

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Michigan vs Arizona

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Hinkle Fieldhouse

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference



I see so many similarities with the intangibles and the team character of both of us, and then obviously when you factor in the size and both teams get a lot of credit for how good our front lines are, but there's some great guards and very intelligent basketball being played by both teams.

When we watch them, we see ourselves other than a few stylistic differences. We see a lot of ourselves in them, and it's going to be a battle. We believe it's going to be won in the 39th or 40th minute of this game.

Q. Yaxel has found a different gear over the last few weekends of the tournament. How long do you think it took him to realize he was a great player?

DUSTY MAY: It took him a while, and I think our guys have constantly reminded him. He's so unselfish. He's so -- I don't know how to say it. He wants to be one of the guys. They've encouraged him to be more aggressive, to shoot more, to hunt some more individual accolades all year, and he simply refused because he didn't care about any of those things.

It's allowed us to have a real selfless group, and it's improved our environment because he's been so unselfish but he still has no idea how good he is.

Q. I think last weekend you referred to Marches and Elliott as psycho contenders. I know you play more games in practice than a lot of groups. What does that competitiveness look like on a daily basis in your practice gym and how does it raise the level that your team competes at deep into the tournament?

DUSTY MAY: Well, all season when we went starters versus reserves, the reserves have held their own, and then we start mixing in the lineups where you have a couple of our all-league guys going against a couple of the all-league guys on another team.

It's just been a really healthy competitive environment all year, and it's part -- I think it's a big part of our success and our improvement throughout the season because if you're not -- if you don't have 10 guys out there battling, pushing

DUSTY MAY: It's an honor to be back in the Final Four representing University of Michigan and the Big Ten conference with a group that is very well-deserving, and we're just excited to still be one of four teams still standing.

Q. I asked Charlie about your time in high school. He mentioned the buzz cut. Being here in Indianapolis, does this bring back any memories, and how special is it to have a Final Four not so far from where you grew up?

DUSTY MAY: Well, it's special simply being here. It's a little bit overwhelming with friends and families and old teachers and whatnot, but it's a full circle moment.

I still remember as a junior, senior manager when the Final Four was here in Indianapolis myself, and all of us managers wanted to find a way in coaching in any capacity would pile in a car and just get out and hopefully bump into any coach and find a way to make an impression, obviously using the Coach Knight badge to get in any conversation.

Just a full circle moment from chasing around coaches trying to beg for a GA spot, to be back here with this team, it's surreal.

Q. Just talk about the matchup with Arizona and your bigs versus their bigs and how critical that's obviously going to be?

DUSTY MAY: Well, we feel like we're built in a similar fashion to Arizona and I'll begin with the veterans on both teams and how they've taken this off-the-bench role and they've impacted winning almost every game.

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each other to get better, then you can get a little bit stagnant and whatnot.

The depth of our roster certainly helped our practice habits.

Q. Dusty, you're not at the ultimate goal. I'm sure you want to win two more games. Just knowing that next year no matter what happens you're going to be hanging a Final Four banner, maybe more, at Chrysler, that's a big moment. A lot of players are already looking forward to that, coming back next year, coming back in 20 years to celebrate that. What was the reception like going back to school after the Elite Eight from the campus, from BOOSers, from alumni, whatever that might be?

DUSTY MAY: To be honest, we've tried to keep it as business as possible and limit all of those outside distractions and stay busy. We gave our guys a day and a half off essentially. We had two days off of organized practice, but on day two we lifted. We had an Arizona overview and we did individual workouts and did some things that we thought might prepare us to play in the dome and things like that.

To be honest, it felt a lot different than it did at FAU. This felt like something our guys expected, and even our fan base, it felt like they expected it a little bit, as well, and so did I because of the guys we have wearing a Michigan jersey.

All along, it's just kind of felt like mission has not been accomplished yet.

Q. When and how did the Big Goof nickname come up for Aday, and how important has it been for him to feel comfortable being himself to get the most out of him for you as a coach this year?

DUSTY MAY: I think it's very important that all of our guys are -- I'll begin with, in our building we take pride in psychological safety, and we want all these guys to be who they are now when other people are counting on us to do a job, then we have to do it in a certain way with a level of intensity and professionalism and whatnot, but when we're not doing that job, we want these guys to enjoy each other's company, to have fun and be who they are.

He's always goofing around and his personality -- I say that, Elliot and Morez are psychos and Yax is laughing and cutting up and he's silly, and Aday is silly and Roddy is serious and Nimari is serious. So you have all these unique personalities. We want them to be themselves, and I date myself with my staff. I'm older than all those guys, but Reno 911, I don't know if you guys are familiar with

Lieutenant Dangle.

So yes, I hear some laughter. So there was one day Aday made a play and he was just being silly on the court, and it was the same day that I had sent the staff a Lieutenant Dangle goofing in his new boots. I think it was Coach Church said he's just goofing, so he immediately became the Big Goof.

Q. Obviously you've been very successful building this team through the transfer portal through your two years here. What does this run mean for building something sustainable, long-term success? How does getting to a Final Four help with what you're trying to build at Michigan?

DUSTY MAY: Well, I want to give our team last year a lot of credit for the way those guys played, and a couple of them left, a couple of them stayed, a couple of them went to the NBA. But those guys, when you move up, there's a lot of questions when you go from low major to high major, whatever. There are a lot of questions.

When you're recruiting, you're recruiting against that every day. When you haven't had a guy drafted in the first round you're recruiting against that every day. There's certain things you're always recruiting against. Last year's team gave us an identity that this is the way we're going to play.

I think when you turned on the TV, our guys, the way they shared the ball, the way they cared for each other, how connected they were as a group on the court, showed that the guys we're recruiting now, and you look at the way Vlad and Danny as two seven-footers play, if you're a big guy that wants to play a certain way, then seeing what those guys did made us a very attractive option for them.

Recruiting wasn't near as difficult last year as it was the first year, and hopefully each year recruiting becomes more niche and we have an identity and a brand that people choose us. We talk about the transfer portal and all this other stuff. I think more than ever we used to choose players and we used to convince them to come play for us, whether it's because we were showering them with attention, showing them more love, or we'd simply been recruiting them longer. In our opinion we always thought those were pretty shallow reasons to choose a university because a coach came to more 6:00 a.m. workouts, things like that.

Now the players -- and each coach may have a different opinion, but the players are choosing us. When we make contact with the player the first thing they do is slide into the DMs and messages of all of our players that we've coached in the past and they do more homework and intel

on us than we do on them.

So I know that's spinning in a number of different directions, but recruiting has changed so much, and I'm going to echo Coach Barnes from Tennessee last week, it's not that bad. We used to recruit guys for three years and spend 80, 100, 200 manhours away from our families begging these 15 to 18 year olds to come play at our university and then they decide to go another direction, and you just think of all the time and resources you've wasted.

Recruiting has been streamlined and it's much more efficient than it's ever been.

Q. When you went running around the Final Four in 2000, can you name a couple of the student managers that were with you? And B, is that how you got the job at USC? Did you run into any coaches in downtown?

DUSTY MAY: Actually, it was Matt Baberk (ph) who got on at Stanford right away. It was Dan Block who got on at Indiana but decided to go the family route and he'll still be at these games. And actually Dane Fife is a glorified manager. He was with us and he was the most annoying of the bunch. And then Joe Pasternack was with us and he was kind of the ringleader of that circus.

No, the USC job, I still say to this day -- Henry Bibby was a coach in the CBA and he's sitting on the road recruiting talking to Mike Davis and John Treloar who he knew from the CBA days, and he said, I just had to fire my operations guy because he didn't work. He was a former player that just didn't know what it took and the demands of the job.

This is when staffs were three assistants and one other spot. And he said, I'm looking for a guy that works hard and Coach Treloar and Coach Davis looked at him and said, we've got a guy for you. So that's how I was able to get a job in coaching.

For whatever reason the stars were aligned and I fell into that spot and was very -- I learned a lot.

But yeah, that was the group that came up here and we put our stamp on Indianapolis that year at the Final Four.

Q. If you look at the teams in this year's Final Four, there's a lot less reliance generally speaking on returning players compared to last year and certainly in years past. Do you still think retention is important in this day and age, and what has been your approach to know that you're finding the right guys who will make your group work even if you don't have as much returning talent as maybe would be typical for teams in this spot several years ago?

DUSTY MAY: Well, I have a whole different perspective on the retention piece and I'll be as quick as I can with this answer. If you're retaining the right guys, yes. You have to retain the right guys, and I think that's a big part of our success.

The guys that we retained earned the trust of our new guys immediately because they wanted to win. There was no hidden agendas. They were all about the team.

They taught all of our unwritten rules, they expressed how much Michigan meant to them and what this place can do for all of us after we're done playing, so there is my stance on retention.

We brought back our entire team after the Final Four run at FAU, and it was the hardest coaching job, the most difficult year of my life as an assistant, as a video coordinator, as a head coach. That was the most difficult year for a number of reasons.

So that year it would have been much healthier for the group if we didn't retain everyone. Because when you look at college basketball, Tre Carroll was an All Big East player that didn't get to play. Brandon Lorient was a big time player at West Virginia that didn't get to play. Nick Boyd was, B.J. Greenlee.

So we had these guys that were Power Five starters that weren't able to play in games.

So it was difficult on everyone, so that was a nice segue into this high major Power Five stuff because we had all of the high major problems in a minor scale, but they were all there, and so we were forced to deal with that stuff before.

When you talk about retention, retention is not always good. It's retaining the right guys and making sure they still have the same agenda and objectives, which is to win and to do it together.

Q. What can you say about what happened to Elliot yesterday with his allergic reaction and what can you say about the fact that he still made it with the team here?

DUSTY MAY: Very unfortunate for him to have to go through that. If it's the worst thing that happens to us, then we're very blessed. It also just shows him how much he means to his teammates. They were very concerned, obviously, like we all would be for a reaction like that.

But just grateful that he's fine. We have great medical care, and he's back with us. Dude is a warrior. He'll be

fine.

Q. Arizona starts three freshmen that are obviously playing above their years and their experience. What do you make of those three so far this year?

DUSTY MAY: Well, first of all, if you've played in the Euroleague you are not a freshman, so let's cut Kharchenkov off that list. When we were at Florida we used to talk about how there are certain prerequisites to be able to play as a freshman at a Power Five level and one of those prerequisites was playing USA Basketball because of the amount of intensity that it takes to compete during the trials, during the practices and also the games and also the sacrifice it takes because you're playing with 11 of the best players in our country and you have to sacrifice so much just to play.

So you know what it means to play team ball and put something above yourself. When you look at Burries and Koa Peat, I think both of those guys have multiyear national team experience, Team USA experience like Morez Johnson. Trey McKenney has one year for us. But I think that experience allows those guys to be much more advanced than the typical high school player.

Now some guys are older, some guys are younger, but those guys -- I guess DNA factors into it. Those guys don't look like freshmen.

Q. Obviously you mentioned that it kind of feels different this time than last time with FAU. Could you expand on that? What are the biggest differences and have those differences made you change your process for this year and with this team to make it back to this spot?

DUSTY MAY: Well, the Monday last year, I think we advanced on Sunday, so the Monday last year I spent the entire day talking to coaching -- other coaches that had played in the Final Four about what to do and what not to do and how to prepare. So the first day is simply learning because we obviously didn't anticipate going to the Final Four.

So you're learning that, and this year it was more of our staff getting together and going through our notes and checklist about what we didn't do well and what we did and try to recreate what we did well and try to figure out a better way for what we didn't.

So I think we're a step ahead there. As far as it feeling different, I'd challenge you to walk into our offices arena at FAU and everything about what that group did and even just to look at a picture of that group and their journeys to

get there and this one, it's two different situations.

This is just -- we felt like we expected to be here. Last year we were on the innocent fight for about three or four months where we were just lost in the fight, battling every single day, scrapping for everything and not knowing if you're even going to be in the tournament, let alone make it to the Final Four.

I think here we probably clinched an NCAA Tournament bid after Players Era in November, so just the entire thing has felt different.

Q. Just an hour ago TNT Sports announced an alt cast of your game against Arizona featuring the Fab Five. What perspective do you think the Fab Five will add to the game's commentary?

DUSTY MAY: Well, first of all, other than Michael Jordan, since I've been alive, I don't think there's ever been a group change the culture for the better of our sport than the Fab Five. Just number one. We're proud to represent those guys and carry the flag for the former players at the University of Michigan.

People have no idea all of the great players because there's been several different coaches and there's been different umbrellas, how many great players, how many great coaches have walked those sidelines and played on that court.

Obviously the more attention on the Fab Five, the better for us as a brand as a basketball program.

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