

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Purdue vs Arizona

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San Jose, California, USA

SAP Center

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Motiejus Krivas

Koa Peat

Brayden Burries

Ivan Kharchenkov

Jaden Bradley

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference



recruiting staff is talking to you guys, talking to you about the history of Arizona basketball and wanting to get back to the Final Four, what were those conversations like about the desire to get Arizona back to its first Final Four since 2001?

JADEN BRADLEY: I would say I was coming out of the transfer portal, it wasn't really talked about getting to the Final Four or anything. It was just talking about just being a better player, just the culture, the Arizona history, just coming and being part of something bigger than yourself.

These guys here are great people on and off the court. You want to surround yourself with other great people and great players to help elevate your game for the next level. And that's something that I feel like I can do at the University of Arizona.

Q. I think one of us needs to follow up and ask Brayden and Ivan why they were laughing when Jaden claimed to be the best. Do you have thoughts to share with us?

BRAYDEN BURRIES: Definitely, we play 2K a lot. Last time we played, I believe I beat Jaden. But no, we had a tournament, though. We did have a 2K tournament. This was actually my partner, Ivan. We made it to, what was it, Elite Eight or Final Four? Elite Eight. We didn't win it all. But we were really competitive.

Q. I wanted to ask Koa a question. Koa, you have football in your blood, obviously. Why did you choose basketball? What made you fall in love with this game instead?

KOA PEAT: I played a lot of sports growing up, baseball, football and basketball. So from a young age I was playing a lot of sports, around a lot of athletes in my family.

But honestly, I just truthfully fell in love with basketball. Especially during quarantine, all I was doing was training and just working out and really working on my body. And I slimmed down a little bit, and I just thought basketball was like the best choice for me. Especially now you could play a long time playing basketball. Football's a different story. I had great support from my family members in my choice in playing basketball, and I think I've made the right choice,

TOMMY LLOYD: Good afternoon, guys. Obviously it's great to be here. Proud of these guys on my right here and excited for our next opportunity. Obviously we're playing a program that's been elite for a long time, but especially the last few years. And they obviously have a championship culture and a great coach and great players.

I have a lot of respect for them. It's going to present a ton of challenges. We're excited to give it a go tomorrow and get in a 40-minute game and try to figure it out.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jaden, I want to ask you first because last night you alluded to it in terms of the cohesiveness and closeness of this team. You mentioned that you guys also play some games together even like off the court. What are some of those things that you guys do? Are there any specific games you actually like playing to spend time together?

JADEN BRADLEY: Right now, the guys are big into FIFA right now. I don't play. 2K, probably the best on the team at that. And just different, Uno sometimes, and other stuff, other games like that.

Q. Curious to know, when you guys were getting pitched to come to Arizona and Tommy and the



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for sure.

Q. Jaden, Coach Lloyd made mention of figuring it out. And he has a couple other times. What does figuring it out during a game or practice, what does that mean to you guys?

JADEN BRADLEY: For us players, I feel like I could talk for most of the guys up here, figuring out means, like, in terms of practice, you can obviously go through a lot of different situations, scenarios, but you can't just kind of -- the game, you can't make it feel like the game.

So you get in the game. You're in the trap or something. You've just got to figure it out. Use your fundamentals, your swivels, your pivots and all that stuff. He doesn't know how it's going to get done; you just gotta make it happen.

Q. Koa, as someone who grew up in the state of Arizona and saw the near-misses that the program went through as you were growing up, what was that experience like as a fan for you and your family seeing that and now having an opportunity to be a part of that, to maybe change things?

KOA PEAT: Honestly, truthfully, I didn't really watch a lot of basketball, college basketball growing up. I was more into like watching my brothers in football and my sisters playing college basketball. But I think from the history now, you had to do some studying when you're making your choice on what college you're picking.

So I saw a lot of the past legends that played for Arizona, and Mike Bibby, he was a big mentor to me. He went to the Final Four, won the championship. When you put on the Arizona jersey, you know you're playing for people that played before you. So it's bigger than yourself; it's the program.

Q. Mo and Jaden, you're obviously in different roles you were a couple of years ago, but what do you remember about playing Purdue the last time you faced that team?

MOTIEJUS KRIVAS: We played in Indiana and we were number one, and they kind of came after us. I remember that they're a well-coached team. They still have the guys from that year. So they have a lot of options on offense and defense, so really excited to play in it.

JADEN BRADLEY: Very talented team. Like Mo said, well-coached, very experienced team. We're a different team. We have a different group, but we're excited and ready to get after it.

Q. A question for you, Brayden, from Tia Austin's fifth-grade class. You're their favorite collegiate player. They want to know how you were able to get to where you are today and how young people who want to be in your position can get there?

BRAYDEN BURRIES: I'd say getting here was just keeping a small circle, having good people around you. I really believe that you are who you hang around. My parents do a great job surrounding me with great people around me. Just going through hard times, you know, just trusting it will get better. Praying a lot, and honestly, just never get too high, never get too low. Just be where my feet is.

Q. Last night you guys played against another team that was full of freshmen, but you could see that there was a distinct difference between the way you guys carried yourself and went through the game. How much has the veteran leadership really helped guide you through the course of the season to get to a point where last night you guys could keep your composure, in addition to, obviously, your coach?

BRAYDEN BURRIES: We have great leaders on our team. They did a great job. When the game got a little chippy, their leadership came in very handily, brought us in, told us to just be smart, continue to play basketball the right way. And that's what we did.

Q. Jaden, we heard from Koa last night just about how much fun he was having in last night's game. I'm just curious about how fun the tournament so far has been for you?

JADEN BRADLEY: Winning is always fun for me, just to go out there and go out there with my brothers, going to war and playing the game that we all love. It's always fun. It's exciting. Because this time in the month, like, no games are guaranteed. So just to be able to advance and still be able to connect with this group of guys, because when it's over, everybody's going to go their own different ways, so it's going to be special just to keep playing in times like this.

Q. Jaden, last night you faced Acuff, and tomorrow Braden Smith, some guys that people consider to be the best point guards in the country. What's your mentality when you go into these match-ups and then just overall thoughts on the match-up with Braden?

JADEN BRADLEY: You know, as a competitor, you always want to play against the best of the best. I feel like at this stage I'm able to do that. I definitely don't look at it

as a one-on-one match-up or anything. It's 5-on-5, and we've got subs and we've got great guys off the bench. So we just follow the game plan and go in and try to win a basketball game.

Q. Ivan and Brayden, I guess, specifically, your coach had a wonderful quote last night about how he's going to just continue doing what he knows can be successful and not buck to current trends. But from the eyes of players, a lot of guys are getting plenty of shots from deep. We know Steph Curry's influence on basketball in general. When it comes to adapting and buying into Tommy's system, is that something that you were aware of once you got to campus? Was it a little bit of a wake-up call once you got through like the preseason? Can you just go a little bit deeper, both of you, into what it means to see his vision and then execute it at a time when a lot of guys, obviously, are looking to launch as often as possible from deep?

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: One thing Tommy always likes to say is not to settle. He always likes to take a good shot, always likes to put full pressure on the big guys in the paint. And that's the biggest thing we had in the preseason, you know, and don't settle. You know you don't have to take the first shot possible, play one side to another side. And our big guys are doing a great job ducking in and giving us a land to lay in. So probably don't settle.

BRAYDEN BURRIES: Coming here, I actually didn't know too much about the play style. I just knew what Coach Lloyd told me, that he believed in me, and I believed in him. Part of it was just coming here. I found out that he likes to play inside/out, just being coachable, being able to adapt as a player and just try to see my way out there.

Q. Coach mentioned last night he likes to meet you guys where you are in terms of your own basketball journey. How have you guys specifically seen that take place for your own development at Arizona, and how has his coaching philosophy kind of connected with you guys in that department? How has Coach's philosophy of kind of meeting you where you are in terms of your basketball journey connected with you and your development at Arizona?

KOA PEAT: It's been huge. Coach Lloyd's a great coach. He won't say it, but I think he's one of the best coaches in the country. He's really big just trusting us on the court, letting it be a player-led type of team and letting us make reads. And the development over the summer was great. Especially for me, you know, playing with him on Team USA and then now Arizona basketball, it's been great for me. I'm just blessed to have such a great coach in Tommy

Lloyd.

BRAYDEN BURRIES: I really appreciate Coach Lloyd. You know, he's been there every step of the way. He doesn't care whether you play great or whether you play bad. He's going to be there for you. He cares for you more as a person than just a basketball player. I really appreciate him.

Q. This is for everybody except Mo. He said last night he was most nervous about the first game of the tournament more than kind of any of these other ones, kind of getting into a rhythm has helped just go out there and play ball. So just curious any of the rest of you, where are your nerves at? Do you feel more comfortable as you keep winning and advancing through the tournament? Or just how are you feeling about the moment right now?

BRAYDEN BURRIES: Nerves, I don't think it's like too much nerves. Just trying to go out there, have fun, be coachable, be a great teammate. Win the game. Just taking it day-by-day, just being where our feet is, not getting too far ahead or worrying about the past, just being where our feet is, honestly.

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: I think being nervous is the wrong word. It's more being excited to play. And you really should not be nervous because as long as you're doing whatever you did the whole season long and it worked, you should keep doing it, especially playing with full effort and full energy.

JADEN BRADLEY: The coaching staff does a great job of making sure, like Ivan said, like being in the moment. So we do a good job of that, taking it game by game, and just being excited to play. Like I said earlier, these games from here on out are not guaranteed. So we're just excited to play.

KOA PEAT: I think the Big 12 Tournament definitely helped us get ready for this tournament. Especially playing some of the best teams in the country and then just trying to take it one game at a time and just put our full focus on Purdue now, and just take it one game at a time.

Q. Koa, obviously you had to sit out the games with the injury, and I was curious, what did you learn about yourself having to deal with that situation, and how do you think that maybe changed you coming back for the stretch run of the season?

KOA PEAT: What did I learn about myself? I mean, I think I learned more about my team more than myself, just seeing my team go out there and be great without me.

They stepped up. A lot of guys stepped up. Ivan, Delly, Mo, Tobe, everybody stepped up, and they played big for us. We had some good wins when I was out. And to have me back now it's been special, playing with these guys. They welcomed me back with open arms, and we've been hooping since I've been back. So it's been fun.

Q. Mo, Coach has a long history of developing big guys, international guys. How much did that factor in when you decided you wanted to play for him? How much did you guys talk about that?

MOTIEJUS KRIVAS: I mean, he was coaching Azuolas Tubelis, Domantas Sabonis, great players from Lithuania. When you see they have full trust in Coach, it makes the decision way more easy.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

TOMMY LLOYD: First, thanks for asking these guys a lot of questions. You can see I'm a lucky dude. Honestly, you guys don't need to hear from me. These guys are the spokespeople for our program, and thanks for asking those questions and helping people hear what they have to say because they're awesome representatives of our program and of our university and our community.

Q. I was actually going to say that I've noticed the last couple days, you're very -- you seem as interested in the answers as we are that the players give. It's not always like that when we're in these things. I was curious, obviously when you were at GU, you went and recruited overseas. You kind of found these hidden gems. It's a lot harder to do that now. Everyone's going overseas. Everyone is looking for skilled international big men from Europe. Does it help that you can go into families' homes and say, look at all these guys I've developed? How much is that part of your recruiting pitch now, whereas before it was like you didn't necessarily have that to lean on as much?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, I think a lot. I think anytime you have a track record of doing something, that speaks volumes. I think that's really important. One of my schticks in recruiting is we're going to be fact-based. We're not going to sell you a dream. We're not going to sell you something we haven't done before.

When we talk to you about things, we're going to be very direct. And we're going to paint an accurate picture of what we think your situation looks like when you play for us. And we're going to tell you areas we think you need to improve on and how we can help you do that.

Q. When you faced Purdue two years ago, even

though Brayden and Fletcher were sophomores, they were already seasoned vets in the current landscape of college basketball, do you think we'll see anything like this again, where have you two guys in the backcourt who start their entire careers together for four years?

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, potentially. I mean, I don't want to rule that out. But it is really impressive. I mean, it's just really impressive what Purdue's done. Just how good those players are and how committed they can be.

What I remember about that game two years ago was that I think it was a Saturday afternoon game. We were ranked 1, they were ranked 2 or 3. Every bar in that city of Indianapolis must have been full for hours because those fans came in there lit. In a good way. And it was a lot of fun and it was so loud in that place. I mean, honestly, other than playing at Allen Fieldhouse, it's probably one of the loudest venues I've ever been a part of, and that's saying something when you're in an NBA arena.

Q. The continuity and experience they have, how does that show up on tape? When you're watching them, what kind of challenge is that?

TOMMY LLOYD: They just have depth to what they do. I'm sure the way Paint can coach them now, there's a lot of reps that have already been done, so it can be a lot of conversations. And they have a vast database to draw from of experiences together, and I'm sure he can say, hey, do you remember when we did this, you know, two months ago or two years ago? And he has guys that can recall, and that's been impressive.

What I'll say -- and Braden Smith is obviously a great player. And Chad from the Pacers, the GM, he called me like when Braden was a sophomore in high school. We have a relationship. I've known Chad forever. He used to be at Portland. He's like, I don't know, this kid's a little small. But my son's playing with him. He plays at my son's high school. I mean, he's really good.

So you talk about an eye for talent. That kid was like a freshman or sophomore. For him to be the all-time leader in assists now, I mean, it's pretty impressive. Kudos to Chad. He definitely identified a good one there, and Purdue found him as well. So it's been a match made in heaven.

Q. A couple of your players told me that before every practice in game you all have a huddle where there's a word or a mantra that you'll say to each other to get ready for that day. What's the word today or mantra today? Where did this tradition come from?

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TOMMY LLOYD: I'm not going to tell you. I mean, that's our culture stuff. I think it's important that you have rituals that are meaningful. I think you may be -- there's probably a way you can overdo some of these ritual-type things and maybe it gets cheesy. But I think what's cool, if you have a group of guys that are willing to put their arms around each other and listen to an old guy like me say a few words, and then we have a little routine we go through.

To do that every day willingly, I think that's really cool. No one's too cool to do it. And to me that's really important.

When you're with people every day, it's really important that people can bond and be normal people and not think the mundane things are stupid. So I really value those rituals that we do. I think they're key components to building a strong culture.

Q. Purdue is the best offensive efficiency in the country, I think the highest KenPom's ever had. They run a lot of sets, are known for running a lot of sets on top of that. Just sort of what sort of tactical issues does that create on these short turnarounds?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, you have to be concept-based. I mean, I'm sure they're pretty good at hiding their calls. So there's no way you're going to be able to teach your team 25 play calls and have them go execute it in a day.

You probably have to hone in on what you do well and try to break it down into concepts in how you guard that and go out -- I think this time of year, you know, I'm sure there will be some adjustments made by both staffs. But both teams are here for a reason, because they're probably really good at doing what they are good at doing. So you're going to see two teams try to come out and assert their will on each other tomorrow. And I'm sure it's going to be a heck of a battle.

Q. Do you remember your first trip to Lithuania, recruiting trip, and what did it take for you to become as networked as you are there?

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, I think I still have a headache from having dinner with Arvydas Sabonis. And there's some parts later that night I don't remember. Listen, Lithuanian people are great people. What an awesome story.

If you guys have never seen the -- there's a documentary out there called "The Other Dream Team." If you love basketball, it'll literally bring tears to your eyes. It's about when they basically gained their independence from the USSR and had that magical run in the '92 Olympics. It's awesome.

Just awesome people. I've got great relationships with a lot of them over the years. I'm thankful for those. I'm thankful for those experiences.

I'm honestly thankful for all my travels over the years. I think it's really helped shape me as a person and as a coach.

Q. Can you talk about the contribution of Tobe Awaka, what he's meant from a leadership standpoint, from a performance standpoint, and just being able to take the role where he's on the bench and not starting anymore?

TOMMY LLOYD: I have more people come up to me and tell me Tobe Awaka's their favorite player. I think that's so cool. He's just -- these guys were great up here, and he would add to that list, and maybe even be better. He's so thoughtful, so mature. He's about the right things.

Honestly, he's been a real asset to our culture, and honestly, I felt we've always had a pretty good culture. I think he's a key component for taking it to another level, on and off the court.

So love Tobe. I wish I could coach him forever. And hopefully we can find other ones like him in the future, because they make my job awesome, and they make coming to work every day special.

Q. It's not a secret that Arizona's proven itself to be a national contender, among the most wins in the past -- since the 21st century. The only thing that's just been missing is a trip to the Final Four. Given that you have a chance to finally get that tomorrow, what would that mean for this program to finally get back to the national semifinals?

TOMMY LLOYD: It's not going to change my life. I'm pretty fortunate, regardless of the outcome tomorrow.

But I just think it's going to be a great moment of collective joy for our entire community. I think that's really powerful. If you get millions of people that can smile at the same time and cheer together, that's powerful stuff. That's the compound effect.

And that's what I would be most excited for. Winning the game would be great. But the collective joy it would give our community, it would be more special than just the win by itself.

Q. Over the course of the last five years, you guys have been close. Got to the Sweet 16. But this group,

particularly, when would you say you noticed their competitiveness and their will to win being a little bit different than teams in the past here at Arizona for you?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think right away. I mean, right away. When we got on the court together, obviously, we saw there was a lot of talent there. It was going to be dynamic in how we kind of approached the game in that it was just going to put a lot of pressure on our opponents. We knew the kids we'd recruited. We knew the kids who were in the program. But when you got them all together, everything just made sense.

I'm not surprised we're sitting here. Not at all. And I think we're exactly where we should be, and now we've got to go put in the work and probably have some good fortune on our side as well to hopefully take the next step.

Q. Talking a little bit more about like the closeness of this team, is there anything you guys do as a coaching staff to help facilitate that closeness? They mentioned they play games with each other. Do you guys have something like a no-phone policy at dinner or when you guys are traveling or anything like that?

TOMMY LLOYD: I'm sure they do some stuff that I don't even know about. But I think one of the things that we really try to do throughout the year and especially early in the year, is we talk to each other. We have meetings. We have breakout groups. We talk, we get to know each other. Everyone gets an opportunity in front of the team to tell their story. I think that's important stuff.

We want people that are, when they're feeling a certain way, to be able to communicate it with their teammates, and we want people to, when they see someone struggling, to be comfortable to go pick them up.

So to me that's just a really important thing we do, is just creating opportunities for people to talk to each other in a meaningful way.

Q. You've been in this position as an assistant coach with Mark Few and all that. Is there something specific you took from him or really any coach about your overall approach to these type of games, and not Xs and Os, but just general --

TOMMY LLOYD: Be normal. Be normal. Be yourself. I think having a consistent approach is the most important thing. And I think if your team saw you change now or become uptight now, I don't think that would be good messaging.

So Coach Few, you guys -- I don't know what you guys think of him or what you know about him, but he's a great guy. But he's really private. He's really low-key, and he's really smart. So I just think that I always appreciated that about him. He never made these moments about him, ever. Never made anything about himself. I think I learned a lot from him and how to carry myself and how to conduct myself.

And I think repetition's been a great teacher for me as well.

This is my fifth year being a head coach, and I've only been a head coach at one place. And if I want my players and my staff committed to development, I better be committed to developing myself, too. So I spend a lot of time trying to get better myself. I think the combination of those two things has been effective.

Q. Wanted to talk to you about Purdue a little bit. They were the 7 seed in the Big Ten Tournament. They go and win that thing, beating Michigan and others and have played well here in March Madness. Just in these last couple of weeks of Purdue, anything that -- without giving away the game plan, of course -- that you can share that maybe jumps out at you, what they're doing so well lately?

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, we're going to come out -- I'm joking. We're going to full-court press and trap everywhere. No, they've just been playing really well. But they've been -- I didn't follow their season super close. I know they've been obviously a great program and a good team all year.

When they pop up on TV and you're sitting on the couch for a few minutes, you watch throughout the season, but nothing more than that.

Just kind of looking at their season a little bit, looks like they hit a few rough patches. And I don't know if there was injuries or just a little bit of fatigue of the season, or scheduling can hit you too. We found that in the Big 12. Sometimes these schedules get back-loaded a little bit, and it's a gauntlet. I mean, that can create some tough stretches in the season.

I mean, they look like the team right now everyone thought they were going to be at the start of the year. I've been really impressed with what they've done. And to go win the Big 12 Tournament and come play the way they have in the NCAA Tournament, it's been really impressive.

Q. Want to follow up on a story you told about Brayden. Did that come up organically with a conversation with Chad? Was he calling you specifically about him? Did that go anywhere? Did

you follow up on Brayden in any way?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, no, I never followed up. So, you know, but let's not act like I was going to beat Purdue recruiting him either. So it was probably a moot point.

Chad has had a lot of players I've coached, whether it's been Andrew Nembhard or Ben Mathurin. So we've had a lot of communication over the years, and he was in Portland for a number of years.

And I think he just called me, and we were talking about players. And he mentioned this kid at his son's high school. He was a heck of a young player but just a little small. I never have forgotten about that.

And I never followed up on it. I don't know if I was transitioning between Gonzaga and Arizona at the time, but I'll say this, the kid made a heck of a choice. And the guys at Purdue were really smart for choosing him, because he's been awesome to watch.

Q. You said earlier that when you recruit, you're going to be fact-based. A lot of coaches have talked about that it's harder and harder to be fact-based with players these days. They have to kind of soften their message. Have you experienced that? Especially because a lot of times the assistant is the nice one and the head coach is the bad guy. So have you experienced that? Is it different at all with international kids?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think international kids want -- it's a little bigger jump for them. So I think just the comfort of knowing that they're going to play for a coach who is experienced in that area in helping them transition is important. But I haven't changed my approach in recruiting at all, or evaluating. Not one bit.

We have honest conversations. If I can't -- it doesn't mean I don't go at people or anything. Just, hey, here's where I think you're at. Here's how I think you fit in. Here's what you can get better at. Maybe here's how we can help you. Those are the conversation.

I don't go into these conversations saying man, you're going to be an NBA all-star and we're going to just let you do whatever you want. I mean, that's not how we recruit. We don't want guys like that. We want guys that want to come to be a part of something bigger than themselves and also individually have big dreams and understand that it's not all about them.

So to me, having that honest approach is a great barometer for me to get the kind of character we're hoping

to get in our program, because the guys that don't want to be a part of that, they self-select out. They don't text me back or call me back, which is great. And they can go have success doing it their way at their own places, and I wish them nothing but the best.

I think it's really important just to, I guess, for lack of a better word, don't sell your soul in this recruiting thing. One thing I always think about is just the continuum of talent versus dysfunction.

And I don't want to build a team where I'm just trying to accumulate talent to overcome the dysfunction that comes with the talent. There's always going to be dysfunction. We're human beings. But one of the things we really try to do is limit as much dysfunction as possible and get the most talented, least dysfunctional people we can get in our program.

We're not perfect by any stretch. So this is not a holier-than-thou speech, but, I mean, that's kind of how we've always approached it, and it seems to be working.

Q. You just talked about when the team is being successful, right, like the Tucson community, that happiness, that joy that it brings them. What did you make of the crowd last night kind of being that sixth man and just what are you excited for, the energy that they can bring tomorrow?

TOMMY LLOYD: They were great. They were great. But I know this, they're going to have their hands full tomorrow because the bars in San Jose are going to be full of Purdue fans. Like I told you earlier. So our fans need to get up early and get to work and let's have some fun in here tomorrow. It should be a great day.

But obviously Tucson's got a special place in my heart. These last couple of weeks, to be honest with you, I haven't been getting out much. It's been nice. It's been nice just to be at home kind of hanging out, not realizing there is all that excitement going on. So I can just kind of focus on the task at hand.

That's been my mindset. And that will probably continue to be my mindset. I don't know, if things somehow someday go well, you might not see me out much next week. I might just be hanging out in my little hideout in those foothills up there.

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