

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Thursday, October 10, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Louisville Cardinals
Coach Pat Kelsey
J'Vonne Hadley
Chucky Hepburn
Men's Press Conference



you feel like maybe that added to bringing you to Louisville and trusting in the process and trusting in everything?

PAT KELSEY: I believe in my faith that God has a plan for all of us throughout the journey of our lifetime. I like to think that it was in God's plan for me to be standing up here right here as head coach of Louisville.

I say all the time. I try to keep my life simple, and it's about faith, family, and hoop. Faith, family, and Louisville basketball. Faith, family, and being a teacher and mentor and role model and a leader for these young men behind me.

It starts with my faith. That's my center. That's my core. That's where I gain my strength. That's where I'm able to withstand the trials and tribulations of life.

One of the great gifts that I think I could give my players and to my children is to be that example of somebody that's committed to Christ. I'm sure as heck not perfect. In fact, I'm probably the least perfect person in this entire room, if not people listening out there watching.

You know, that is 100% where I am centered as a human being and the most important thing in my life is my relationship with Christ.

Q. I had a chance to talk to both of the guys today and a number of veterans on the squad, but you have one rookie on this team. Both of these guys have said he doesn't seem like a freshman in Khani Rooths. How has he impressed you since he stepped on campus?

PAT KELSEY: I've said this several times, but we're going to address one true freshman, as you mentioned, Khani Rooths. We thought long and hard about allowing him to dress himself, but we've thought better of it at this point.

That was a joke. Watch it again, and you'll get it. These guys a little slow here. I'm just kidding.

You should have seen the speech these guys gave the other day at our tipoff luncheon. You want to talk about

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Louisville. Questions for Coach, please.

Q. First off, welcome to the ACC.

PAT KELSEY: Thank you.

Q. Were there any connections that you had at Louisville, anything from the past, or was it as soon as this job opened, it's, like, I got to take it?

PAT KELSEY: Well, you know, the connections from a locale standpoint, I'm from right up the road in Cincinnati. I-71, about 90 miles straight up the road. Didn't matter if I was 90 miles away or I was nine million miles away, the brand of University of Louisville Cardinal basketball resonates from coast-to-coast in collegiate sports.

Obviously growing up in the '80s, the era of Denny Crum, the national championships, and the Final Four, and 1980, 1986, all of those great, great players.

Obviously Coach Pitino carried the baton from Coach Crum and continued Louisville as being one of the best programs in college basketball.

That's the connection. It's Louisville. Are you kidding me? You know? When they expressed an interest, obviously I had a great job. I was in a city that my family was very comfortable with and we had grown a lot of roots, but to have the opportunity to be the head coach at one of the most storied programs ever in our sport, unbelievably blessed.

Q. During the NCAA Tournament with the College of Charleston I actually spoke to you about your faith, and would love to continue that conversation of how



caliber of human being and the character of guys that are going to represent this program. Last year they both did a phenomenal job.

Khani Rooths is an old soul. He doesn't act like a freshman. He doesn't want to be considered a freshman. Early on when I was handling him with kid gloves a little bit when we were implementing stuff, and I felt like I had to over-explain stuff. He looked at me and goes, Coach, I got it, I got it. I love that.

He has a high basketball IQ, great work ethic, and a very, very bright future.

Q. On a team that has so many veterans, I'm wondering if you could just talk about your guys' leadership dynamic and just how you have seen that develop during practice? Then, also, could you speak on how these two that you brought with you have become two of the leaders on the team?

PAT KELSEY: Leadership is crucial, as we all know, for the success of any enterprise. We obviously want to reach elite results. It starts with your leadership. Your leadership drives your culture, your culture drives your behavior, and your behavior obviously drives your results.

I'm very blessed to have a team, a locker room full of guys that are leaders. They all do it in different ways because we're all different. Some are more vocal. Some are by example, but they're a group of guys that are committed to the common good.

It makes it easy as a coach when your message is resonating in the locker room when you're not around. We've got a group of guys and a team full of guys that are that way. That makes my job very, very easy.

It's two examples right here with Chucky and J'Vonne being here. We could go all the way down the line. We have an older veteran team, guys that have logged a ton of minutes of college basketball. They've had a lot of success.

We always talk about the back of the bubble gum card. There's a lot of evidence that these guys are very, very productive players. They're bought into the system, bought into our culture, and I'm really blessed and lucky to coach them and excited about the season.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch spots with Chucky. We'll have Chucky Hepburn up for a few minutes. Questions, please.

Q. You transferring from Wisconsin, what was the

message that you got from Coach and just your belief that in this final year of eligibility this was going to be the right place for you?

CHUCKY HEPBURN: Yeah, Coach Kelsey was one of the first ones to call me in the transfer portal. It was a very long conversation. I loved the energy that he brought. I love the type of guys he is recruiting. They're all about the right things.

When you have a players' coach like him and you bring the great type of guys that he brought in, that's something you want to go play for.

Where Louisville basketball is at right now we want to be able to bring that back in. We know how much Louisville basketball means to the city, and we want to be able to bring it back to Louisville.

Q. You mentioned Peyton Siva being a guy that you really looked up to when you were talking to the ACC folks just a moment ago. What was that conversation like when you approached Peyton and said, hey, you are a guy that I kind of looked up to from basically day one?

CHUCKY HEPBURN: Yeah, one of the first things I truly said to him was, wow, you're pretty old now. You have gray hair. I was probably, like, 10 years old and just looking back, it's pretty funny.

It's been great to have Peyton Siva mentor me. He is one of my favorite college point guards growing up. To be able to have him to be my mentor, national champion, he has played in the NBA, played overseas, he has had a ton of experience as a pro.

I want to take everything that he says to me. I take it in. I'm blessed to have him as a mentor.

Q. Talking to anybody about you, one thing they mention is just that you're really a tenacious defender. I'm wondering if you can kind of walk us through how you got to be that way. Has that been something that's always been a huge emphasis of your game even when you were starting out really young?

CHUCKY HEPBURN: Yeah. Starting in high school my freshman year if I wanted to start varsity, I had to play defense. I had to go lock in and do whatever it takes to make defensive plays and make winning plays.

After my freshman year, sophomore through senior year, I led the state in steals per game. I've taken a lot of pride in my defense because I started to learn that if you wanted to



see the floor, if you wanted to be known as like a tenacious defender on the court, you've got to be locked in defensively. You have to pick up 94 feet. You have to do the little things defensively.

Like I say, I take a lot of pride doing that, and that's where I really want my game to be.

THE MODERATOR: You can pass the microphone off to J'Vonnie. Your first assist of the year officially.

Questions for J'Vonnie Hadley.

Q. I'm curious, kind of similar question to Chucky, who is kind of a mentor for you as you were going through the college ranks?

J'VONNIE HADLEY: Actually mine is in terms of a coach actually, Coach Hank Plona. He was my coach at junior college coach at Indian Hills Community College. That's where I was my sophomore year. He's been my biggest mentor probably ever.

Just with him being a head coach, and also being like a father figure. I still talk to him, you know, as often as I can. He will be texting with me. He brought me out of some dark places being at Indian Hills, just being down on myself a little bit.

But I mean, with him getting the job at Western Kentucky, he is right down the road. It's not hard for him to come down or me to go check in with him.

Q. Could you speak to just with so many guys, with both you and Chucky and this is your last year of college, as is the case for so many people on your roster, could you speak to the sense of urgency this team has to kind of get things back on track now as opposed to just setting a foundation to build upon later?

J'VONNIE HADLEY: I think we all understand that Louisville basketball needs to come back right now. That's where revival comes from. Just reviving the Louisville culture, the Louisville way. Coach Kelsey has done a great job of implementing and just educating us on the rich history that Louisville has and the Final Fours, the national championships. I mean, he has done a great job of bringing in winners.

Most of us have been the NCAA Tournament. We're born winners, and we're joining Coach Kelsey and his winning staff as well. It's a recipe for wins in the future.

Q. Similar to what I asked your teammate, what was it

about Coach and his message that spoke to you and resonated with you to make that move from Colorado to Louisville?

J'VONNIE HADLEY: Coach Kelsey wasn't necessarily the first coach to call me because I entered the portal a little bit early. He got the job a little bit after that.

At the same time, he was the most passionate coach that called me. He was the coach with the most energy and the most -- he was the most genuine coach and all of those great things.

When I got to campus at the same time it was all real. It wasn't fake. I believed him through the first phone call. He probably talked for about 30 minutes, and that's all it really took.

It was real. I trusted him. That's ultimately what you look for in the portal is trust, especially with you having one year left. You look for a coach that you're going to put your last year in his hands ultimately and the team's hands because we didn't have a lot of commits.

Trusting in him that he is going to build the right team and bring the right guys along to accomplish something greater than a national championship.

THE MODERATOR: Your communications team fed us a note, and on you they say tough, fifth-year guard with a junkyard dog mentality. What does the junkyard dog mentality mean?

J'VONNIE HADLEY: Ultimately I'm going to get after you. That's really what it means. I'm going to get after you. Whether it's a game or a practice, I'm going to get after you. On defense, offense, I'm going to attack you.

At the same time I just kind of want to implement that I'm not backing down from anybody or anything. I put my faith in God, and at the end of the day whatever I can accomplish, it wasn't meant for me to accomplish, but I try to do all the little things in the game of basketball. Rebounds, defend.

I'm not going to be that 30 points per game scorer. I wasn't gifted to be Kevin Durant, 7 foot, moving like that. That's not how I was built. I was built to play my role, do all the little things in the game, and I understand that, and I understand my role, and I understand that I'm going to be that leader for this team.

THE MODERATOR: J'Vonnie, thank you. Louisville, good luck this year.



