

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Colgate vs Baylor

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Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

Baylor Bears

Coach Scott Drew

Jalen Bridges

RayJ Dennis

Media Conference

Q. Jalen, I know Langston has been banged up for a while and he's been fighting through the end of the year. With him not being available who has to step up on the weekend this team?

JALEN BRIDGES: With a guy as talented or as crucial as playing as Langston I feel everybody has to step up honestly. Everybody is capable of doing it. Everybody's done it before. It will take a team effort to pick up for Langston's loss.

Q. What have particularly the freshmen, Ja'Kobe and Yves, meant to the team this season? And what gives you believe that they still have a lot of really good basketball in front of them for the tournament?

RAYJ DENNIS: Obviously they're super talented freshmen. They've been huge and a huge part to everything we've done this year. And honestly I think throughout the year they've both grown tremendously, I mean physically and mentally.

I really think they're like sophomores, older guys now. That's how I look at them. I think their best ball is ahead of them.

Q. RJ and Jalen, is there somebody on the team who is responsible for setting up the handshake line during introductions? And how intricate can they be? Does everybody have their own version of that handshake?

JALEN BRIDGES: We just do our little clap when we're going out. We have a little rhythm we like to keep. We don't have any -- I personally don't have any specific



handshakes with anybody. I'm going to end up forgetting it. I don't want to be embarrassed. I don't know about him, but I don't have any handshake with anybody.

RAYJ DENNIS: Kind of similar. I think everybody on our team has like different handshakes with different guys. But everybody doesn't have one with everybody. Just kind of depends.

Q. RayJ, how much does this day mean to you, didn't have a shoot-around at the neutral site at the Big 12s. How big is it to get settled in here?

RAYJ DENNIS: It's great, obviously, to be able to shoot around and get a feel for the building before you play. But I think we're more excited about playing and actually getting to roll the ball out whether we have a shoot-around or not.

Q. A lot of first-year or freshman players on this team. How and why have you embraced such a leadership role this season?

RAYJ DENNIS: Starting with the coaches, they've put me in a position that allowed me to be in a position to do that. My teammates just kind of allowing me and listening and being able to allow me to lead them and do things like that.

And then also it helps when you're not the only guy talking, the only guy leading. We've got JB. We've got older guys like Caleb who also take on leadership roles.

Q. Jalen, what does a guy like JTT meant to this team, just everything he's been through personally, but then also having the experience of being on the national championship team and stuff like that?

JALEN BRIDGES: I mean, a guy like John is everything to this program. I think it was very evident on senior night when the whole arena just erupted when his name was called.

But he's everything to us. He's been through a lot, and it's more so the way that he persevered through that. Even when he was hurt, he was probably our hardest worker last

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year. That's honestly special. And just someone who is as wise as him who has been around who won a national championship.

He's also a great leader. So it's great to have a guy like John in the locker room.

Q. Four straight tournaments with a 3 seed or higher. Question for both of you -- Jalen, you've been in the program for a couple of years; RayJ, this is your first year. What is it about Baylor that's enabled the program to maintain such a high level of consistency?

RAYJ DENNIS: The culture, for sure, the culture and the organization that Coach Drew has created over the past 20, 21 years allows his teams to be able to do this year in, year out for sure.

JALEN BRIDGES: I feel it's something about Coach Drew. He doesn't always want the most talented player; he wants somebody who is going to be an immediate culture fit. I feel like, especially with the freshmen that we got and the transfers that we got, that allows to us keep things rolling and keep getting back here.

Q. Jalen, Coach Drew isn't the most-like fiery guy with the media. Is he the same even-keeled way with you guys behind the scenes? And how does he then motivate you guys or what is it about his coaching that has allowed him to have so much success?

JALEN BRIDGES: Coach Drew is honestly the most positive person I've ever been around. I don't think I've ever seen him have a bad day. It's just that contagious energy that he gives off. It just makes you want to run through a wall, honestly. It's really fun. I've had a lot of fun playing for Coach Drew these last two years.

RAYJ DENNIS: I mean, Coach Drew is super energetic, super passionate and emotional. I don't know if I'd use "even-keeled," but it's super fun to play for a guy like that who is super passionate and competitive, the same way the players are.

Q. Looking back on it now, Jalen, having four new guys around you, has it really been a hurdle or did it just kind of come together rather quickly?

JALEN BRIDGES: It really wasn't a hurdle. Guys like RayJ and J Nunn and Yves and Ja'Kobe, it's a credit to them, their work ethic. They wanted to get better, they wanted to learn the system. There was really no hurdle, just guys coming in ready to compete and ready to win.

SCOTT DREW: It's always a blessing, honor, privilege to

be part of March Madness. Really excited for our guys to have a chance to experience it. We have a lot of players, this will be their first time. And in college you dream of being a part of this. So excited for it to begin.

Q. Obviously in Kansas City you all didn't get that day before to get that shoot-around. How much of a benefit is it to get it today, maybe contribute to seeing some shots go down early?

SCOTT DREW: Definitely you hope it helps more than without getting in there. Not only do you have that, then before the game you have the full warm-up allotment time which is great as well. I know our guys are excited to get out there and be a part of this.

And, again, if you ever want to play college basketball, this is the pinnacle, this is what you strive for. Really excited for a couple of our guys that have never had this. RayJ Dennis, it's his fifth year in college, first time experiencing this.

Q. I know you got some questions yesterday about the Louisville opening and you talked about that. But then there's reports that you are going to stay at Baylor. Curious, could you comment on those reports and how challenging is it to navigate that stuff while also trying to focus on the tournament?

SCOTT DREW: I'm really blessed because I've got a great agent, like most coaches do. They handle all that stuff and just let us coach and focus. During the season, that's all I do is spend time focusing on Baylor. And that's all I'm going to say about that.

Q. At the beginning of the year, the storyline was kind of having four new starters and where do you go from there. And looking back, has that been as much of a hurdle as you thought? Or did the guys kind of adjust a lot quicker?

SCOTT DREW: Depends on which game you would ask that question after. But I know the one thing that is exciting as a coach, whenever you have as much turnover, there's a lot of first-time experiences for everybody. And you always remember your first-time experiences more than year two, three, four and five.

So it's a blessing to go through some of this stuff with the guys for the first time. As a staff we can shed some more wisdom, knowledge on what they might be feeling going through. At the same time there's that youthful energy of first-time experience and things.

And that's where the Big 12 conference, like all

conferences are competitive, and you feel it prepares you for the NCAA Tournament. But being a part of the Big 12, there's really no environment you're going to walk into and be intimidated this time of year.

Q. You guys have one of the best 3-point offenses in the country. And then you look at Colgate and they have one of the best 3-point defenses in the country, ranking 11th on KenPom. How do you adjust your strategy for a team that has a good perimeter defense?

SCOTT DREW: First and foremost, each and every game you go into, the shot quality is more important than the actual shot. Whatever the defense takes away, they usually give you something else. And you try to just do your best to make sure that your team's getting the right shots for the team and what they do best.

And at the same time, this time of year it's great playing somebody you haven't played. Everyone's tired of playing conference opponents. You want to play someone that doesn't know every tendency you have and every play call you have. So excited about that.

But Colgate, I mean, they've got four guys, this is their fourth time in the NCAA Tournament, and that says a lot for their program, their coaching staff and what they've been able to do at Colgate.

Q. You mentioned RayJ, his fifth season. How has he embraced that leadership role in his first year with Baylor? Is that what you expected to get out of him when he came into this season?

SCOTT DREW: In recruiting you always hope for the best. RayJ, one of the best things our staff did is identifying his characteristics. From Boise State to Toledo, he had always been a great teammate and great leader.

Same thing with us. Those staffs did a great job in helping develop him. He came into Baylor and has been a servant leader: What can I do to help the team? And the players have really responded well to him because of his attitude. Couldn't be more pleased with him as a leader and a person.

Q. Along those lines, Jalen said that when you're constructing your roster you seem to prioritize culture fit over maybe just raw talent. I'm curious what makes a player a culture fit in your program?

SCOTT DREW: We have a culture, joy, Jesus, others, yourself, servant leadership, guys that want to be coached and want to get better, want to be in the gym and most of all like one another.

If you make the NCAA Tournament you probably have a team that likes one another. And identifying that, parents can understand when you have kids you want them to hang around other kids that make them better and bring out the best in them.

We're looking for the same thing. A team that likes one another to bring out the best in one another. And we want to be around every day. You spend a lot more time in practice than you do actually playing games. So you want to have energy givers and people you enjoy working with.

Q. You've talked about your agent dealt with that one portion of your job. But with this day and age, the portal opening, you're trying to prepare for a tournament game, trying to keep players looking around. How crazy has this week become for a head coach? And is there any thoughts to maybe fixing some of this to make it a little bit more manageable?

SCOTT DREW: I try to stay in my lane and focus on what I can focus on. I know with the portal coming open, every team playing would prefer the portal comes open after season's over because you want to focus on your team. And they come, in our case, Baylor University to play in NCAA Tournaments and have a chance to make a Final Four and win a national championship. And to give your players anything less would be wrong.

So that's why you're locked in and focused on that. But, again, part of our job is always recruiting. So you're always going to spend some time just with the portal, it makes it -- I mean, as you saw, what was it, 450 names in the first day? Whatever. And I'm sure that will keep going up each and every day.

And I understand the flipside, that the teams that are done playing right now want to recruit and want to find out who's staying, who's going. I don't know if I have any right answers. I can just tell you if you're playing now, you want to spend time with your team and not focus on the portal as much.

Q. With Yves Missi, what's that been like molding him and developing him? And where have you seen him grow most on the court and off the court?

SCOTT DREW: Yves, our staff did a great job identifying somebody that not only fits our culture but unbelievable talent. And each and every day you feel like you're seeing a highlight that's a top-10 play of the day possibly in practice. That's exciting.

But he deserves all the credit for putting in the work, being

really coachable. And he's one of those guys you only have to show him once, teach him once, explain it once and he does it. And for someone that's only played basketball for two and a half, three years, being the second-best scoring big in his high school team to now one of the best players in the nation, his future's really bright. Hopefully we get a chance to coach him through the month because every week he gets better.

Q. JTT, what has his presence meant for this team just everything he's been through, but also having been on a national title team?

SCOTT DREW: Thanks for asking about John. Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua is one of the few guys with a national championship ring in college basketball. There's a shirt, Walking Miracle, and literally he is for what he's overcome.

And he's somebody that continues to inspire motivate and lead every day, and even though he's not playing as much as he did earlier in his career, unbelievable leader and somebody that's really helped Yves and Josh every day with his wisdom, knowledge.

But also he doesn't do anything at half speed. Everything he does is 100 percent. And one of the hardest workers you'll ever be around. One of my favorite players I've coached.

He's going to be really successful whatever he does the rest of his life because he's a great young man. Thanks for asking.

Q. What's it say for Langston, obviously he's gone through so much adversity. I talked to him a couple minutes ago. He said God still has a plan for me. What's it say about that, to still have him be able to even lead from the sideline, I guess?

SCOTT DREW: He's obviously been through a lot, but his foundation, spiritual foundation has really helped him. And, I tell you, he's been a great -- I know he doesn't like to be called a coach -- but he's done a great job coaching.

He'll continue to do that, and he gives a lot of wisdom to our freshmen and first-time guys. And everybody looks up to him because they respect how he's handled his injuries, how he's overcome and how he's, regardless if he's played or not played, been locked in to help the team.

Q. I'm curious, this is your 21st season at Baylor. Do you feel in this day and age almost like an anomaly? I know there's other coaches -- Bill Self has been at Kansas a long time. And we've had this kind of a

generation of great coaches retire in the last couple of years. Do you think about that at all? Because it feels like maybe you're the next sort of generation of longstanding coach. Do you think about a responsibility in that way and just sort of what the landscape is like to have a job for 21 years like you have?

SCOTT DREW: Well, first and foremost, really blessed and privileged to work with great coaches and great players, because without them there is no 21 years.

Second of all, your family has to sacrifice a lot. My wife, for nights that you're gone recruiting and how she's raised the kids that allow us to build a program for 21 years.

At the same time, coaches that start to look back usually don't go forward very long. So we're always focused on the next day and how can we constantly improve and get better.

One thing I've always respected since I got into the profession, my dad, Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, always talked about making the game better. I'm on several committees and always tried to help or give thoughts, ideas, inputs, recruiting calendar or whatnot, with the game.

I know -- I think all of us that have been around long enough to start recruiting our players' kids that we need to help make sure that the next generation, it's a better situation for them.

I do appreciate having that opportunity to try to help out. Not saying just because you're around longer you have more answers, but I think experience and sharing that is important.

Q. Have you ever, maybe not getting into specifics, have you ever come close to leaving? And what has kind of pulled you back? I think people here in Memphis might be interested in that because it's a long time ago now, but there was rumblings of 16 years ago the same type of story that popped up yesterday was popping up related to Memphis. And obviously you've been at Baylor all this time. What pulls you back, I guess, without getting into specifics of how close?

SCOTT DREW: I think, first and foremost, I went to Baylor because I prayed about it and felt led to go. At the end of the day, when God says go, retire, whatever he says, that's all I want to do is be in his will, number one.

Number two, Baylor University has always given us a

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chance to compete at the highest level. As a coach, if you love the people you're with and you have a chance to compete at the highest level, that's all any competitor wants.

And I mean when our staff got to Baylor, our goal was to get to Final Fours, win national championships. We've been to a couple of Elite Eights. We won a national championship.

When you get there, also, you realize how blessed you probably are, because injuries and illnesses and whatnot really affect your opportunity to win in March. I mean, that's why it's March Madness and it's not just March, because you expect the unexpected.

We're in the house of the Grizz as well, and that's why they don't play 4-7. If they did the best teams would always win. In a 40-minute game anything could happen.

In the years when I thought we had the talent to win it all, maybe we had some injuries, had some unfortunate breaks, but that's what makes it so exciting is everything has to be aligned. And can't thank the leadership at Baylor for over the 21 years giving us that opportunity and trusting and believing in us.

Last, with that, the great thing is Baylor is a large Baptist school in the nation. Has a great niche. And we prepare champions for life. It's spiritual. It's academic. It's character formation, athletic.

And as a coach, some of the best compliments you can ever get is when past players, 15, 20 years ago come back and still ask for opinions or advice or say, I remember when you said this, and it's really true.

Now, there's a lot of times they say, Scott, you're wrong on that, you know. But it's great to hear every once in a while you get something right.

Q. The schedule worked out with Grand Canyon getting the late game. How excited were you to see you were going to have a chance to watch? And are you excited for your brother this week?

SCOTT DREW: I always talk to my brother. It's perfect being in the same area not playing each other. Spokane, I'm much more excited that we're in Memphis. Got better ribs down here.

Anyway, really excited for them as well. Makes it tougher for my dad to figure out travel, though. Spokane to Memphis, no direct flights there.