

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - St. John's vs Kansas

Saturday, March 21, 2026

San Diego, California, USA

Viejas Arena

**Kansas Jayhawks**

**Coach Bill Self**

**Bryson Tiller**

**Melvin Council, Jr.**

Media Conference

You're coming off the Big 12 tournament last week. How does that help you prepare for these one-day turn around that you're facing here?

BRYSON TILLER: We're kind of used to this environment, playing back-to-back games. It started in Vegas. We just gotta lock in really hard, rest and recover and get prepared for the next game.

**Q. Bryson, you'll be seeing a lot of Zubey Ejofo around the rim tomorrow. What have you seen in the film from him and how can you attack him?**

BRYSON TILLER: Very physical player. We played here. We just have to match his energy and hit him first.

**Q. For Melvin, you've done well getting downhill a lot this season. What do you see in this St. John's team? How do you kind of plan to attack that?**

MELVIN COUNCIL, JR.: The same. Nothing is going to change. Keep being aggressive.

MODERATOR: Any other questions for the student-athletes? All right. You guys are good to go. Stand by for Coach Self.

MODERATOR: Kansas Jayhawks head coach Bill Self. We'll start off with an opening statement.

BILL SELF: Excited to be here. Looking forward to playing St. John's tomorrow. We know it'll be a great test, and certainly they're as hot as any team in the field.



**Q. You and Rick have had long successful careers but kind of on parallel paths without interacting very much. What have you liked over the years about his teams?**

BILL SELF: You know, I think we've only played once, and that was Iona, if I'm not mistaken. From afar, I would say how consistently hard they play and how disruptive they are consistently, and he's done it different ways. He's done it by pressing and zone pressing. He's done it by just man-to-man pressure. He's done it by being one of the first to take advantage of the three-point line. And now he's doing it by pummeling people inside and stuff, too. So he's certainly adjusted to his roster, I think, probably as well as anybody in the game.

**Q. Last night you mentioned the last 15 minutes were a D minus. Having gone back and looked at the game film, what else caused your team to get back into the game aside from being complacent, and how can you prevent a repeat from happening against a physical St. John's club?**

BILL SELF: Well, I think we were complacent. I think we just tried to play -- finish the game, play not to lose. I really think that Cal Bap made some hard shots, too. But we didn't put any pressure on the basket offensively at all the last six or seven minutes.

After looking at it, I don't know that the last 15 were that poor, but the last seven or eight were worse than what I thought the last 15 were. So I certainly hope we're in that position again to improve on that complacency. But I think that happens sometimes in the tournament. You kind of just try to get through the finish line as opposed to staying aggressive all the time.

**Q. And second question, kind of going alongside the first question you got asked. I asked Pitino earlier what makes you such a great coach and he mentioned you're a great talented evaluator, as well as a well-rounded guy that excels both in offense and defense. Earlier in the week you had called him amongst the best there is in the sport. Can you talk a little more about what makes him such a great coach and what you expect to see from his team in just the second time match up against you two?**



BILL SELF: To Pat's question, to me, the coaches that are so impressive to me are the coaches that coached without a three-point line and then became efficient with the three-point line, without a shot clock, then became one of the best with the shot clock. Always evolving with the game. And I think that he's done that as well as anybody, maybe ever has.

**Q. Can you talk about what stands out about St. John's from what you've seen and the challenges they present tomorrow?**

BILL SELF: I would say how hard they play. They don't make the game easy on any possession. If you're taking the ball side out, you gotta work to get it in. If you're taking the ball out full court, you gotta work to get it in. If you're taking the ball out, out of bounds under, you gotta work to get it in. I mean, it's like -- they put pressure on you without risking getting scored on an easy basket.

There's just nothing easy. And over time, it's not going to work all the time. But overtime, you're going to steal three, four, five, six extra possessions a game, and that's the difference in winning and losing a lot of games. So that would be the thing that I think sticks out without getting into any details about offense or defense.

**Q. Bill, maybe 10 years ago it would have been rare to play against one of your former players, but just with the era we're in, how do you grow accustomed to the fact that this could be something you do pretty regularly?**

BILL SELF: You know, we haven't really done it a lot. Yesufu at West Virginia, Udeh at TCU, and you guys could probably help me more with some, but Zuby is the most successful guy that has left and have gone on and been amazing. And of course, we love Zuby. We didn't want him to leave. The we're really happy for his success. We just don't -- we just hope it doesn't come against us. But we love everything he's done and done well. And even though we don't stay in touch, but if I see him play great, I'll still hit him a text and let him know that we're all proud of his success.

**Q. Bill, you've talked about the importance of Bryson tiller throughout the season. What do you need to see from him tomorrow against St. John's?**

BILL SELF: Same thing I need to see from all our bigs. You know, hit first, aggressiveness. You know, get 70 percent of the 50-50 balls. There's a lot of things that our bigs, and when I say "big," our three, four and five, I think that we can do to put us in a better position considering I

know what their threes, fours and fives are capable of and being so good at those particular things.

**Q. Just continuing on Zuby, could you just elaborate a little bit more on, the guy doesn't play very much for you and wants to leave. What are those conversations like in trying to convince him to stay?**

BILL SELF: He was a freshman when we had him. Zuby was a good high school player, but he wasn't a McDonald's guy or anything like that. He played well for us as a freshman, but we also returned -- we were coming off winning a National Championship, and we had a pretty good roster coming back. And then we also had another freshman that was the exact same position that he was in, Earnest Duday. And so those two split time when if we'd only had one of them, they probably would have played 15, 18 minutes. But since we had two, we split that.

So neither one really had a chance to flourish issue. And then we got Hunter if, I'm not mistaken, at the end of the year. The thing that I've been most impressed with about Zuby is when we had him, he was an undersized post. Now he is a complete 4 man. So he can play the 5, but he can also pass, and with what he's done from a skill set and everything. So I would say that's the thing that has been as impressive to me as anything.

I would have loved to have seen him stay. We all wanted him to stay, but with what his goals were, he made a good, solid decision.

**Q. Outside of Zuby, who really jumps off the page as somebody to look out for tomorrow night in regards to preparation for St. John's?**

BILL SELF: To me, they have eight starters. But we played against Dylan the last three years, and so we know how athletic he is, and it's hard to simulate that type of athleticism until you actually play against it.

And then Hopkins, I've never coached against him. But those two I think do as good a job of putting pressure on people off the bounce as maybe anybody we play.

**Q. Coach, Samis had a tragedy this week. How have you and the players supported him, and does your heart break for Samis?**

BILL SELF: Yes. We landed here Wednesday, about -- I may be off a little bit, 4:30 maybe. And by 7, he was on a plane to El Paso because his father was very, very sick. And then he got to El Paso that night, but didn't make it in time to say goodbye to his father. So, yeah, that's so hard for anybody at any age to go through, let alone a

youngster.

I know he's heartbroken. But he came back and is with us now, and we'll certainly do our best to hold him and prop him up and do everything we can to support him.

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