity and culture, it felt like home to me.

JAMAL FULLER: For me I had a different journey. Coming out of D-II it was different. I ended up having a conversation with Coach Rod and Coach Dalmar. It was pretty much the same. New York feels like a second home. It feels like I'm in Toronto, and it's a great feeling.

So after that and talking with Coach Rod and getting to see the vision that they showed us, I was okay with committing and coming back.

Q. Malachi, from your brief time that you were at Arizona State, what do you remember about hearing about Arizona and the strength that they have as a program and maybe the rivalry that was going on there?

MALACHI DAVIS: Just that they're a good team. They're well-disciplined, and they're very physical. And they love to play bully ball.

Q. Have any of you guys watched either the UMBC upset or the FDU upset? Is that something that Coach has shown you, or have any of you guys watched those games since you've been the 16th seed. Either the two 16 upsets, if you watched it, and is there anything you can take from those two upsets?

MALACHI DAVIS: It's go hard or go home at this point. If you lose, you go home. If you win, you move on. So I mean, we just try to use that as our drive to, you know, stay focused and stick to LIU basketball and come out with a win.

GREG GORDON: Tobin Anderson, he was my coach at Iona. So I hope that he left a little bit of magic, so I can use it.

Q. This is the eighth time that LIU has gone to the tournament but the first time with Coach Rod. What does it mean for you guys, this group, to be able to get here, kind of, to this spot in the tournament?

GREG GORDON: It means a lot, because, you know, coming here, he started off with three wins, and he just kept increasing. And the school, they gave him time to

improve. And it eventually paid off, which meant a lot to us, because it landed all of us here and landed all of our teammates here. We're just glad that we're able to bring one as the Sharks. It means a lot, honestly.

Q. Building off the question about 16 over 1 seeds, how would you guys characterize just the belief in the locker room right now going up against a favorite to win it all?

GREG GORDON: I don't know if you watched TikTok, but there's a lot of TikToks edits of the Sharks right now. A lot of people are picking us in their bracket to win the national championship.

As much as like I get some of it as a joke -- most of it is a joke, but it definitely stores belief in us. It makes us feel like the world kind of believes in us. So it has given us a different type of drive.

We're not going to come out scared or timid. We're just going to come out and play.

Q. In Coach Strickland talking to you guys in the recruiting process, I mean, he was an incredible basketball player in high school in New York. He was with the New York Knicks. Did he ever talk to you guys about what it's like to be successful in New York as some kind of either inducement to come to LIU, or as he's been talking to you about the chances of winning this game?

JAMAL FULLER: He doesn't really talk about it. I feel like as the days go on, we start to learn. We were at a gym the other day and we found out -- I didn't know he went to Oak Hill, to be honest. Like we're just finding about his journey and learning as we go on. It's kind of like, you get to really see what he did. It's kind of amazing.

GREG GORDON: He doesn't talk much. He's like a guy, like you have to go and initiate conversation with him and get him comfortable enough to really speak. He doesn't like speaking about himself. He doesn't like bragging about himself. He's definitely a humble guy.

Q. Shadrak, you mentioned watching other Canadian players who are playing in those play-in games. As a Canadian guy -- I guess this goes for Jamal and Malachi as well -- how much pride does it give you to see other Canadian players succeeding in college basketball? And how much do you kind of keep up with those guys around the sport?

SHADRAC LASU: I'm going to answer the second part of the question. I don't really know a lot of the guys

personally, but I do -- I do keep watch here and there.

But honestly, like, we're kind of repping a country on our back. It's good to see the guys from Canada are getting exposure. There's a lot of good players in Canada who don't have as much exposure just because they're in Canada. And the fact that they're coming down here and being able to put on for their teams and come to a big tournament like this is really great.

I think it's a sense of pride holding the Canadian flag on our back. Me, Jamal and Malachi, we do it with our heads high. We're just happy to do that and happy to be here, overall.

Q. Greg, what did Tobin, when you were at Iona, did he ever talk about what that upset was like? Have you heard from him this week about it?

GREG GORDON: Yeah, he talked about it. I mean, it was like, I don't want to say it's, like, his biggest achievement in his life because he's had so much other good stuff in life, probably. But I know that game meant a lot to him. He spoke belief into his team before they went out and did the unthinkable.

That's a big feature of it. I just think that was -- he always talked about it and how they never backed down. They came in with just pride.

Q. Greg, building off what you said about TikTok stuff, fins up and all that, fun you guys have had off the court, how much has that helped in the locker room, kind of your togetherness? And is that something that could help make a run in the tournament?

GREG GORDON: Oh, yeah, definitely, I feel like the first fins up is going to send shivers down everybody's spine. I feel like even Arizona would do it. It's such a great movement. Everyone loves it. It's like fun.

So I think it gives us the belief that, no matter where we are, people, they're rooting for us. It definitely helps us a lot.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from LIU head coach Rod Strickland.

ROD STRICKLAND: Just happy to be here. Look forward to the challenge on Friday. I think our guys are ready. We know what we're up against. Just looking forward to Friday.

Q. This is the first time a lot of people are going to be seeing your program play. What should they know

about this team? What can they expect to see?

ROD STRICKLAND: Well, I mean, we're going to play a fast-tempo -- want to get the ball out in transition, dribble-drive kind of offense, drive and kicks. Looking for the best possible shots.

I think we're capable of hitting 3-pointers, but I just think in attack mode. And we're going to play hard defensively, and we're going to compete.

Q. Bringing this team to the tournament, how does this achievement compare to your days as a player? Is it a similar or different type of satisfaction?

ROD STRICKLAND: That's a great question. I'm trying to answer that. I think it's different probably because as a player, you know, that was a comfort level, like, I've been playing basketball all my life.

I think being a coach, that coach bug kind of hit me at the end of my career, after my career. So to be able to kind of transform and be able to lead a group, especially after taking -- I took this program over, we had three wins the first year, seven, 17, then 24.

So it feels good to be able to lead a group of young men and get to them to a point where they're somewhere where they've never been before. And I can see it every day, like, since we got the bid. You can see the excitement. So it feels good to be able to lead young people to get to somewhere where they've never been before.

Q. With the playing career you had, seemed like you could have gone any number of ways with your life after you were done playing. What did hit you about that coaching bug? And you went into a lot of development. What drew you that way?

ROD STRICKLAND: Well, like you said, you could go so many different ways. And I guess you can, but I think I've always been a basketball person. Basketball has been my life.

As a player, after I played, I went and became an assistant coach with Memphis and Kentucky. Then I was an executive in the NBA office. And now being a head coach, I don't know, it's like me trying to conquer basketball.

I think my experience helps me, I can do anything in basketball, any position just because I'm of it. I've been it all my life. That's what I know. That's what I eat. That's what I sleep.

So I think it was just a natural progression after a while.



Q. Arizona head coach Tommy Lloyd earlier this week said that he doesn't know you very well, but he's from the Pacific Northwest and is a fan of your playing time in Portland and stuff. Curious what your thoughts are, initial impressions are of Tommy and Arizona, and just kind of what you know about the team so far?

ROD STRICKLAND: I mean, obviously a great coach. Watching those guys, they're going to be physical. Not a great 3-point shooting team. So they kind of compensate by doing a lot of other things. They offensive rebound. They get out in transition. They're going to play a lot of high-low, a lot of duck-ins.

So I tell my group, we've got to be ready to compete. We've got to be ready for the physicality. We've got to be ready to be tough. We've got to be able to rebound the ball. We have to be able to do -- we have to be ready to do all the dirty little things to win this game.

Q. You just mentioned it about the 3-point shooting for Arizona. But it's similar for you in terms of not taking a lot of 3s. That's kind of unique in today's college basketball, particularly for maybe the smaller schools that are looking to try to overcome size advantage. Why have you guys been so heavily on the 2-point shot?

ROD STRICKLAND: I mean, just, honestly, I guess I feel like teams are shooting so many 3s. So our goal is to guard the 3-point line. And I think we've said all year, let's see if a team can beat us making 2s.

So we try to cover the 3-point line knowing that's what you are looking for. We have the ability to make 3s but we're trying to take the best shot possible. So we're not searching for the 3s, as I know other teams are.

So on the other side of that, defensively, we want to take away the 3.

Q. The first couple of years you had at LIU, was there a turning point in particular? Or what changed, or was that just a natural --

ROD STRICKLAND: No, I think the turning point was the culture. I had to create the culture, and it took a little bit of time.

I took this job in July, four years ago. I didn't really have a chance to recruit, new head coach. So I had to experience some things. I had to surround myself with people who are like-minded. And then obviously the recruiting became better.

I've always said, once we start winning, I think the recruiting will get better and better each year, but I think I just had to create a culture. I had to get the right people around me that thought like me.

Q. Your guys seem very confident -- not like overconfident, but confident, confident in themselves. Only two 16s have ever beaten a 1. Do you like the fact that they're coming in here knowing we have nothing to lose but we're here for a reason, we're not here by accident kind of thing?

ROD STRICKLAND: You have to be confident. You have to be confident. Yes?

Q. Have you guys watched any of the previous two upsets of the 16s/1s? Is that something you want them aware that it's happened before and that kind of thing?

ROD STRICKLAND: I'll say this, have you to be confident. I mean, there's no way you can walk in any game feeling like you're defeated. Our goal from the beginning was to win regular season, win conference, and then get to the dance, and then make some noise. That's what it's all about.

And they are confident. But I'm sure they know what they're up against, and that's a good thing.

Hopefully, I think about that confidence. There's going to be some anxiety with that confidence as well, right? So you've got to feel all of that.

But the bottom line is we've got to go out there and compete. The bottom line is two teams will get on the court. Obviously one is going to win. But we've got to compete.

As far as looking at 1/16 losses, no. We talk about it. I want us to be loose. I want us just to play basketball. Like, we've been doing this all year. I understand the lights and excitement, and they're going to feel some of that, but I just want us to be loose. I want us to play hard and go for it.

Q. It's sort of a question about having success in New York. You were a high school superstar in New York. You were a loved Knick. Is there something especially rewarding for you for having done this particular thing with LIU, from three wins to NCAA Tournament in your hometown?

ROD STRICKLAND: It's special because it's home. Every home game, especially as we start winning, you can see

the excitement in the building. I had a chance to have my 90-year-old mother come to every game.

I've got New York City street legends walking in the building every game. I've got my friends and family. There's become an excitement in New York about this program. So it feels good because I'm homegrown. I'm a big part of the community. Yeah, so it's special. It's definitely special.

Q. Tommy Lloyd said he grew up an hour north of Portland. He said he remembered you playing for the Blazers and really liked watching you. I'm curious if you hear that kind of stuff a lot? Do people say that a lot to you? How do you handle that? Because I know some of the players were saying you don't really talk much about your playing career?

ROD STRICKLAND: I don't. And I think I had a hell of a basketball career. But it's over. I think I protect it more because it's over. I've never been one -- I'm not an accolade guy and all that. I've kind of grown into that since I stopped playing.

But it's not really about me. I know what I've done. I think the older folks know what I've done. These players have no clue. They've got to look on YouTube to understand what happened with me. And I just don't think that's what it's about.

I think I have to give my knowledge and experience as best I can to them, and I want to help them grow. This here now, this is more for me, this is more important for them than me. I've been on this stage before. I've done some things. I've been in the spotlight.

I'm cool right here in the corner. Let's let these guys -- let them have their time and let them do something special, because I remember my days at DePaul. I remember my days in Memphis and Kentucky. They're going to remember this. So this is more about them than me.

Q. I've spoken to coaches recently who have gone on those Cinderella runs in the tournament, had those upsets. And the biggest thing they say, kind of their secret sauce, was just the togetherness in their locker room. How would you characterize at this point in the season how tight knit your group is?

ROD STRICKLAND: They're tight. I think we've grown and grown throughout the year. Like, I had a conversation with one of the players -- we just talked about the beginnings. I told him, I don't know if you totally trusted me in the beginning. He was, like, you're right.

Now it kind of feels like they understand who I am. They understand what I'm about, and I understand them. And I think we've grown throughout the year, and we've become closer and closer.

I think we know all want the best for each other, and I think we're in the foxhole together. Yeah, I think we're in the foxhole together.

Q. You talked a little bit earlier about Arizona. You guys have played a lot of really, really good teams in your four years since you've been at LIU in the non-conference. Curious kind of what makes this Arizona team stand out from kind of some of those other really good teams you've played against, what's different about them, in preparing for them?

ROD STRICKLAND: I mean, I think their physicality. I look at how they played, a lot of high-low, a lot of duck-ins. They got the player of the year in a point guard who is a downhill driver.

But I just think the physicality and the pace, they're trying to get the ball up. I think the whole combination of all that they do.

But we've had some tests this year. I think it was Mississippi State and Georgia. And we played and we competed. I want us to understand that, that we can compete, right? The W and the L will happen as the game goes on. We've got to compete first.

And I think we understand -- we've had some battles with some Power Four or five, whatever you want to call them. So we've just got to compete.

Q. You're here at this sub regional. Coach Pitino is here at the subregional. Can you share with us any good stories from when you were playing for him with the Knicks?

ROD STRICKLAND: Pitino's tough, tough cookie. That's my guy, though. I can share a story. My jersey got retired this year at DePaul University, and it was against St. John's. And I did that purposely. I wanted that day because of me and Pitino's history, St. John's being from New York.

Coach called me a couple of days before the game and said, do you want to travel with us? We'll fly you there and back. I think right there, that says it all about Rick Pitino, that he would reach out and give me that gesture at that moment in time.

So we have a lot of history. I'm a big-time fan of Coach

Pitino. I think he's the Don Dotta of coaching in basketball, as a coach and as a person. I'm a Pitino fan.

Q. Did you like playing on the Knicks for him or was he a hard guy to play for?

ROD STRICKLAND: No, no, I loved playing for him. We had our moments, but Rick Pitino, and I don't know if you guys really understand, Rick Pitino was the first one who started this 3-point shooting. Like, he was the one who came into the league. We didn't shoot as many.

So he was forward-thinking way before everyone else. So he's a tough cookie, but he's a great coach and I enjoyed playing for him.

Q. You guys have gone somewhat viral on social media. And Greg was saying that the first fins up is going to send shivers down everyone's spines. How much has that kind of fueled your guys' excitement and enthusiasm with how crazy all that sensation has been?

ROD STRICKLAND: Yeah, no, I think it's added to it. The fins up craze has been phenomenal. But the great thing about it, when we were 3-and-whatever, they were right there across cheering, fins up.

So full circle, 24 games, NCAA Tournament, I think if you are around New York City, you can see it building. And once we got into the NEC playoffs, it just became a thing.

I heard Nebraska was doing it. They have been a big part of our success, and they've been there from the beginning. And I'm sure they're here and they'll be here Friday morning.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports