

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arkansas vs Arizona

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SAP Center

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Anthony Dell'Orosio

Tobe Awaka

Jaden Bradley

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

Q. Jaden, as the veteran of the group, when you have the youngsters who have acclimated to March Madness over the last week-and-change or so, what's been the balance of talking to them about your experiences throughout this tournament and ultimately how they get to adjust to the stage for themselves and beyond?

JADEN BRADLEY: They've got two games under their belt now, so they're pretty familiar with the expectations and everything that's going on. We just try to tell them it's just a game. It's definitely more important, has a little bit more meaning, but they have great experiences and great leaders, so...

Q. Arizona has kind of had a rough time getting out of the Sweet 16 over the last five years. We've made it four times in the Sweet 16s but haven't advanced into the Elite Eight. Is there any added pressure for you guys going into this game thinking, hey, we need to do it now?

TOBE AWAKA: I mean, I don't really think the past is a predictor of the future. I think we're just worried about what's next up on our plate, which is Arkansas. We're going to prepare to the best of our ability, follow the game plan, follow the scout, and hopefully if we do what we do, we'll be successful.

Q. You just mentioned Arkansas; what are you



thinking about doing defensively with that backcourt, Meleek Thomas, Darius Acuff? What are you looking to throw at them to quell those tough shots they make?

ANTHONY DELL'ORSO: Just limit their shots, try and make every shot tough. No easy looks, crash the glass, play our normal game, to be honest. It's tough with quick turnarounds and multiple teams you've never seen before, so we've got to stay true to ourselves and just make the night as tough as possible for them.

Q. Jaden, you started your career at Alabama with Nick Pringle. What's your relationship like with him, and are you looking forward to seeing him tomorrow?

JADEN BRADLEY: Yeah, that's definitely my guy. I talk to him here and there. I'm excited to play against them as always, go against somebody that you spent a year with practicing and battling with. Excited for that.

But just ready to go at it with my guys.

Q. Jaden, obviously you've been at multiple stops in your career and have kind of seen the changing landscape with the transfer portal and NIL. How do you think those two things and overall a lot of changes we've seen in college basketball, how do you think that's affected players' relationships with coaches and the programs that they're a part of?

JADEN BRADLEY: You know, NIL is definitely changing the game, but us players, I feel like before NIL we just fell in love with the game of basketball, and relationships, can't really speak for other players, but I know guys on this team, we really don't care about that stuff, we don't talk about that stuff, we really love each other, just go in, play the game, love the coaching staff, and our ultimate goal is to try to reach the next level. We just try to encounter that stuff.

Q. Toby, you had that stretch where you made 17 consecutive free throws. What was the feel like for you during that stretch, and had you ever been on a long stretch like that in your career?

TOBE AWAKA: I mean, honestly, it's not something that I



... when all is said, we're done.®

keep a strong mental count of. Just always try to lock in, take a deep breath and make as many as possible during the game.

If I have, I'm not sure. But again, the goal is to always try and make all of them.

TOMMY LLOYD: Good afternoon. It's great to be here. Obviously we're excited for the opportunity. It's a quick turnaround, having played Sunday evening, so it feels like that just wrapped up.

But we're excited about the next opportunity and the next pursuit.

Q. A little off topic, but I saw during the broadcast they're talking about your aspiring DJ career --

TOMMY LLOYD: That's not off topic. I can talk about that all day.

Q. What made you want to become a DJ and do you feel like you're good at it?

TOMMY LLOYD: Absolutely not, and listen, it's more of a joke than anything, so let's be honest.

But I have been able to develop a great relationship with Mike Schwartz, AKA Mix Master Mike, who's a Bay Area guy who will be in the building tomorrow for the game.

He's one of the best DJs of all time, and happened to run with the Beastie Boys for a lot of years, and it's no secret I've always loved the Beastie Boys. It's been a little bit of a, I guess -- I don't know if a childhood fantasy but probably a manhood fantasy for me that's come true. So it's been awesome to have that relationship.

Q. (Inaudible.)

TOMMY LLOYD: No, but what I'll say is -- people probably want to talk about other stuff, but getting to hang out with him in his studio and stuff, you see a true artist at work, and it's crazy how talented people are. And what's really impressive is when somebody is so talented at something you have no idea about, but you respect the outcome of what they do. It's really cool to see them explain to you the process a little bit. So that's been fun to kind of be able to get a peek behind the scenes, so to speak.

Q. You got a little emotional earlier this season talking about the role that Brian Brigger played for your team. When you're going back and forth and have these quick turnarounds, how important is it to have a dedicated equipment team like this?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, another thing I'd love to talk about. I think what you're referring to, though, happened last year. It was at our Cincinnati game. I think. I get emotional about Briggs every week, so it's hard to remember.

But Brian Brigger is a really important piece of our program. He's the equipment manager, but more than that, I kind of joke he's kind of our spirit animal. This guy is so genuine and so authentic and has -- is so willing to sacrifice anything for us to be successful that -- it's what makes a program a program.

You have to be more than just about winning basketball games. We're together a lot, and you need people that are willing to put it on the line and sacrifice everything for others to be successful, and he embodies that maybe better than anybody I've ever seen.

Q. I think the last time you faced off against Coach Cal dates back to his Memphis days. What do you remember about those matchups and what are you looking forward to most about facing a Coach Cal team?

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, we would play these mid-season kind of conference season battles between Gonzaga and Memphis back in the day, and they were epic battles.

A vivid memory I had was when he had that thing rolling at Memphis is Derrick Rose come down on a fast break, and I've never seen anybody so fast with the ball in their hands in my life.

What's so cool with Coach Cal is everyone has different styles. How he's -- with his swagger and his personality, been able to manage so many uber talents over the years has been really, really impressive to watch, because at the end of the day, let's face it, if you want to be trying to win the whole thing here, you've got to have really talented players.

Coach Cal has done as good a job as anybody maybe in the history of the game at managing talented players.

Q. Getting to this round has been pretty much the standard of late at Arizona, but getting past this level, this round, hasn't been for a little while. Do you feel, you or the players, a burden maybe that you need to try to get past that point?

TOMMY LLOYD: Not really. I don't feel a burden. I know it's easy to create narratives. These are hard basketball games, and I fully respect that.

I love this team. I love how this team is built. I think this

team is built for the long haul. But I also respect the fact that we're going to have to do it possession by possession, media time-out by media time-out type of game, and our opponents are formidable.

Yeah, obviously we want to be playing Saturday, but we're not going to look past this opportunity or make it like an end-all, be-all for anything because it's not that. Our approach to our guys has been normal. Let's just treat this as normal. Like, we're playing on three days' rest instead of four days' rest. Well, we did that in the Big 12. So let's treat this as normal and let's not make it bigger than it normally is.

Q. A lot of young players that are going to marquee this matchup. What does it say about this program that there are some young freshmen that are cornerstones of both teams?

TOMMY LLOYD: You know, I think it's -- Coach Cal, obviously, I just mentioned is probably as good as anybody at recruiting and coaching young players. Obviously Coach K at Duke did a great job, John is doing a great job of that now.

I just think that Arizona is another one, another destination for some of these top young players. Our program is probably not a perfect fit for everybody, but for the right guys, it's a special place.

I think what it says, if you have coaches that are confident in the culture of their program, it doesn't matter what year you are in school. To be able to be a significant contributor.

I know, the way our freshmen play, people remind me all the time, like, did you realize your three freshmen were the leading scorer last game? No, I didn't realize that, but I also -- when I'm writing up lineup cards and whatever, or game plans, I don't write freshman next to their name, either. I just know they're really good basketball players.

Q. I have a story for you and then I'm hoping to get your response. The last time Arizona played Arkansas was back in 1994 on April 2. At that game, Wilbur was tackled by Tusk, the mascot with Arkansas, and he actually blew out his ACL. Not only did the mascot have a torn ACL from that, but he also had to watch Arizona lose in that Final Four matchup.

I talked to him this morning, and he wanted me to tell you the story and said obviously he's rooting for you. Now I'm hoping for your response.

TOMMY LLOYD: Was he able to play through the ACL

tear?

Q. No...

TOMMY LLOYD: I don't know, is there a statute of limitations or can we get a lawsuit on that? I mean, I think he should get a good lawyer. Call Rafi, maybe? That's a name I see a lot in Arizona. I don't know.

Q. We've talked about the freshmen quite a bit over the course of the year. Can you talk about Darius Acuff, what challenges he presents and how does he stack up to the many freshmen that you've played?

TOMMY LLOYD: Darius is a supreme talent, and he's a great young man. Obviously, for those that don't know, I was able to coach him in USA Basketball two summers ago. He was the MVP of our tournament.

Darius is a serious guy. He doesn't always say a lot. I was only around him for three, three and a half weeks or something. So I'm sure there's more to him than I saw, but what I know is he's a supreme competitor, and I know that's a guy that's not afraid of the moment, and he has the ability to kind of, quote-unquote, get the eye of the tiger. He has that ability and that mentality to kind of rise up his game based on the importance of the game.

So I'm sure we're going to get a great effort out of Darius tomorrow, and I even reached out to him previous to last summer, and I was trying to make a pitch for him to come back and play for us for the U-19s, but he had other plans. And good for him. I'm glad -- he's had a really good season. Maybe, I don't know if he got some of the early accolades some of these other freshmen got, but like I've always said, who cares about early accolades because I know he's getting them now and they're well deserved and he's put himself in an incredible opportunity to have a great career.

Q. Do you have to coach differently when you have a team, when you're relying on so many freshmen as opposed to when you have a veteran team?

TOMMY LLOYD: Nope. No, to me it's the same approach. We've been doing stuff on the court almost since June, so we have a lot of time and a lot of experience together.

I mean, maybe there's some things early to get them up to speed or get them the experience you want to have, and you might have to live with some mistakes that allow for growth opportunities early, but we're at the point now where I think a lot of lessons have been learned. Not that they know it all, not that I know it all. But they're definitely acclimated, seasoned veterans at this point.

Q. Tommy, just kind of your overall thoughts on Arkansas; you've talked about Darius and some of the freshmen and talent, but just give me the scout.

TOMMY LLOYD: They're putting up video game numbers on offense. Obviously they're electric in transition. They have the ability to play up top in lobs and kind of the vertical spacing stuff as well as anybody.

Obviously you've got to really take care of the ball against them to try to force them to play in the half court. But, you know, what they've found in the half court is Coach Cal is a vet; he knows how to get guys in the right spots and try to find the right matchups, and they've got a guy right now that they're comfortable putting the ball in his hands and he led the SEC in scoring and assists as a freshman. That's pretty impressive.

They're definitely a tough out, and I mean, to me, when you see them pop up, I don't know, what are they, a 4 seed, something like that? For a team to take second in the SEC and win the SEC tournament be a 4 seed, yeah, they've probably got an argument there.

But hey, let's throw the seeds out the window and let's get after it tomorrow.

Q. We were just in the locker room talking to your two point guards. You've got a veteran, you've got a freshman, and they're roommates, I guess, a lot on the road. I was curious how important is that do you think, that mentorship role that Jaden has played, and how big has that been in your season's success?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think it's been a critical component. I would say the leadership aspect is really important. But I think just as important is the young player to be open to being led. Sometimes when you come out of high school -- we all know how we were -- you think you know maybe actually more than you really know.

Brayden has never been like that. I remember -- obviously it's well documented, Brayden didn't start the season off on fire, and he and I had a couple meetings during that time, and I just had to continue to remind him that these were experiences that he needed to get where he wanted to go, and I think once he started out slow and we had won some tough early games, I think he felt like he did not want to step on anybody's toes.

He and I had to have a good talk about that because I told him, I have a sneaky suspicion once this thing clicks for you you're going to be our leading scorer. But I think that just says who he is and his character that once we sort of

started having team success, and he wasn't having success, he didn't want to come in and overstep and maybe mess up that team success because he's such a great young man.

Q. You may have heard there's an opening in Chapel Hill. Your name is being bandied about pretty prominently. I don't know if you want to make news or address that too specifically, but I would think at a relatively early point in your head coaching career that the fact that when the best jobs open up, your name is thrown into that must be pretty nice. Take that wherever you want.

TOMMY LLOYD: Oh, wow, well, thanks. I preferred the first question about Mix Master Mike. I already have one of the best jobs in the country. One thing we talk about in our program all the time, and I think I've gotten better at, and I think our team has been crushing it this year, is just the ability to have full focus and be present in the moment.

So I think we have a great team. I think we have a chance to advance in this tournament game by game. But I'm not delusional. I know we could lose tomorrow.

But this team deserves my full focus, so there's not one thing that is going to knock me off my path. I'm 100 percent focused on Arizona basketball and this program, and I can't wait until the ball gets thrown up tomorrow, and then can't wait to try to figure out a way to come out on top.

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