

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

Thursday, March 19, 2026

San Diego, California, USA

Viejas Arena

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Anthony Dell'Orso

Jaden Bradley

Tobe Awaka

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Tobe Awaka, Jaden Bradley and Anthony Dell'Orso.

Q. A lot of people are predicting that Arizona is going to go pretty far in the tournament. But one question mark everyone has on that run is just whether or not the freshmen are ready for this big moment. How are you guys, as the seniors, helping prepare them for this?

TOBE AWAKA: I think it's just kind of just telling them one game at a time. Don't try and reinvent the wheel. You guys have been successful throughout the whole season. I think they've done a great job of handling adversity, and just handling the ups and downs of the college basketball season. So just really stay true to who they are and just keep doing what they're doing.

Q. Anthony, you guys are title favorites. How do you not get complacent facing a 16 seed and take every single game seriously?

ANTHONY DELL'ORSO: I think obviously every game is a big game. It's do or die. This team, even though they're a 16 seed they're still a great team. They're able to win and own their spot here. We don't take anyone lightly. It's a business trip and we've got to give every team the utmost respect.

Q. Tommy said at the beginning of the week that you guys are treating this game just like any other one. What's the preparation been like this week getting



ready for the first round?

JADEN BRADLEY: I feel like we had a lot of time. We reviewed the other team, break down a lot of film, go over sets and stuff and personnel. Like Deli said, they're a great team. They won their conference for a reason. We're not going to take this game lightly. We're going to go out there, do what we do all year.

Q. Jaden, how have you seen Brayden evolve throughout the season?

JADEN BRADLEY: Brayden, he's been great for us. Earlier in the year he had a little rough start. And we played some great teams. He's just had to find his flow.

He's been great for us scoring, on the defensive end. And we knew he was going to be that. It just took him a little time to show the world. And excited for him to continue this in March.

Q. You probably have seen looking through the scout and the tape, LIU's game is inside, similar to kind of your game. What do you think that match-up is going to be like? And sort of how does LIU have to beat you at your own game, if you will?

TOBE AWAKA: I think it's going to be exciting. It's going to be fun. Again, it's just sort of keying in on personnel, knowing their tendencies. Obviously they like to play inside, just like us.

It's going to be a lot of paint protection, just making sure that those key guys, you know, their key moves, sit on those, and make sure we're cognizant of all that.

Q. Three seniors, Jaden, I'll ask you to speak for all three of you. You've been down this road before. But are you taking it all in knowing this is your last one and this is going to be special and you hope to make it special?

JADEN BRADLEY: No, not really. I know it's going to be special for the group. I'm kind of putting my personal feelings to the side, doing everything for the team, going out there, taking one game at a time.



We've all been through this, been in March. So the freshmen haven't. So just give them little nuggets. But it's nothing new, nothing special. But just one game at a time.

Q. Anthony, you started out at a mid-major yourself, you played at Campbell. Can you talk about kind of that hunger, maybe, that comes with kind of playing in a mid-major coming into a tournament like this and how now being on the other side, how you're going to I guess play against that?

ANTHONY DELL'ORSO: Obviously coming from the mid-major levels, you understand what it takes to get to this point. That's why we respect the team we're playing. They've gone through a lot to get here, just like we've gone through.

I have always had that kind of chip on my shoulder to kind of prove something to the world. I think that brings the kind of the fire out of my game and gives me the emotion that I can uplift teammates with. And then it has nothing to do with results or scoring or anything like that, it's all just energy.

Q. Anthony, I'm curious, as an Australian player, international player in college basketball, do you keep up with other Australian players around the sport? Is it a point of pride for you when you see them succeeding? Do you watch them at all, or is it not something you're thinking about during the season?

ANTHONY DELL'ORSO: I kind of know who is in it. Some of them I'm closer with, some of them I just know from afar. But they're all great players. It's tough to get here in general. And for guys to make it to where we've made it to, it's a credit to them.

But it's always cool to see people from your hometown and doing well and being successful for the game of basketball and just the country in general. So, yeah, definitely proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Tommy Lloyd.

TOMMY LLOYD: It's great to be in San Diego. We're excited to start off the tournament. Obviously we've been doing our due diligence and, you know, obviously we've got a formidable opponent in LIU. And they've had a great season and we're looking forward to the match-up. And got a lot of respect for what we're stepping into.

Q. What's the biggest growth you've seen from this team since November?

TOMMY LLOYD: Wow, a lot. I mean, we obviously got off

to a good start this season. But the one thing that I'll give this team credit for, I really feel like it's improved over the course of the season.

And it could be young players just gaining experience. It could be, you know, teammates just learning how to play together. But I've seen a lot of growth from this group, from day one. And honestly, I've seen a lot of growth from this team in the last couple of weeks.

One of the things we've tried to strive for is just improve week by week. And that could be a number of ways. That could be in your base defense. That could be adding something here and there.

So a growth mindset is something that we really value, and I think these guys have exemplified that all season.

Q. You've got a lot of production this year out of freshmen. What was your roster strategy there as opposed to like loading up in the portal?

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, for me, it was a simply calculus. The COVID eligibility was kind of timing out. So I just didn't feel like -- two things -- I didn't feel there was going to be as many quality transfers in the transfer portal, for one. And, two, I thought it was going to be overpriced.

And then but the simplest answer for us is, we were able to get involved with freshmen that we really believed in from day one.

I've had the good fortune of playing against Duke a few times, and Jon is a good friend of mine. We played Duke twice last year. At the start of the year, we played them at our place and they got us. It wasn't a great probably well-played game either side, but they came out on top. You might have felt like they were a little bit young but really talented.

We played them at the end of the season. I feel they were young. I just thought they were really good.

And, so, we were able to get involved with some freshmen that we felt could be just big-time impact players in college basketball, no matter what year or what class they were.

Q. Do you expect to keep most of them next year?

TOMMY LLOYD: That stuff all plays out here. We've made a commitment to each other. I'm not just saying this to gloss over any questions, but just to stay in the moment. And we're going to enjoy this experience and stay fully focused on this moment.

And all that stuff is going to take place after the season. There's no reason for us to get emotionally caught up in it now.

Q. Last week against Iowa State, Burries didn't play great, but then he bounced back and played phenomenally well in the championship game. What is special about his makeup?

TOMMY LLOYD: I don't know, I might have to just disagree with you. I'm not trying to be contrarian but I thought we played pretty well against Iowa State. I just think they're really good. And I think they're really hard to play against. And they got off to a good start, 14-2, and we had to battle back in the game.

So I thought there was stretches in that Iowa State game that we played really well. And I thought they played equally as well. And we were fortunate enough to kind of the ball in the last possession and make a shot.

I think the challenge after that was, when you have an emotional game like that, is making sure that you're able to kind of put it away and move forward to are a championship game.

I thought our guys -- obviously we have a lot of respect for Houston. We wanted to get back out there and prove that, you know, we were able to maturely move past the semifinal and get ready for the final.

Q. [Inaudible]?

TOMMY LLOYD: There's a lot of things -- it's like a jet engine in here. My hearing's going. I'm getting a little older.

But that's a great question. Brayden obviously didn't have a great semifinal game. Listen, I'm going to give Iowa State credit for that. Iowa State's really hard to play against. If you haven't played against them a number of times as a player or even a coach, like, it's different. So you've got to acknowledge that.

And he didn't play great, nor did Koa. And they were able to put it behind themselves and bounce back and play great against a good Houston team in the championship game. I mean, those guys are really good players, and they've actually matured beyond their years when it comes to being competitors.

Q. Last time we had a chance to talk to you was on Selection Sunday. We were all still learning about LIU. But now that some time has passed and obviously you're playing them tomorrow, what really stands out

about them?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, you know, they're really scrappy. And they have hoopers. They've done a great job putting together a team that makes sense. They're committed to a style of play that's going to be aggressive, mostly man-to-man defense. They're really good in the gaps and really handsy.

And then offensively, their actions might not be complicated, but they have good individual players, and they put them in situations that they're comfortable in.

We know we're going to have to accommodate for that, and we're going to have to have a game plan heading into the game.

They've got kind of a dynamic forward, No. 33, Fuller, and he's just a really good player. He's leading them in scoring. He kind of scores inside/out. He makes 3s. He's a bigger guy that can kind of handle the ball in certain situations.

He's kind of one of those match-up nightmare guys that we're going to have to make some decisions on.

Q. At times, Rod will put four guards on the floor. What can be difficult about defending that?

TOMMY LLOYD: In the game today, that's not uncommon. A lot of people are playing four guards. At times he will play a smaller lineup.

I mean, obviously the difficulties could be sometimes it spreads you out a little bit. And maybe they have some match-up advantages where you have a guy that's not a super strong perimeter defender guarding a perimeter player.

I know we're built for it. We've been facing it all year. I know our bigger guys are good perimeter defenders. For me, when teams go small, I usually like to double down on going big and seeing how they respond to that.

Q. What update can you give us on Jaden and his wrist, how that progressed through the week?

TOMMY LLOYD: I haven't heard one thing about the wrist all week. So it seems to be in good shape. He's been practicing normal. Nothing on his hand. So he's looked good to me.

Q. You were talking earlier about COVID-era guys, COVID eligibility sort of the assessment for building and kind of how that process goes when you're deciding the guys that you want to target in the

offseason?

TOMMY LLOYD: It happens to a lot of conversations. And honestly, my approach was very simple. I don't have a crazy master plan. The first thing you've got to figure out is, what can you realistically get? You've got to identify that. If you're being inefficient and you're chasing things that either, A, you're not going to be able to attain, or B, aren't going to be good enough for what you want to do, you've got to be able to eliminate those as fast as you can.

You're dealing with situations where it could be a reality to get them. I think that's one.

And, two, you have to make one good simple decision and see where it leads to the next good, simple decision. I think if you're getting out ahead of yourself and you have this master plan, but it's going to take five decisions to get there, good luck getting five decisions in a row right.

So that's the way I approach it. Just very simple, a little bit methodical and with some patience -- some patience and some perseverance and some confidence you're going to be able to figure it out.

Q. You talked a little bit about the balance of the team, the freshmen not playing great against Iowa State but bouncing back against Houston. But the other side is just kind of the maturity and poise that everybody on the team is playing with throughout the season. Every time there's a run, seemed to kind of weather that storm, big opponents, hostile environments. Can you just talk a little bit about that maturity and how you can carry that into March?

TOMMY LLOYD: This group's really steady. This is not a group that gets too high or too low. And one thing we always talk about is, like, putting ourselves in position to be in position. And how do you do that?

Well, you usually do it by executing a bunch of simple things effectively over time. Then that's what builds the platform for runs, is being able to do that.

We don't want to be a team that's overreactive to anything good or bad, and so I just think having that steadiness and having competitive players -- and you get down in some games and you just kind of take a breath and say, okay, let's figure out a way to claw back in this game. We don't need to panic. And then let's get the game close enough to give ourselves a chance to figure it out as we go.

If you seem to have figured it out and you make -- you land a big blow and you're able to make a run on them and have a little bit of a lead, then how can you manage that lead

down the stretch of the game to get the result you want?

And I mean, honestly, that's been our approach. And the guys have been really consistent in delivering on that.

Q. There's a lot of talk about how consistent, mature, steady you guys are. What's the biggest thing you want to see this team unlock right now heading into --

TOMMY LLOYD: Unlock? Nothing. I want us to be ourselves, 100 percent normal. If we are at the point now where we have to start doing stuff we haven't done before, I probably haven't done my job. So we want to get out there -- here's how I'm breaking it down.

The ball's going to go up tomorrow at 10:35 in the morning. We're going to either win the jump or we're going to lose the jump. From there, we're going to figure I get out. Next possession.

We're not going to overcomplicate it. I don't know what our first media timeout is going to be like because I'm going to figure it out when we're in that, based on how the game's going.

Q. We talked to the three seniors that were sitting up here before you came in. How much do you rely on them to let the freshmen know what this is what tomorrow's going to be like tomorrow when the ball tips off?

TOMMY LLOYD: You know, those are great questions. I haven't sensed that our freshmen don't know what this is about. And I told our freshmen, hey, you guys won a state championship? Yeah. Then let's go win another state championship.

And the way you win a state championship, you win a state championship game by game. This just happens to have the word "national" in front of it. But it's no different approach.

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