

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

**Houston Cougars**

**Kelvin Sampson**

**Milos Uzan**

**Emanuel Sharp**

Postgame Press Conference



perimeter, huge inside. We were undersized, but not under toughed. Our kids were tough today.

**Q. Last night, Coach, you told us you already won the Big 12 Conference and this was a fun, three-day tournament. How important is it to validate with this tournament?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: That kind of sounds a little too trivial. You know, we won this tournament, believe it or not, three straight times in the early 2000s. That was when it was on a Sunday and we had to hustle upstairs at Kemper to just make it on Selection Sunday.

I remember standing outside the suites talking to Keith Langford and his mother when they were announcing our name. I don't know why that just popped in my head just now. But those were the days. The Saturday thing makes a lot more sense.

I think the thing I -- and this is why they should always keep this tournament in Kansas City. The forerunner to the Big 12 was the Big Eight. I know I'm the only guy coaching still that was a head coach in the Big Eight. I coached there for three years, '94-'95, '95-'96, and '96-'97. I can't remember the first year of the Big 12.

But Eddie Sutton, Danny Nee, Norm Stewart, O'Hearn's Arena. I don't even know the name of the new one. But those guys taught the new guy a lot. I learned a lot from those guys, the old Big Eight.

You think about the tradition that those schools had and now -- of course the first year of the Big 12, Missouri and Nebraska, Texas A&M, no TCU. TCU wasn't in it. It was Baylor, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and Texas. Those were the four Texas schools. And Oklahoma, OSU, and then the northern schools.

What a great league it was. More intimate. Of course you don't have the diversions and distractions that you have now. Proud to represent the Big 12. I'm not going to come off my statement that the Big 12 champion is decided over ten weeks, though.

Houston 72, Arizona 64

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is Houston Head Coach Kelvin Sampson along with Milos Uzan and Emanuel Sharp. Coach?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Now we can talk about Arizona. First of all, congratulations to Tommy, his staff, and his team. I thought they had a great plan. The first half they had us on our heels a little bit, but once we got to halftime and kinda got reorganized, and did a much better job of attacking their defense, looking for the match-ups that we thought we had a chance to win.

Then once Milos and Mylik and Emanuel and L.J., they're our best shot makers. The thing about not having J'Wan Roberts, he's our best scoring big. We didn't have him to throw it to. We couldn't throw it inside. So we weren't going to manufacture a lot of shots in the paint unless the ball was driven into the paint.

Veesaar is such an excellent pick and roll defender, but we kept him out of those the second half. We ghosted every screen and that allowed us to get in the paint. Once we got into the paint, we could spray it or shoot it.

We listed two or three guys that we felt like if we could get any of these three in an iso and space, drive 'em, and then that allowed us to get to the offensive boards. If your big screens are setting screens and rolling they're not in a position to rebound. That's why we weren't getting any the second half.

I think Ja'Vier had five for the game and Mylik had two, and then we had a bunch of tips that we kept alive and came up with. Arizona is a good team, very athletic on the



It's an honor for our kids. I'm glad our kids get to come to the tournament. Had we lost today that would have been a great experience for them.

You're not going to win every game you play. And winning this tournament is awesome for the team that wins, but for the team that loses it's not the end of the world. Arizona is going to have a good seed and they're going to be a tough out in the NCAA Tournament next week, and two weeks from now nobody is going to remember they lost to Houston in the Big 12 Tournament. Except maybe our fans. They may, or our kids.

It's been an awesome year. Especially considering how we started, and the journey that these kids have had, just really proud of them and the staff.

**Q. Kelvin, as long as we're reminiscing, first time in the game that there is no old Big Eight team.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: That's right. Two newbies, right? Older newbie, they're the new newbie.

**Q. There was a point in the second half where it seemed like Milos was not only bringing up the ball, but the team was clearing out for him. Is that an accurate observation?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: The second half?

**Q. Second half.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: When we beat them in Tucson, you know, we had a clear game plan going in, and it was awesome; worked. We got L open for threes. Emanuel had been out for about ten days. He missed some games, and that was his first game back. I think he was 0-7.

But we have this series we call Push. Our Push Series we do a couple things out of it. And Milos is -- he's the best ambidextrous point guard and pick and roll guy that I've had. I've had some that were probably better going right, and maybe a left hander I've had -- I don't think I've ever had a left hander. But he goes left and right equally good. If you jump up and push him to his left there is no difference in that than his right.

But Arizona did a really good job at the game plan. So what we did at halftime was we stayed away from any big-on-big -- any pick and roll. What we did was instead of setting the screen we ghosted the screen, and that allowed us to get downhill without anybody in front of us.

A regular pick and roll at their place, they drop coverage, right, Milos? They were in drop coverage so we got

downhill because of where they put their big. Here they put him at the line of scrimmage and we couldn't turn the corner because they're so huge and agile.

Veesaar and Awaka both. So we set screens with our guards. Once we set the screen we call 'em ghosts, where you saw the screen and you slip out. Now we can get downhill behind it. Our kids are good one-on-one players, you know?

There is a lot of old school people that think offense should look like it did when Pete Corill was the coach. Back cuts and pin downs and you score off of an action. I would like to introduce LeBron James and James Harden and Kevin Durant to basketball today.

We recruit guys that can play one-on-one basketball. A lot of these defenses are designed to stop you, so if you can get a good one-on-one player in space, you can get a good shot. And a good shot is a good shot. We took a lot of good shots the second half.

**Q. What can you say about the bonds and the relationships for this group and how does that make you different than other teams in the NCAA Tournament.**

MILOS UZAN: I came from a different culture so I was able to see two sides of it, and Houston's culture is so real; the brotherhood here is top tier. What we go through during the summer, I feel like it brings us together even more.

So, yeah, I mean, I'm just super excited and glad we were able to pull through with this one.

EMANUEL SHARP: Same thing. The amount of time we spend with each other every day, in the gym, outside of the gym, you know, it's kinda hard not to be close with them, and that's what makes us such a good team.

Along with the coaches and the coaching staff and the work that we put in, we bring all that together, you get Houston basketball. It's a great feeling.

**Q. Is this team as well prepared as any team that you've had to go into the NCAA Tournament?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: The team I had in '02 I thought could beat anybody in the country. We had just beat Kansas in Kemper but we beat Maryland by 15 or 18, so those were the two teams on the other side of the bracket.

And then Quannas, he tells it, but he had the worst sprained ankle I ever seen. Way worse than J'Wan



Roberts. J'Wan could have played; Quannas could not.

That's when I realized that sometimes it's not how good you are, it's whether good fortune shines on you. Bob Huggins had the best team in the country and Martin, and the year we went to the Final Four in '21, I didn't think we could win it.

Baylor was better than us. They were too good. I thought we could play with the other teams in the Final Four, but we couldn't beat Baylor. In '22 Bill's team won it. I don't think that's the best team Bill's ever had, so I thought we had a chance that year.

Last year's team, when Arceneaux tore his Achilles running down the floor against Texas A&M, and Joe-Joe broke a bone in his foot, we still figured a way to win. But that's because we had the best player in the Big 12 in Jamal Shead.

I still thought we could get to the Final Four with that team, but obviously UConn and Alabama, Purdue, those teams were so good, and Connecticut was special.

But this team, you know, we've played Auburn and we've played Alabama. I don't think we're better than either one of those teams. I think we can play with 'em.

**Q. Kelvin, you guys three years ago, Arizona was ranked number one, you beat 'em pretty good. Tommy has talked about that game and how it spurred him want to build a tougher team. And you've seen them twice this year, do they seem differently built the way they executed at all this year?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: They were number one in the nation or number one seed?

**Q. Yeah, number one seed.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: They were a number one seed, yeah. I thought that team was pretty tough. Ben Mathurin, the best player we played against, but our team was tough, too. I don't know how to compare our team to other teams, that's for their coach to say. I think for us, our team is tough.

I know Caleb Love is tough. Jaden Bradley is tough. KJ Lewis is tough. Veesaar is really good. He'll be a first round draft choice. Awaka is tough. That's the team we played tonight.

I don't know enough about their back story like you guys do. I don't know a lot about 'em. I know Tommy is an outstanding coach and he has a great staff, too. But that's

a good team. They get the right draw, they can play for a long time next week and the following week.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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