

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

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

**Arizona Wildcats**

**Coach Tommy Lloyd**

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference



**TOMMY LLOYD:** Well, great to see you guys. Feels like a few of us have been on like a five-week tour together, so let's see if we can keep it going. Obviously, guys, it's an incredible honor to be here in Indianapolis at the Final Four. The state of Indiana and Indianapolis in particular is the center of the basketball universe a lot of times, with the history and tradition of the game and what it means to the state. It's an incredible honor to be representing the University of Arizona, and ready to play on Saturday.

**Q. I know that back at Gonzaga you guys were doing a lot of international recruiting before it was cool. I just wonder how NIL has sort of changed -- you're still doing it, but how has it changed what you do?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** To be honest with you, I think it's maybe opened a few more doors. One of the detriments to international recruiting back in the day was if a kid wanted to get paid, the European clubs could pay them legally, and obviously we couldn't.

Now that that hurdle has been taken away, you're seeing more and more good players from Europe that are willing to come over.

I think it's going to settle down here in a little bit. With everyone trying to figure out this convoluted notion of who's eligible, who's not eligible, kids coming over at 21, I think that'll settle down. All our international guys came over at 18, 19, so normally just had graduated from high school type of thing.

I think we will see in the next year or two we'll get back to that deal, and I hope it stays part of the game. It's a global game, and there's a lot of good players over there, and I think it'll help make the college basketball product stronger than ever.

**Q. Keeping on the topic of international players, can you talk about Ivan Kharchenkov and Koa Peat? A lot of recognition as freshmen for good reason, but can you talk about them?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** Yeah, Ivan has been great from day one but I think what's been cool is his role has expanded over the course of the season to where he's become one of our better play makers and passes, and he has a knack in these game to creat scoring opportunities of his own in critical moments.

He's been great defensively all year. He has a winning mentality and a winning approach to the game.

Yeah, it's been really cool to watch him have consistent success but then even be able to take it to another level as we got down the stretch of the season.

**Q. The program won the championship here in '97. What do you make of all that?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** I know where you're going with this, but I'm like -- I must have a blind spot when it comes to fashion or uniforms or headbands or shoes. I just never really notice that stuff.

I couldn't even tell you what uniforms our guys have been wearing. I just usually know who are the team in the dark jerseys or the lighter jerseys. I don't got much before that. Now, if Briggs is going to come up, our equipment manager if you didn't know, he can come up and do his own press conference later and he could help you.

**Q. It seems like waiting is a big part of this storyline for this school and this team right now. Quarter century to get back here. But for you personally, 15 years before you finally got a shot to be head coach and now you're two wins away from a National Championship. On a personal level, what does this moment mean to you?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** Well, it's 22 years from an assistant to a head coach. Guys, I'm a team guy. Like, I have really a

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difficult time individualizing things for myself especially.

When we were at Gonzaga making those runs, I'm sure I wanted to win as much as I did now for the team. For me, I say this often, my strongest motivating factor is our community and our fans.

I know how much this run has meant for them, to kind of get over the hump after 25 years, to get back to a Final Four. If there's a way we could win a couple games here, I think it would be really special for our community, and that would make me more excited than anything.

**Q. You were here the last time Indianapolis hosted a Final Four. Obviously it was pretty unconventional. I'm curious what memories you might have of that process and obviously that season but in particular that tournament and just kind of everything that went into it from a team's perspective.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, it's very different. I can't remember my room number, but it was on the third floor of the Marriott and we were there for about a month. Yeah, you didn't leave the hotel.

It was actually really interesting at first, all the teams in the tournament were in basically this run of hotels right here. We were kind of all connected, so we were kind of all, I guess, whatever, quarantined or whatever you want to call it together.

It was really cool to be in close proximity. There may or may not have been a lounge that was created by the coaches that they all hung out at night together, which was really cool, just you went in there and you built some relationships with coaches.

It was almost like being on one of these reality shows. The next day Coach X would have been gone. He would have been sent off the island. You're like, man, I'm sad they lost; we don't get to hang out tonight. Definitely a different experience, and now it's just kind of the monster of the Arizona fan base and our traveling crew that are hanging out together.

Definitely a different experience, but I look back at that 2021 experience with fond memories, and the NCAA and the city of Indianapolis did an amazing job pulling off the NCAA Tournament at a time when we needed that type of thing and the game of basketball, but for our entire country just to be able to celebrate together.

**Q. What's kind of the ideal roster construction between balancing freshmen and older players? Since the one-and-done rule, only two schools, one of the**

**Kentucky teams and one of the Duke teams, won a championship being led by one-and-done freshmen. Now you obviously have some elite freshmen. What are the challenges there, and can a team led by freshmen win the championship?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, Zags. I think the best answer I can give you, I think it all comes down to just really good players.

Obviously when you talk about freshmen, I think there's an assumption that they're inexperienced and youthful. But some of these freshmen are maybe more experienced than we give them credit for. Some of these guys, they played in state championship games, they played in gold medal games. They've done these AAU circuits that I know that you frequent a little bit around, and these kids are maybe a little bit more worldly than people give them credit for.

It depends on how they've been raised and their maturity level. Our freshmen, I literally don't look at them as freshmen right now; I just look at them as good basketball players.

I felt the same thing with John's team at Duke last year. We played them twice at the start of the year. Yeah, maybe they're young. We played them at the end of the year in the NCAA Tournament. They were just really good. To me that's the formula is just really good players.

**Q. I was curious your conversations with Delly and Awaka of coming off the bench behind some of these freshmen and what contributions they've given you. What does it mean to you to see them be this impactful?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, it was critical for the makeup of our team that those guys were maybe able to accept a role that I had kind of envisioned for them and I thought what would be best for the team.

You know, Tobe, he actually volunteered. It was his idea to come off the bench. He's such a mature guy and such a good player, I think he came in and he said, Big Mo had an injury last year, and he's a developing player, and he's really worked hard to come back at full strength; I think it would be a boost for his confidence if he started.

Koa, here's this elite highly recruited freshman. He's never not started. And Tobe said, I have experience not starting, so I think it would be better for Koa to keep him in a role that he's comfortable with. That was his idea.

Delly, when I talked to him about it, I think Delly, in full honesty, would have liked to start, and I kind of told him my

vision. I just felt like we needed kind of a sniper off the bench, and I think having that -- somebody that can fulfill that role was going to be really important, and another reason, probably the most important reason I came up with that, not only is Brayden a good player but I knew Brayden was going to spend some time at the point.

Our schedule was so tough early, I didn't want Brayden coming off the bench to sub for Bradley. Say Bradley picks up an early foul and now you have this freshman who's youthful and trying to gain experience running the point his first minutes in the game. So I wanted his first minutes of the game at the point guard to come after he'd been on the court for a couple minutes as a 2 or a combo.

That was the reasoning, and I'm thankful for Delly and Tobe for being so mature and such great teammates and accepting that role because without them doing that, we would not be here right now.

**Q. North Carolina hasn't filled its vacancy, which has only created more suspense about whether you're the target for that job. How do you respond to people who are wondering if you're going to be the coach at Arizona next year?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Listen, I've got my full focus on this team. Nothing is distracting me. That's just how I've decided to approach it. I'm excited. I thought we had a really good practice today. I'm excited to play and for our practice tomorrow.

Myron, you've gotten to know me over the years. I'm a simple guy. I am kind of just one thing at a time. I'm not a multitasker. You can ask my wife. I'm 100 percent locked in on Arizona basketball right now, and I'm excited to see what this team can do.

I have a real strong belief in this team, and this team deserves my full attention, so that's what I'm giving them.

**Q. You mentioned Delly a little bit earlier, but in the Final Four we always see unhung heroes with Dwyane and Delly both, especially Delly having some moments against Iowa State, Houston, so on, so on, how important can they be in this game against Michigan with the matchups?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Incredibly important. I think you're right, there's always an X-factor. There's always somebody that steps up for the winning team that maybe you didn't expect.

Everyone on our team has had moments this year where they've been that guy. So I just tell our guys, you never

know when that moment is going to come.

So of course you want to be prepared for it, but also, don't be scared of it. When you get a chance to make that shot or make that play or get that rebound, do it with conviction. So that's what I talk about, because there's no shame in the ball not going in.

That's it. But it's a great question because it'll be interesting to see who from maybe the role players on each team is able to kind of step out and have a game because that could be a difference maker.

**Q. What's it like to have the athletic director's son on your team?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, that's interesting. He's a great kid, and he has a ton of energy and a ton of spirit. It's been an interesting journey because to be honest with you, he's maybe not at the level of player as most walk-ons.

But watching him navigate that has been impressive because it's not easy to show up in a room every day and -- if you see him standing next to Tobe Awaka, you're like, okay, how is he going to function in practice. To see his personality grow over the last few years and him gain confidence and comfort and finding other ways to contribute has been impressive.

Jackson is a really smart young kid with great energy, and I've enjoyed watching him navigate this process. Because what I'm going to tell you is it's not easy. Being a walk-on is not easy. Being a manager is not easy. It's a massive amount of sacrifice you have to make. Especially when you put on that jersey, that jersey means something.

To be able to keep your confidence as a person when maybe you're not up to the level as a player is something that I've been really impressed that Jackson has been able to do the last couple of years.

**Q. I was wondering if you could take me back to when you first saw Mo and what you thought of him then and how he's progressed until now.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Man, when I first saw Mo, I thought, this is going to be the next great big man from Lithuania after Sabonis. I'm sure there's a few others in between there.

But that was my first thought. It's been really cool to watch him kind of grow into that. He had a solid freshman year for us, but I think like a lot of international kids, he came over and maybe thought it was going to be a little bit easier than it really was.

Then the second year I thought he was prepared to make the jump we've kind of seen now, but he had that injury. So for him to hang with it, and this is his third year, he obviously redshirted last year, but his third year, it all kind of happened. It's really cool to see because the patience and perseverance and endurance it takes to be a good player is really hard, so I'm happy that he's having some success.

**Q. Another player related question. Can you just talk about the maturity of Jaden Bradley in his final year and how special it is for a player of that magnitude who's kind of captured the love of Tucson to lead the team to this stage?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, I mean, J.B. has been awesome. I don't know if I've seen a guy be as consistently high level in clutch moments as he's been for an entire season.

He's been great. What's really cool about him is he's not afraid of those moments, but he's definitely not, like, trying to make this team about him. He's about winning, 100 percent. He would be fine -- if you told him right now, J.B., you're going to go 0 for 27 if you get to play two games here and have 12 turnovers but you're going to win both games but you're going to play really bad, but you're going to win, he would 100 percent take it because that's the kind of guy he is.

**Q. You talk about Jaden Bradley and you mentioned Delly is a sniper and there was the three that Delly hit in the game against Purdue. I don't know if you noticed but you probably did that after Jaden threw him that ball he went and set a screen on Fletcher Lloyd and put him on the ground. How often will a guard do that after making a pass to the corner and then go set a screen?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, maybe it was a little brush screen or something. J.B.'s ability to improvise and make plays in the moment is really impressive. In order to do that, you have to have an incredibly high basketball IQ, and that's what J.B. has.

**Q. You mentioned Tobe coming off the bench. What has he meant to this team, and do you remember what you liked about him?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, we'd played against Tobe when he was a freshman at Tennessee at our place. I never had heard of him. Here's this guy, maybe a little bit undersized, he's playing with guys like Oumar Ballo and Azuolas Tubelis and Tennessee had a bunch of big guys, that Serbian guy that was in wrestling matches all the time.

I just remember there was kind of a loose ball rebound situation, and like two of our big guys went for it and two of Tennessee's big guys went for it. Everyone fell to the floor and there's Tobe standing with the ball. I'm like, oh, my God, who's that guy.

That summer I got to kind of watch him play for USA Basketball up close and just then you start hearing what a great kid he is.

So when his name went in the portal, we were all in.

For us, he's been an incredibly important piece to our identity. If you want to be effort and physicality and toughness, let's just put a picture of Tobe Awaka in the dictionary because he's been that for us.

**Q. If you played Dusty May in a pickleball game, who would win?**

TOMMY LLOYD: That's a good question. Does Dusty have the glasses on or off? I'm joking there. Dusty looks like the guy to me. He's probably got a solid little pickleball game. I know he definitely would dissect the game and he would become a student of it, because that's what he is as a coach, and I'm sure he would have great touch and play lots of angles.

I'm a little bit more as you can imagine of a banger they call it. I'm coming right for your chest. I like body bags, those types of things when I play. Maybe that's a little different approach.

**Q. This team showed they could win an offensive track meet against Arkansas and a defensive grind against Purdue. After years of being labeled a finesse program, what specific adjustments --**

TOMMY LLOYD: Who labeled us that?

**Q. Well, I've heard that before. I don't believe it, but --**

TOMMY LLOYD: Listen, if we've been a finesse program the last few years, I think people are being a little bit lazy. Finesse basketball has never been in my DNA. If you go back a lot of those years, those teams we had at Gonzaga were incredibly physical.

To me, that physicality is the price of admission. If you're not physical and you're not willing to go toe to toe and fight, eventually, I don't care what type of tricks you've got up your sleeve as a coach you're probably going to come up short.

For me it's a baseline requirement to be a championship



level program if you want to be competing at this level year in and year out, and that's what we hope to do.

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