

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

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

**Arizona Wildcats**

**Coach Tommy Lloyd**

**Ivan Kharchenkov**

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference



**TOMMY LLOYD:** I felt like we did this yesterday. Actually, obviously you guys know we're excited to be here. I thought we had a good day yesterday, good day of prep and we're going to have another good day of prep today. Honestly can't wait for tomorrow night.

**Q. Coach, I was able to talk to some players from the 2001 team and they all mentioned that you have a very open-door policy about bringing in players that have played for the program, coaches that have been on it. Why do you feel like it was so important to bring those guys in and to speak to this team and be able to be around so your team can see who has laid the path for this program?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** Well, I think one of the special things when you play at a program like Arizona, it's something that stays with you for the rest of your life. What I think about is we have all these great former players and student managers that gave a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to the program, and it's part of their identity.

I think about those guys at home, watching games with their kids on their lap, and it means something.

I don't know in the pro game, I've never been there so maybe this is a little bit of a stretch. I don't know if you get that same connection. You basically played for Arizona in your time, your eligibility ran out, it's still part of you today.

For me, it's really important that we include those guys in everything and they feel like owners of our program because they are owners. They're 100 percent owners and they're great dudes.

It's been one of the coolest things for me to experience is

developing relationships with them and having them tell me their stories because their stories are Arizona basketball stories.

For me to be a small part of it now, it means a lot to learn about the past of the program and what it's done.

**Q. On that note, we're one day out from this national semifinals. You've been asked about the North Carolina job frequently; there's even been talk that Michael Jordan has reached out to you. What are you telling your team and where do you stand with everything 24 hours out from the game?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** Yeah, well, I guess you're known for putting me on the spot. I'm happy to announce I'm staying at Arizona. We've been able to get some things done the past couple days.

I really appreciate President Garimella, John Arnold and Des'Rea for showing a real commitment to our program.

Arizona basketball, you guys know what it means to me, and when I say it's a special place, that always comes from the bottom of my heart.

I didn't want to make this entire Final Four about that because I'm just a small part of something much bigger, but on that same note, I'd also like to let you know that North Carolina is an amazing place. I mean, it's a one of one. It's an honor to even be considered for that job.

The young kid, for me the college basketball junkie watching those games at home, never would have thought something like that could have happened to somebody like me.

North Carolina is a first-class organization, and I appreciate them for the way they've handled this. Michael Jordan, the phone call never did happen, so I'll put that to rest.

But come on, we all idolized MJ. I don't know how many hours I've watched that come fly with me video and my kid grew up watching the movie he made and just -- it's

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amazing that that opportunity was even thought could be possible.

With that being said, though, I made a decision that my Michael Jordan is Steve Kerr, and I'm proud to be an Arizona Wildcat.

**Q. I don't mean to shift gears, but I wanted to ask about Yax Lendeborg and how you guys have gone about preparing for his versatility, and what do you feel like Dusty May's offense has brought out of his game this year?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, he's obviously an elite talent. You put the skill with those physical tools, and looks like to me he's got that alpha dog in him. Dusty has done an incredible job just putting him in positions to utilize all his skills.

There's probably not one way to guard him. You've probably got to try a little bit of everything and then hope you get a little bit lucky and some of those shots just don't go in.

But he's been an incredible talent, and I'm sure that guy, that's going to be a household name in basketball for a long time.

**Q. Coach, I put out a tweet yesterday asking Arizona fans who was your favorite player out of all these guys, and an overwhelming amount of people said Tobe Awaka. Why do you think so many people like Tobe?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I think people just respect the effort he plays with and the physicality he plays with. I think it really stands out.

I think people can kind of identify, they see that blue-collar approach he has to the game, and I think that's something we all respect.

I have sung Tobe's praises a thousand times and I'd do it a thousand times again. He's an amazing individual, high, high, high character, about all the right things, and I'm just really thankful that we got the opportunity to coach him, and thankful that his talent and perseverance and work ethic really propelled us to be able to get to a Final Four.

**Q. Not to put you back too much on that, but you've been saying this whole thing was a distraction for us basically, but for you behind the scenes, you said some things were going on. How was that process? How did you deal with it when you were getting ready for this?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Honestly, I've been full focused on our deal. There's obviously people behind the scenes that were helping me and working with the administration. This wasn't like meant to be like a leverage deal. I appreciate our administration, and I think we've made huge progress on what the vision for Arizona basketball can be. I appreciate them getting behind it and kind of rallying behind it, investing in it.

It's not about me; it's about everyone that identifies with that block A. To me, that's the driving force, and I've always told you that for me it's to be able to deliver for them and kind of be an entity that our community can rally around and feel good about.

I love being in the middle of that, so I'm thankful.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk about the similarities between your team and Michigan and how you match up and all that. When you have an opponent that is so similar, how difficult is it to find something that can maybe make you stand out when you know the other team does it just as well?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, I think you just -- honestly, I think you've just got to get on the court and figure it out. I think both teams are probably adept at what they do, and we're going to get out, and I think both of us are going to try to play to our strengths and see how it feels. To me, that's the biggest thing.

We've obviously got a lot of respect for Michigan. They've had an incredible season and they're incredibly well built, and we know there's going to be a ton of challenges tomorrow, and we're going to have some moments where we have to figure some things out.

**Q. Jaden Bradley just said one of the reasons he wanted to make a Final Four besides him and the program is you. He wanted to help you make a Final Four. What does that mean for you to hear that and just your relationship with your point guard?**

TOMMY LLOYD: It means a lot. When you have that reciprocal relationship with people or your players where you want good things for them and they want good things for you, that's really powerful.

One thing we talk about a lot in our program is vision, but we also talk about purpose: Why? Why you do things? What motivates you?

When your purpose is other people and doing good that allows other people to be successful, that's crazy powerful.



That's way more powerful than trying to do something for yourself. I appreciate J.B. saying that, and trust me, he's got great things coming to him. He's done great things for us. I can't wait to watch him play tomorrow.

**Q. When you were going through what you were going through in November and December and just rolling, Michigan was doing the same, beating people up pretty bad. Did you have a chance to see them then and now realize they're probably better than what you saw back then?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, you catch them on TV a few times. I hadn't did a deep dive into them or anything like we have now. Obviously they beat up on Gonzaga pretty good, and that doesn't happen very often. When they did that, that obviously got my attention.

Again, these seasons you're running your own race with your own team, and you just don't have time to sit there and really dissect other teams that you're not playing. Obviously they've had an incredible season from the start to the finish.

It's been really impressive to watch.

**Q. I know he's not playing, but what have you seen out of Bryce James throughout his redshirt season?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, Bryce has gotten so much better. Watching him practice yesterday I was like, wow, the progress he's made -- he probably doesn't even realize how much better he's gotten in the last six, seven, eight months. His body has changed. A lot of his fundamentals and techniques have really sharpened up.

Once our season wraps up and everyone gets a little bit of a break, I'm excited to get back in the gym with him because I think there's another big jump in him that he's built a really good foundation for himself to prepare himself off of, so I can't wait to see what it looks like.

**Q. What are you talking about, like rev share percentages, administrative support with NIL promotion? What did it here?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, what did it is it's where I wanted to be. And they wanted me to stay. That was the driving force behind everything.

Rather than get into specifics, to me it's just a holistic approach. There's not one thing anymore. Arizona basketball needs to become a locomotive, where everything surrounding it is pushing it forward. To me -- that's not because of me. That's because of what was built

before I came here, and it's my opportunity right now to kind of be the captain of the ship.

But just putting everything we have behind our program, and the number one thing that starts with is just energy and effort.

It's not easy. It's not easy when you are trying to build a program or run an athletic department. I fully understand that.

Yeah, so just getting that alignment, and I think we are taking big steps towards doing that.

**Q. Can you just talk a little bit about what it means for guys like Justin Kokoskie and Brian Brigger who have been with this program for a long time but have never seen a Final Four before, what it means, how special that is?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, that's -- thank you for pointing those guys out. I tell people, I've got a tough job, but it's really tough when you've got a celebrity trainer, a celebrity equipment manager, and a celebrity strength coach. Those guys have been around before I got there.

When I got there, rather than clean house, I wanted to find people that had been there and knew Arizona better than I did that were around the program, that knew the stories, because I didn't want to come in and just scrub Arizona basketball and make it about me, because it's not.

I felt my best way to serve the program was learn about it, and those guys have been great teachers for me.

I'm happy for all three of them, especially J-Rock because J-Rock has been around since the early 2000s. We were beginning to think he was the curse. So to overcome that and to find out that he's not the curse is a really good thing.

**Q. Tommy, a lot of young assistant coaches are kind of in hurry to climb. You sat still at Gonzaga. How much better of a head coach are you for taking your time?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Wow, I think it was a massive difference for me. It allowed me to fully invest where I was at without worrying about what was in it for me. So just to be able to -- obviously you're learning under a Hall of Famer, and we didn't know it at the time. I didn't know I would ever be the head coach in a Final Four. So there was something really genuine about how we were approaching it, where he becomes like your big brother.

I was really comfortable, and I think just that comfort I had



allowed me to really, like, deepen my learning and kind of learn myself and learn my identity and just have comfort in my own skin. Because I wasn't out trying to prove anything to anybody. I was just trying to do a good job. Yeah, it was amazing.

That 22 years, honestly, guys, I would be probably just as happy if I was still there because I wouldn't know any different.

Somebody told me something really smart once. They said, in this business of basketball, whether you're a player or you're a coach, you're making investments every day. You're investing every day, every day, every day, every day, every day, but you have to approach it like you can only make one withdrawal because the moment you make your withdrawal, you lose the compound effect.

So that really resonated with me. You take your time, take your time, take your time, because if you withdraw too early, your money is not going to double. If you look at it that way.

When somebody explained to me that is what I did, it really resonated with me and made a lot of sense. So yeah, so I'm so thankful for those 22 years. They were awesome. I'm thankful because I think I've learned a lot this first five years, and I'm going to work to be a better coach every single day because I am comfortable now.

I am at the right place, so I have that good feeling, and I know that's my sweet spot for me personally.

**Q. Big 12 regular season champions, Big 12 tournament champions in Kansas City. Can you talk about those games and how it prepared you for this weekend here in Indy?**

TOMMY LLOYD: It was incredible. I was talking last night with Tad Boyle, and I thanked him. We played them the last game of the season after we had wrapped up the Big 12 regular season championship. That game was really important for us, and you wouldn't have known it at the time because everyone is like, well, you've already won the conference, what are you going to do, you don't want to get anybody injured, and you're thinking about all those things.

I thought going into the game I was going to play more guys and kind of reduce the minutes for some of our main guys, just trying to out-think myself.

Once we got in the game, just my instinct was, no -- because we weren't playing good, we were down, we were flat. I was like, no, absolutely not, these dudes are going to figure it out, and I trusted they would figure it out, and

they're going to win this game. We're playing to win.

I'm not going to lose this game and let our players have an excuse that, well, Coach didn't really want to win because he played everybody or he played different.

For me, that mindset was really important. Then that continued into the Big 12 tournament. Okay, you're probably going to be a 1 seed, you've had a great season. I'm like, no, we're going to go in there to win that freaking tournament game by game. You don't get a dress rehearsal for the NCAA Tournament, so I really wanted to treat the Big 12 tournament as our dress rehearsal, and if we showed up, didn't play good, we were flat, we lost, I thought it would be something that we could learn from.

If we won, I thought we could continue to galvanize and it could build confidence for our team. So it was awesome. That little stretch really, really helped our team.

**Q. I was just talking to Brayden Burries and Koa Peat and they mentioned you told them to live in the moment and be why where you are feet are. What's the value of that advice for freshmen an this stage?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I think you've just got to find a way to connect and create meaning for them. That's why I keep telling them, and you guys have heard me say it multiple times the last couple weeks, let's just treat this as a state tournament. These guys have all won state championships. Why do we have to put the word "national" in front of it and treat it different because there is a different word in front of it. Treat it like a state tournament. You're in the semis in the state tournament.

We all remember that back in the day. Unfortunately, my team got knocked out before then, so I didn't get that feeling as a player. These guys all know what it feels like. I want them to understand they've been here before, just maybe different circumstances.

**Q. From Koa to T.J. on your staff and the history of, Mike Bibby, Richard Jefferson, what can you say about the level of talent that is in the valley even with Section 7 being out there? It's become a destination to develop the next big player.**

TOMMY LLOYD: You're exactly right. Phoenix has a good basketball tradition. When I was a young assistant -- it wasn't like Phoenix had all these players. It was probably a little bit dry. The few good ones would go to Arizona. Now there's so many more good players coming out of the state of Arizona. The city of Phoenix has grown. A number of prep schools have popped up in that area.

It has become a destination for high level basketball players, and obviously we're welcoming that and we want to be in the middle of it.

**Q. Ivan, in what ways have you seen Coach Lloyd invest in you?**

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: That's a good question. Just the time and the details he puts into his work. We had a lot of meetings this year. I would say like roughly once a month, just talking about a couple games, talking about some clips, things I can improve, and just talking a little bit about basketball, and then he gave me a plan.

These three things I want to improve in for the next couple games, and I would then put more emphasis on that and hopefully make him proud.

TOMMY LLOYD: Yeah, I mean, Ivan has been great. Obviously he had a lot of basketball experience coming, but my message to him was, like, this might go a little different than you expect. There's a transition, even though he played at a high level in Europe, to NCAA basketball and playing in the States.

I just wanted him to respect that and understand it. He's done an unbelievable job. He's really improved over the course of the year. I also appreciate that he played well early and stayed in his lane and was patient, because when you come over here and you're as accomplished as he is, you could sometimes want too a little much too fast and it kind of back fires. So he's had a great approach and been playing his best basketball the past few weeks, and that's really helping our team.

**Q. I've asked this question a few times today. With coming to the Final Four emotions are always so high and they're up and down, energies are high. What would you say your emotions are right now going into the Final Four and how do you think that is going to affect you on the court?**

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: Obviously this is great, but how Coach mentioned already, we want to take this as a regular road trip, going on a Big 12 road trip, taking it a game at a time.

We came in here earlier than a usual road trip but it's only so we can have a normal practice on the floor, just in the stadium, and I really appreciate that.

Emotions are great, but I don't want to let them loose too early because the game is on Saturday.

TOMMY LLOYD: And for me, my emotions are fine. I

always tell our guys that the better job we can do making things feel normal, I think the better chance we have of playing good. We're not a program that is maybe overly excited. We're focused, and these guys, I'm hopeful, will be ready to play tomorrow because we know it's going to be a really tough game.

**Q. Coach Lloyd, I know you touched on this a bit, but how big of an influence was being an assistant at Gonzaga? How did that translate into your head coaching career at Arizona?**

TOMMY LLOYD: It was amazing. When I think back to the relationships I still have, the first night we got in, Coach Few and his whole family and Dan Munson, all those former Zags guys just came up to my room and we just hung out for a couple hours. It's family.

For me, it's a big part of who I am, and it was a great place to be a part of and to learn what it takes to be a good coach. I'll always be thankful for my experience there.

**Q. Tommy, what do you love about Arizona compared to any other program, university? What separates that from other programs?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Man, you know, Arizona is a special place for the right people. I look at our fan base and I kind of laugh sometimes. I'm like -- when I close my eyes, I think of an Arizona fan. There's lots of them, so don't pigeonhole this into one, but I see this guy about my age that hasn't shaved in a few days, he's got a flat bill hat on and he's wearing a jersey.

I'm like, what 50 year old dudes wear jerseys? You know who does? Arizona basketball fans do. And I love those guys, and I connect with those people. I honestly love the community of Tucson. I'm not a big city guy. I'm more of a country boy. Just love hanging out with my friends and family and don't want to deal with traffic, and I think Tucson gets an interesting rap.

It's the little brother or whatever to Phoenix, and Phoenix is great. It's cool hanging out in Scottsdale. But people that choose to live in Tucson are choosing to live there because they're a little bit different and they love the things Tucson is about.

All those things resonated with me and connected with me.

We love it there. Literally, my parents have a house there, my wife's parents moved there, my wife's sister moved there. All our kids are there. We have grandkids now. The roots are getting pretty deep. You can grow roots in the desert, trust me.



**Q. This is a question for both of you guys, but following that two-game skid in mid February against Kansas and Texas Tech, you guys rattled off 13 straight wins, eight of them coming against ranked teams. What did that two-game skid teach you about yourselves and how are you able to use that going forward?**

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: I felt like it gave us a little bit of a relief. We didn't have to guard anything. We didn't have to protect anything, not anything like a streak or anything. It also showed us if we don't show up 100 percent and give it our all, we're going to lose some games.

It was good. Just a little reality check to recalibrate a little bit into the season to get to the day one, to the fundamentals, and go out there knowing the feeling of losing, that it sucks, and just playing with an edge from that point on.

TOMMY LLOYD: I think Ivan crushed it. I remember we lost at Kansas that day. I just told the guys, there's no shame. That place was electric that day. It was a Big Monday. We were No. 1 in the country. It was electric.

But I told our guys after the game, no, no, we're fine. The season just started. That was our approach. The season just started. It was great. We had a 20-some game winning streak in the preseason. Now the season is for real; let's go.

Then we came home and went through a few injuries and a good Texas Tech team beat us, and then we really had to kind of dig in and kind of figure out how we were going to do it because we had to kind of adjust how we were playing, and it was a lot of moving parts.

These guys did an incredible job. The staff did a great job hanging with it, and then it was about executing it day by day, play-by-play.

**Q. Coach, you were here in '21 as an assistant. Can you talk about your experience with Indianapolis as a host city and how they embrace hosting an event like the Final Four?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, '21, as you remember, was COVID, and we were in a bubble. I think we literally ended up staying like three and a half weeks at the Marriott on the third floor.

Yeah, obviously this experience is very different. But Indianapolis, come on, we know what basketball means in the state of Indiana. It's an amazing host city for the Final

Four. Just the proximity of everything on feet is really cool.

I'm assuming the city is really filling up, and I'm assuming we're going to see that tonight and through the day tomorrow.

But yeah, it's been amazing, and we're thankful that the NCAA and the city of Indianapolis work in great partnership to put on an amazing event.

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: Pretty cool city, even though I didn't see a lot of it. Reminds me of the weather of Germany a little bit, so a couple similarities there.

But I love everything that has -- the connection to basketball. I don't know where we went through yesterday with the big hall and the basketballfest things --

TOMMY LLOYD: The fanfest.

IVAN KHARCHENKOV: And I loved that to see, and I wish Germany and Europe a couple more things like that would happen.

**Q. Tommy, so much has been made about this long drought in the west, no one from the west has won in 29 years. Do you think the players actually know that or understand that, have that perspective, or no because they're too young?**

TOMMY LLOYD: No, they have no idea. Ivan, I think half serious and half joking, when we won the Elite Eight game, I don't know if we were doing media or whatever and he was like, is this really hard to do? I'm like, wow. Yeah, thanks. I said, yeah. 27 years of my life, and this is the third time for me. So yeah, it is hard to do.

For these guys to come in here and -- there's a beauty in that, though. They're just coming in here and their expectations is we're going to get in the game and we're going to try to win. They don't make it much more complicated than that.

But the long-term deal in the west, yeah, it's a long drought. It's a long drought for the Big Ten, as well.

Yeah, it'll be interesting to see how this thing shakes out.

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