

# Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Arizona Wildcats

Tommy Lloyd

Oumar Ballo

Pelle Larsson



THE MODERATOR: It's great to have Tommy Lloyd on the stage with us to begin today. Coach, welcome.

TOMMY LLOYD: Great to be here.

**Q. As we're just for you two weeks away from your first exhibition game, how are you feeling about your team?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I feel great. It was a long off-season, which is good in a lot of respects. It allowed me time to continue my growth as a coach. I know I'm in a special place, and I know I carry a huge responsibility, and it comes with that.

I'm excited. I'm excited about the group of guys we have. It's been fun watching them kind of grow as a team, and obviously we still have a lot of work to do like everybody else.

I think we've got a lot of the right pieces, and now we've just got to put it together and get challenged and go through some adversity. Hopefully the outcome will be good.

**Q. Speaking of adversity, you've been phenomenal the first two years, 61 wins. Disappointing loss last year first round of the tournament. Talking to people around your program, reading stuff in the off-season, you talked about toughness and how toughness needs to be more a part of the fabric of your program. Talk about how you're implementing that and how it's going to help you guys be even better, especially in the postseason.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Toughness can be kind of a catchall term. I never felt that we're soft. I think we play a very aggressive, physical style of basketball. But at the end of the day, you get in a single elimination tournament, and

toughness comes in lots of form.

It could be sticking to a game plan. It could be obviously the physical things you think come with dominating the point and dominating the glass and things like that.

But I think it's important. The first thing I thought after that Princeton game is I need to increase our margin for error, and to me, toughness is a way that you do that. If you want to be competitive in these games, sometimes you've got to be able to physically dominate your opponent.

We're going to strive for that. We know it's going to be challenging. We know other teams fight back really hard. So, yeah, I think toughness is a cornerstone of our program, and I think for us to be able to make sure, when you get to March, that you're able to be successful. Toughness has to be a key element of everything we do.

**Q. Coach, good morning. You have some decent heavyweights on your nonconference schedule. What are some immediate things you're looking for out of your team, in terms of tweaking and that you want to correct, if there are corrections to be made, when you play those opponents?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, there's got to be corrections, and the reason you play opponents like that is because they're going to expose you. To me, that's part of the fun is trying to figure it out. I could maybe guess at some of the things I need to correct, but I think those are going to show themselves over time, and I don't want to, like, predetermine we're not going to be good at this or we're going to be great at that.

I'm going to let it kind of play out in front of me, and I'll coach it in the moment as things start to show up.

**Q. Caleb Love has been one of the most talented players in college basketball over the last several years, but he's also been really inconsistent. I'd love to hear your thoughts on what you thought of him before he transferred to your program and what you've seen from him since he's been in Tucson.**



TOMMY LLOYD: Obviously you know he's got a lot of talent. What he did at Carolina, people would maybe say it's inconsistent or inefficient or whatever you want to say. All I know is this: Two years ago in the NCAA Tournament, that guy had 30 points in an Elite Eight game and 28 in a Final Four game. So there's not many guys in the history of college basketball that can say they've done that.

They didn't have a great year as a team last year, and he was part of it, and he owned it. He and I have had amazing conversations about how we can help him and how he can help us. So I think we got him at the right time.

I know maybe he's been a little bit of a lightning rod because, when you play at a place like Carolina and you're Preseason Number 1 and it doesn't work out, there's going to be some criticism that comes with that. He knows that.

But he's someone that everyone in college basketball -- media, fans -- should be rooting for. These young guys deserve multiple opportunities to be successful. You shouldn't be defined what happens one year at Carolina when your team is Preseason Number 1 and there's a lot of things that go into it.

For me, I know this. I'm always rooting for young people, and I can't wait for this to turn out to be a success story this year.

**Q. I want to talk about the evolution of Oumar Ballo. He has just been fantastic for you. I want to know what your expectations are for him this season, particularly when it comes to leadership now that he's an upperclassman.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Sure. Big O, you guys will hear from him in a second. He has a special place in my heart. This is a guy I knew he was going to be successful because he has amazing high character.

He had to deal with some growing pains and some struggle, and he's come out on the other side. For me, the conversations I've had with him, it's not so much statistical growth or anything like that -- I mean, I'm sure he wants to add a three-point shot, but that's not as important to me, stuff like that.

I just want to see him continue to grow as a basketball player kind of in modern basketball maybe, so he can be successful outside of an Arizona setting and have a long, good career because the game has changed for players like him. Maybe we're a little bit old school in the way we play, where we really value and reward guys like him. I don't know if other systems are doing that across the country and in basketball in general.

But then you're right, it's the leadership. He has that. He has so much potential there. His leadership can be grounded in the fact that he's dealt with struggle and come through it. I think all these guys, these young players struggle as part of their growth process. So to have somebody who's done it, come through the other side, I think he can be a great example for others, especially within our program.

**Q. Piggy-backing on that, Tommy, one thing that struck me in your two years at Arizona is player development and how guys, you see them one year, they come back better the next. Everyone this time of year wants to talk about who's coming in, whether it's five-star high school kids, transfer portal guys. Talk about your off-season player development and who this year you think is going to come back looking different than they did last year, not just Oumar.**

TOMMY LLOYD: For me, one of the core tenets of our program is always going to be pushing the limits of individual player development. I think that's an important part of it. We're 100 percent bought into that, and I think our players in our program feel that.

At the end of last season, when you're going through everything and you're figuring out what your roster is going to look like, I always slept good because I was banking on these guys coming back being better. I didn't even know who the incoming guys coming in with them were going to be, but I knew these guys come back. I thought if I have Kylan Boswell, Pelle Larsson, and Oumar Ballo coming back, and they all make the off-season jumps that guys make in our program, that's the foundation for a top ten team right there.

I think those guys have made that jump, and I think we've added some really good pieces to it, and I'm excited.

I think you're going to see Pelle, Pelle is -- you're going to hear from him in a second -- an incredibly talented player. There's no doubt in my mind he's an NBA talent, and I've always believed that, and he and I have had conversations about it. I think he's been finding his way in college basketball, and the last years he's been on really good teams with other good players, and he's unbelievable filling in the gaps for that.

I think this is going to be an opportunity for him to be maybe one of those featured players, and he's ready for that moment.

**Q. Keshad Johnson is going to be an important part for you guys. Looking at your roster, what you lost**

**from last year, specifically Tubelis and what he brought to the table production-wise. Johnson gets to the national championship game last year at San Diego State. Talk about what he's going to bring to the table, not just from a numbers standpoint, but defensively too.**

TOMMY LLOYD: He's an amazing person. First off, I want to say that San Diego State did a great job with him throughout the course of his career, and he really developed there because he started as kind of a guy that didn't play, to being a starter. And I've seen that growth continue. So he game in with a great foundation, and I'm thankful for that.

He's a very versatile player. I don't want to just label him as a defensive player because I think he's really good at both sides of the ball. But defensively he has an ability in the modern game. He switches. He can switch guard 1 through 5. He can pressure the basketball. He can cover up for mistakes, protect the rim. He's a force on the glass.

Offensively in our system, that 4 man is in the middle of the action a lot, and I've really seen kind of his play making grow and his shooting grow. And I'm excited for him to get an opportunity to show that stuff.

**Q. First of all, Tommy, congratulations on all your success. Unbelievable. I'm just wondering stylistically over the summer, have you thought about any changes you might make? I know you're big. I know you have great guards. By the way, pretty good combination. And I know you love to play fast. But have you thought, well, maybe I need to do -- I need to tweak it a little bit?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I think we're going to walk the ball up and play in the 40s this year.

**Q. I know you're not going to do that.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Stylistically, I'm always looking to grow. I think maybe you're going to see some different layers that we're trying to add to our system and maybe play a different way.

We had Tubelis at the 4, which I really like having those two big guys out there. I don't know if we'll have that predominantly as much as we did last year. The floor might be opened up with some spacing scenarios and half-court offense.

But all in all, we have a system, and I don't know if we recruit to it, play to it, whatever, but we're going to play fast. We're going to move the ball. We're going to play in ball

screens. I'm going to be on the guys to make good decisions with the ball. We're going to have disciplined shot selection but playing with freedom. All the same elements are going to be there.

Defensively, we're continuing to grow there as well. The first year, I think we were a top ten defense. Last year it didn't feel like we were as good defensively, but we were kind of top 40 when you'd look analytically at it. We know, for us to be where we want to be as a program, we need to scratch and claw to be up in that top ten defensive area, and I think we have the pieces to do that.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to bring your players in, Oumar Ballo and Pelle Larsson. As they come in, could you give us a thought on why they're here for you.

TOMMY LLOYD: These are kind of the two most experienced guys in our program right now. They represent Arizona basketball well in every way on and off the floor. It wasn't -- a lot of thought didn't go into this one. It was an easy selection for these two guys to come. These are two guys who have been great players for us, and they've played with other great players.

I'm excited for them to kind of take the next step and be the featured guys, and I know they're ready for that challenge and they're not going to disappoint.

THE MODERATOR: I'll tell you who we should have brought in for this guy is Chris Rounds, the strength coach at Arizona. Look at these guys. You guys are ready to go.

PELLE LARSSON: Always.

**Q. What's been the off-season workout regimen? You had an international trip. Were you able to put on as much muscle as you wanted to?**

PELLE LARSSON: They've got weight rooms in hotels, so we've been doing fine.

**Q. For you two, I know you have a handful of new players in the program, and I asked your coach about it. The disappointment of the NCAA Tournament last year and how motivating that is for both of you. Oumar, I'll start with you. Did that have an effect on your summer and the motivation to get in the weight room and work on your game and come back better this year?**

OUMAR BALLO: Yes, for sure because last year we didn't finish the way that we wanted to. So that put a chip on our shoulder. We have to get better as a team and as individuals. So that motivated us a lot this summer to work

out harder.

**Q. For both you guys, Tommy was just talking about how much you guys talk about development and work on development. Was there something that, for each of you, that you really worked on this off-season? I know, in fact, Oumar, you've been really good about different things you've added to your game, that little jump hook, the little jump push shot. Just again for both of you, what things have you maybe worked on personally?**

PELLE LARSSON: Just finding more ways within our offense, I think, to score, find the right opportunities to get your shot off and then just be aggressive, try to play more aggressive than ever on the defensive end. Hopefully I can dump the ball off to O as much as I can off of that.

OUMAR BALLO: Me personally, I just work a lot on my low catching, be a low threat, and also be a leader for those young bigs and try to bring everyone together and try to connect all the dots.

**Q. Pelle, I don't know if you've both thought about it, but you both started at other schools, you both transferred, you've both been Sixth Man of the Year in the Pac. If you go back and look at where you were as freshmen coming in and where you are now, did you see this? Was that part of the hope or the plan in coming to Arizona?**

PELLE LARSSON: When I came in as a freshman, I definitely didn't imagine myself playing at Arizona, but it's been great. I'm very blessed and thankful.

Me and O kind of got there at the same time and been through the same stuff. So it's really nice for me to share that journey with him.

OUMAR BALLO: Yeah, personally Arizona was one of my top three schools, but I went to Gonzaga because of Coach Lloyd, and that was probably the best decision because he led me where I needed to be. I'm grateful I'm here today, went through my struggle, and found my own way. I'm thankful for the program to give me a second chance.

**Q. Let's talk about your off-seasons. Obviously as a team, you guys went on an international trip. You both went home, Sweden. Oumar, you did some basketball camps back in Mali. Can you tell us about that.**

OUMAR BALLO: Me and some other guys from Mali, we went home this summer. We had 250 kids. We brought them shoes and gear, and we had two days of camp, and it

was amazing. The joy that we put on those kids' faces were heartwarming. I'm glad we got to do that, give something back to those kids.

**Q. Pelle, one thing that doesn't get talked about enough -- it gets mentioned, but I don't think talked about enough -- is your unselfishness with your role at Arizona. You started, then you didn't start. Then you were Sixth Man of the Year last year, you started, and then you came off the bench. Talk about your approach to that because Tommy was talking about your potential to be an NBA player, and that stuff matters. Like your unselfishness and your ability to be in different roles and thrive in those roles matters to NBA people. So talk about what you've gone through mentally in terms of adjusting to that.**

PELLE LARSSON: I don't think there was any like big adjustments necessary because it's kind of I was taught to -- what matters is when you're on the court, what you're doing when you're on the court, and I was taught to just play to win.

So I've just been trusting that and trusting my coach, my teammates, that what we do in practice is going to get us better and just stick to the plan and help as much as I can when I'm actually on the court.

**Q. Tommy talked about toughness in the off-season. I asked him about it, and now I'm going to ask you guys about it. Are you throwing blows in practice now and beating each other up, or is it more just the mental approach, the mental toughness of things so that what happened last year doesn't happen again?**

OUMAR BALLO: I feel like it's both. Our practices really get intense. Guys go after each other, and it's so physical. But most importantly, it's a mental approach because me and Pelle were there last year, and the way the season ended, man, it hurt us.

For us, it's important to let guys know that we need to get better as a person and as a team, and mentally is the key to grow, to grow mentally.

**Q. We're a month away from your first road game at Duke. So when we watch you guys play, obviously you got the opener before that, but could you, Pelle, give us some insight, some players that maybe we haven't seen in Arizona uniforms yet that you think will make an impact that you've been seeing in practice?**

PELLE LARSSON: On our team? Yeah, we've got a lot of guys. I feel like this is probably like the deepest roster that I've been a part of. So many talented young guys and

experienced upperclassmen. It's a good mix.

Honestly, in practice we can divide it into three even teams and go at it and butt heads. So it's been really fun this off-season. Anyone who will get the chance in the spotlight will definitely try to take advantage and step up for themselves and for the team.

**Q. Oumar, who's throwing that high-low pass to you this year?**

OUMAR BALLO: Keshad and Pelle for sure.

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