

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Utah State vs Arizona

Saturday, March 21, 2026

San Diego, California, USA

Viejas Arena

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Ivan Kharchenkov

Motiejus Krivas

Media Conference



MOTIEJUS KRIVAS: I know they had a great season. Before the game, I didn't watch a lot of them. But I knew what's their identity like and how they play. So about that much.

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: Before the game, I didn't know too much. After they beat Villanova, watching the game, they for sure have a strong identity, playing physical, playing quick. And now preparing for them, we obviously know what they're doing.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Motiejus Krivas and Ivan Kharchenkov.

Q. Motiejus, Utah State has obviously been able to win games by controlling the paint but teams that have beat them have beat them to the punch there. What are the keys for you guys to be able to control the paint against the Aggies?

MOTIEJUS KRIVAS: Just keep doing what we've been doing the whole season. And we are paint-oriented team that can make all the 3s when we kick out. So just keep doing what we do.

Q. Ivan, yesterday you tied a season high with 10 rebounds. Is there anything different you did yesterday in terms of making your presence felt around the rim? If so, how do you continue that tomorrow against a good Utah State interior defense?

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: I didn't do anything more different than in any other games. I just seemed to be a little bit more lucky in this game, that the rebounds fell into my direction.

But to keep it going, just go to the offensive rebounds, especially also the defensive rebounds every time the ball goes up. But don't forget the basics of cutting out your guy. The most important thing is that the team get the rebound and not any individual.

Q. How much did you know about Utah State before last night trying to get ready for them? What did you know about them?

Q. When you've got international players like yourselves, you've got freshmen, guys from different backgrounds, how have you been able to come together and create good chemistry, especially with a lot of youngsters involved in this as well?

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: I would say pretty easy, because we all do one thing that binds us together, and that's playing basketball. And the game respects game, and I think that's the biggest respect you can gain from the other teammates, and just clicked from the beginning.

MOTIEJUS KRIVAS: I mean, we're all almost the same age, like, a two-, three-year gap. So most of us have the same interests. So that wasn't hard.

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with an opening statement from coach Lloyd.

TOMMY LLOYD: First off, I want to wish the Pima Community College girls basketball team, assistant coached by Arizona legend Jim Rosborough, good luck in their national championship game here, coming up in, like, an hour. And Coach Roz is going to retire, and he was a great servant to Arizona basketball. Kind of Luke Olsen's right-hand guy for a lot of years and this is kind of a last year in it. Let's send him out on top.

Q. How important is it for you guys to be able to push the pace against Utah State where their defense has sometimes been night and day versus when they get set in half court versus when they're having to run in translation with the other team?

TOMMY LLOYD: I don't feel like it's a Utah State thing in



particular. I think anytime you can push the pace, before teams have set their base defense, it's going to give you advantages.

And so I mean the number one thing is taking care of the basketball, being able to rebound the basketball. That will allow you to do those to push the pace. But I don't think we're going to look to push the pace any more than we normally would.

Q. Have you basically seen every type of defense this season? And then what is the difficulties or challenges that maybe facing a match-up zone that you could see tomorrow?

TOMMY LLOYD: You've seen a lot of defenses. I don't know if we've seen one in particular quite like this. Conceptually there could be some similarities.

I think what they've done a really good job of is being able to change defenses and being able to mix in some presses, and kind of like get you out of your rhythm a little bit.

They do a great job at that. They do a great job of that. To me, we're going to have to get out there and get a feel for it on the court tomorrow on how we can get comfortable moving the ball and moving our bodies and playing against it. Obviously it's got our full attention.

Q. You've touched on this a little bit, but this is a Utah State that isn't a typical 9 seed. They're Top 25 in the adjusted offensive efficiency. I just want to get your initial thoughts on Coach Calhoun's offense and how they may impose problems on your defense?

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, they've done a great job. Listen, I would say this with the utmost respect, I don't know if -- I'm not an expert at where people should be seeded. But from my experience, no matter who is in that 8-9 game, it's always a tough game. You're playing a really good program.

And they happen to win their conference regular season and their conference tournament. So I'm sure they have a gripe. For me, I don't really get caught up in that stuff.

I knew whoever we would be playing in the second round, that they were going to be a great program.

And then you're right, offensively, they've got a really creative system. It's based on a lot of player movement, and they have multiple options within it. And, I mean, there's a lot of people that are doing dribble-drive stuff or ball-screen-centric.

And they're a team that's kind of breaking the mold. And they're doing a great job with their off-ball actions and in multiple screening actions. And then they do a really good job running that.

But they also have players that are good and then opportunistic in the ball-screen opportunities they have. Definitely a unique system, and it's going to present a lot of challenges.

Q. Can you just take us through what last night, today or the rest of today will look like trying to prepare your guys and then what the biggest point of emphasis going into tomorrow is?

TOMMY LLOYD: Obviously after the game, we'll go back to the hotel last night, and I'm sure the guys had a meal and started some recovery. And we met a couple times with the players yesterday, kind of to lay out today and what it was going to look like. And obviously do some introductory scouting stuff.

And then today we have breakfast and you have a film session. You come practice, and this evening we'll go back, I'm sure we'll have another film session. The guys will go to a good dinner. And obviously we'll try to continue to build the game plan and the scouting report throughout the day.

For us, it's kind of a normal -- we're treating it as a normal day, a day-before-the-game type stuff, but day before the game on the road kind of vibe. That's how we're treating it.

Q. If you can talk about Ivan and what he means to the team?

TOMMY LLOYD: Ivan's obviously been a real impact player for us all season long. Seems like he's finding his rhythm on offense a little bit more and finding ways to put up consistent numbers on a nightly basis, which has been really helpful. I mean we knew we were getting Ivan that he was going to be a good player. And I'm glad to see him having so much success.

Q. He's so good in basketball smarts, can you talk about his instincts, because sometimes you don't learn instincts, you just have them?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think instincts are learned, but when did you learn them, how galvanized are they within you as a player? The biggest thing for me is he's fearless. He's fearless and he has a high IQ. And he's able in the moment to utilize those two attributes.

Those are great attributes to have as a basketball player, to not be afraid of the moment and to know what's going on. I think there's a lot of value in that.

Q. Coach Willard talked yesterday about he didn't think Drake Allen got enough credit for how important he is to that team. What have you seen from him watching Utah State, and what do you think about his value?

TOMMY LLOYD: I see a really good player that understands his contributions to the team. He may not have the standout stats or get some of the attention that the other guys get. But his impact on that team and how they run their stuff and how they really play at both ends of the floor is really important.

He's had a great season for them. His experience shows on the floor. Looks like to me he's all about winning. So, obviously, he's getting some recognition now that's probably well deserved.

Q. What has it been like having Liam on staff?

TOMMY LLOYD: It's been great. We might have to rethink the adjoining rooms with the grandkids in the next room over, you know what I mean? I'm joking there.

It's been a lot of fun. It's a lot of fun to have our family together. Obviously Liam's my son, and we have a strong relationship. And basketball's been a part of our relationship ever since I could remember.

So it's fun to watch him grow up as a young man. It's fun to watch him start his family. It's fun for my wife and I to be a part of it. It's been fun to watch him grow professionally as a coach.

And I think he's got a lot of potential in this business. But like anybody else, he's going to have to earn his keep and build it day-by-day.

Q. Brayden said he's not the nervous type. What do you make of his demeanor and the fact that he's not the nervous type before big games?

TOMMY LLOYD: If you guys had the privilege of getting to know Brayden a little bit, I think that would make a lot of sense to you. He's a laid-back guy. But he's focused, he's very focused. He's a guy that definitely has a routine built around the game of basketball, and he kind of builds his life around the game of basketball.

I think he's someone that puts a lot of trust in the work he does, and he's not afraid of the moment. And he has elite

confidence. I think he has elite confidence in himself as a player and as a person.

And it's cool to see a young guy being able to do that without being arrogant. He's definitely a special one. How he played yesterday didn't surprise me at all.

Q. There's just a calmness and a collectiveness that you and the rest of the staff have on the bench and on the sideline. How do you think that translates to the rest of the team and how they play?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, I think it's simple. If you want your team to be poised, I think as a coach, you need to be poised. If you want your team to be prepared, you know, you need to be prepared.

So for me, I don't really complicate it. I'm not trying to make them into me, but hopefully just us being steady and not panicking is comfort for the players.

And they understand we've got a job to do, and it may not always be perfect.

The last thing, if you want your team to be solution-oriented, you better be solution-oriented as a coach. So that's kind of, I guess for lack of a better word, the A=equals-B algebra that I use for how I want my team to play on the court. If I want them to do certain things, I feel like I've got to be able to model that behavior myself.

Q. In terms of team chemistry, cohesion, just how does this compare to maybe other teams or groups that you've led? It feels like they're so close-knit and just understand each other so well?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, I'm not great at comparing one team to the next, because I think we all have this thing called recency bias. And, yeah, this group really does get along. I feel like our other teams have had a lot of that as well.

We have never claimed to be perfect, but by any stretch. But this is a group, we work hard on our culture, and it's a daily thing you gotta fight for. And you're going to have little ups and downs with it because we're all human beings. But if you can work hard to get people on the same page and get them to care for each other, I think that goes a long way to creating a healthy environment.

Q. Jerrod Calhoun said after the game the other day that he really enjoys watching your team and he doesn't necessarily like watching a lot of other teams. What does that mean to you to hear another coach say that, and what do you think maybe other coaches see

when they watch your team?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, I don't want to speak for other coaches. For me, hopefully our team has an identity that when you sit down and study them, you can see the things that we value as a program, and those things stand out. I mean, that would mean a lot to me.

I'm not trying to be an X and O guru or anything like that, but I do love the game of basketball. I love learning. I think I learn every day on this job -- not just in the human side, how you treat people, but a little bit the science side. The game of basketball, I think, is fascinating, and how it's constantly evolving and changing.

But that being said, there's the same-as-ever factor. A lot of the things that are driving winning today were driving things 26, 27 years ago when I was starting in this business. So I love that aspect to it.

And I appreciate Jerrod saying that. To be honest, I haven't watched them play much until this preparation. I've been impressed. You can tell there's been a lot of thought put into what they do. They get their guys to play with confidence and freedom within a structure and a framework that's really effective.

Q. Krivas yesterday had that behind-the-back bounce pass. Asked him a little bit about it and brought up Arvydas Sabonis. That's the king who everybody in Lithuania kind of wants to be. You obviously coached Arvydas' son. How have you seen that sort of big-man style kind of evolve kind of as a direct result of that Lithuanian style of play?

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, I mean obviously Lithuania has had a proud tradition of bigs with the Sabonis brothers and -- the Sabonis family, not the brothers -- but with Domas and his dad, Arvydas, being just two legends of the game. And then Valanciunas, another great big.

Bu another name that I think that really had an impact on big Mo was Przemek Karnowski. Przemek was on our staff for the last couple years. And if you guys remember him, we could always post him up on the right back, right block and he loved throwing that left-handed behind-the-back pass. So when I saw him throw that pass, that's the place my mind went.

It was funny, before the game, I was talking with Rod, -- Rod played with the Blazers with Arvydas, and I don't think he had quite known my connection to the family. When I told him and I'm really close to the Sabonis family.

He was like, man, Arvydas was such a great player, and

I'm sure when Rod saw him throw the behind-the-back pass, his mind went there as well.

It was just a great play by Mo at that time. I think kind of the second half of the year, he's really grown and kind of offensively for us where we could just kind of pop the ball to him in the post and kind of play through him and force the defense to kind of see something different once in a while.

And he's done a great job, and I'm really proud of Mo. He's really grown as a player this season and the exciting thing for me is I think there's still room to grow, I think there's still a lot of growth to be had there.

Q. A lot has been made about your freshmen. But when you're developing a culture, is it sometimes easier to have freshmen that don't know any better come into culture as opposed to guys that may have done it somewhere else?

TOMMY LLOYD: I don't think so. I think it goes to the character of the person coming in the program. And that's one of the things with recruiting, I think you've got to do a great job of.

I mean I work on this simple continuum all the time. Talent versus dysfunction. I don't want to be in charge of a program where I'm just trying to accrue as much talent as I can to overcome the dysfunction that comes with the talent.

I would rather -- let's really attack limiting dysfunction. There's always going to be some because we are humans. So if we can drill down and limit dysfunction, then get talented people that don't have much dysfunction. I think that's the winning formula. That's more important to me than the age.

And even in our transfers, I mean, Jayden transferred, Tobe transferred, Deli transferred, and those are just great guys.

They're just great guys. Have wanted to be part of something bigger than themselves. And then the freshmen, the freshmen are obviously really talented, and they're going to have great futures. But they're also great teammates. It was just a good blend of guys that were about the right things and we were able to kind of put them together.

I don't think we had to necessarily reteach them how to operate or function within a team, we decided to get them all together and then create a culture, for lack of a better word, that allowed them to flourish.

Q. Pitino a couple days ago talked about the age of college basketball and the last three years being just almost the golden age -- he probably didn't say golden age, but it's been fantastic. Would you agree with that, maybe given all the transfers, and it's just gotten better in the last three years?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think so. I think the game's continuing to evolve and improve. And I think one of the things that the rev share and NIL stuff has allowed for is some of these guys to stay in college longer.

With them kind of resetting how they're evaluating international players has allowed better players to come over and participate in college basketball. I think in the next three to five years, I mean, college basketball is going to -- that is going to hit the golden age where not only are freshmen making an impact, but guys that are kind of borderline NBA players are going to stay in college longer, and it's going to make -- I think eventually we are going to have good continuity within our rosters. All these things are going to get figured out, and the transfer portal will settle down.

I mean, that's my hopes and dreams. But again, I'm not going to overthink it. Tell me what the rules are and we'll figure out how to operate within them. That's always been our mindset. I don't spend a lot of time trying to be the lawmaker. I just want to abide by the laws in place and do the best job I can for the program I'm involved with.

Q. When you shouted out the student media the other day, I was curious, had you heard what Phil Martelli said? Did that prompt that? Or was that spontaneous?

TOMMY LLOYD: That was spontaneous. Guys, to be honest, once this tournament is going, I don't follow it as close -- you guys follow it way more closely than I do. There might be a game on TV in the hotel room as I'm preparing our team, but I don't sit back and get immersed in the tournament madness.

I'm focused on playing a good Utah State team tomorrow and I don't have the bandwidth to take everything in. So I don't even know what Phil said. But when I saw those three kids asking questions, I'm like, good for them. That's a great experience for them.

And listen, I could make some jokes about the media today, but I won't, because you guys are actually all great. I don't mind you at all. But it's good to see some young people participate and learn how this thing's done.