

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Penn State Nittany Lions

Men's Head Coach

Mike Rhoades



THE MODERATOR: Making his first appearance at Big Ten basketball media days, Penn State head coach Mike Rhoades. Coach Rhoades will begin his first season with the Nittany Lions after a successful run at VCU.

Coach Rhoades, welcome. We'll begin with your opening statement.

MIKE RHOADES: Well, it's an honor to be here to represent Penn State and Penn State men's basketball. A small low region kid from Pennsylvania to represent Penn State as the men's basketball coach is a great honor, and I'm excited to be here today. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor now for questions for Coach Rhoades.

Q. How important was it to get Kanye Clary back when you were putting this roster together?

MIKE RHOADES: Very important. Number one is I love dynamic guards and guys that can make plays with the ball in their hands, and Kanye is one of them. To put him together with Ace Baldwin, that's a dynamic backcourt.

Kanye already naturally played the way we want to play: Fast and aggressive with the ball. A lot of ball screens, fast in the open court. So spent a lot of time with him early on, and he and his family, we did know of Kanye and his family and his teams from being in the Richmond area and recruiting the 757 area. It was great to know him, but also build a cool relationship once he got there.

I'm really proud of him. He had a great offseason, great fall here so far. So I'm excited to see what he does.

Q. Obviously with your being a new coach you have to deal with the transfer portal. What was your strategy in terms of filling your roster? As it was Penn State had a lot of seniors, but what was your strategy dealing with that aspect?

MIKE RHOADES: Well, we were down to three guys, so I

had no choice, right? So we just jumped right in.

Number one was not to panic. Make sure we found guys that fit me, fit our staff, fit our program and what we were trying to do. We didn't want to make any mistakes.

What I mean by that is somebody that's going to help us build the program the right way, our way. So we were very picky in the transfer portal. We had a lot of people reach out to us because of our style of play. It's a fun way to play, but we also wanted to make sure they were young men that fit Penn State, what we were trying to do to build our foundation to get off to a great start.

I'm really proud of our staff. Yeah, I think we got ten players in 59 days. So, yes, we were in the transfer portal pretty intense.

Q. When you are down to three players and then you add ten players in 59 days, like you just said. When you do get your group together, philosophically what do you try to get done when you get your group together for the first time and what are some of the immediate things that you try to instill in your team to start to implement the way you want to play?

MIKE RHOADES: Well, number one, is spend time with the players. Before you can get them to give themselves to you, you have to build a level of trust. To build trust, I always believe is time and communication. So we spent a lot of time as a staff just getting to know the players, getting to know who they are, how they operate.

All summer long we had Wednesday night family meals where one coach or two coaches would take a couple of guys and GAs and staff members and managers with the players, and we would go and in State College there are some good places to each eat, and we would have some great meals. It wasn't go and get a meal and get out of there. It was some serious conversation.

Just building a level of trust off the court because the basketball part is the easy part, so that was important to me. To get guys to give themselves to you, they've got to know that Coach has my back, and it takes time. We're



still working on that. That was number one.

The second thing is making sure the guys knew how hard this was going to be, and that's okay. We love it that way that for us to get where we want to go and to do what we want to do with Penn State basketball it's going to take a lot of effort, a lot of time. It was going to be intense. There's going to be a lot of tough days, but those are the days we're going to grow the most. We talk about it all the time.

So those two things were the most important things this offseason and then when we went into practice, just letting loose and going after each other and competing at a really high level.

Q. What do you see as being the hardest part?

MIKE RHOADES: What's the hardest part of this? I don't know. I think it's -- I love it. I think it's a lot of fun.

Just getting guys to understand what it takes, what it takes to get where we want to go, and it's an everyday thing, but that's everybody. Everybody has to go through that. Every coach, not just the new coach.

The neat thing about starting a program or building a program and putting your tag on it is getting guys to see what they're capable of doing on a daily basis, on a weekly basis and as a team going forward into the season. That's a great adventure for me. Getting the guys to understand that you have to stack days together and all that.

So maybe that's the hardest thing about that, but that's also I think one of the coolest parts of my job.

Q. What is the impact of the portal on the ability to build the program? Because from the outside we'll often say, oh, you quickly turned, you could do that. By the same token you're in one of the premiere leagues in the country.

MIKE RHOADES: Well, if we couldn't use the transfer portal, then we would have had to take high school kids, a lot of high school kids that might not have been ready to play at this level right away or take junior college players. You're trying to sometimes squeeze them into your program, and they may not be a great fit.

Now with the transfer portal you can get a guy like Puff Johnson, who is a natural leader and was voted one of the captains of our team, who played in a Final Four and wanted to come back to his home state. A couple of years ago, John, we couldn't do that. Getting some grad transfers, Leo O'Boyle has a business degree from

Lafayette and wants to come and get a masters at Penn State, and he can really shoot. That's a good fit right there.

There's quick fixes, if you want to call it, but also we're trying to get a quick fix to push our program forward quick, but man, there's some great fits too. I think we got a few of them for sure.

Q. You mentioned some of the new guys you brought in. What has stood out to you about D'Marco Dunn so far?

MIKE RHOADES: Just a versatile guard, can score in different ways. I think he could be an elite defender. He just needs playing time. He played behind some very good players at Carolina. I recruited him to VCU, so there's a relationship there with his family and his high school coach.

I think D'Marco could be a guy that surprises a lot of people, and he's growing, he's maturing. He has probably gained about ten pounds this summer and got a lot stronger, but he has great freedom now to go be a player and not worrying about making mistakes or looking over his shoulder. I think he fits our style tremendously.

So I think he's a good player right now. Six months from now, a year from now I think he could be very, very good. So we're really excited to have him. Perfect fit for what we're trying to do.

Q. Penn State has had some success off and on, isolated success, getting in the NCAA Tournament. In your mind what's it going to take for that program to consistently be in the running for the NCAA on an annual basis, I guess?

MIKE RHOADES: Well, number one, belief. Belief that we can do it and we can do it all the time.

What I've said since I've taken the job is Penn State basketball -- and I've known it. When I was a little kid, I went to basketball camp. I saw games in Rec Hall. I've always followed it and cheered it on everywhere I've been. We just haven't had sustained success.

Number one is belief. Number two is having a commitment from your president and your AD, which is why I'm here. I came to Penn State to work for Pat Kraft, and the alignment of our president, our athletic department is the best it's ever been. I felt that. I've seen that. Working for Pat every day makes you want to run through the wall to get it done.

So it's going to take changes. It's going to take a huge commitment. It's going to be the belief that we can do this.



Especially on the days when you get beat or the days it becomes really hard or some things don't go your way, but that's how you build something successful. To sustain it, you have to have people on board on the toughest days. I think we have the people that want to be a part of building this thing to make it a huge winner.

So I came here to win. I came here to try to win big and doing it the right way with great student-athletes, but people that want to play basketball and guys that want to play basketball at Penn State, and I believe we've gotten off to a good start on that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mike Rhoades, thank you so much for your time.

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