

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Creighton vs Louisville

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

**Creighton Bluejays**

**Coach Greg McDermott**

**Steven Ashworth**

**Jamiya Neal**

**Ryan Kalkbrenner**

Media Conference



Personally, last year we were competing against the team of UConn, back-to-back national champions, and similarly to what St. John's did this year, won the regular season and won the tournament.

We were on the opposite end of both of those in my two years at Creighton. But at the same time there is a lot to take from that, the experiences you gain from the games played, and then also in the Big East Tournament, going to a site in New York City, where St. John's is from, and now coming to a site where obviously our opponent is very close and familiar with the arena and the city.

So there are some of those things outside the actual game that I think have mentally prepared us as a team to make sure we can stay together and absorb runs and continue to go on our runs as a team.

So I think, in short, it definitely prepares us well for what March Madness brings.

**Q. Ryan, when the seedings and pairings came out Sunday, there was a strong reaction in Louisville about their draw, and I would assume probably the same in Omaha. Is that more of a media/fan thing, or do the players get riled up about it, too?**

RYAN KALKBRENNER: I think you definitely can get a little riled up for it. For me personally, I know once you get to March, all you have to do is get in, and then it's anyone's game.

So it didn't rile me up too much. What is Louisville now in the AP poll? 10? So that was a little confusing to me how they ended up an 8 seed and they're 10th in the AP poll. But once you get to this time of year, every team is really good anyway.

At this point it doesn't matter who you play. You've got to go out there and win or go home. I try not to get too caught up in seeding, if you think you should be higher or lower or whatever.

**Q. Jamiya, when you look at Louisville on film, what's the main thing that stands out as the biggest challenge to shut down, and how do you feel like you all can**

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Creighton student-athletes Steven Ashworth, Jamiya Neal and Ryan Kalkbrenner. At this time we will take questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Steven, what have you seen from Chucky on film, and what are you anticipating in terms of that match-up in terms of his style of play?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: Very talented guard. Most Omaha guards are. He's going to be a lot of fun to go up against tomorrow, both offensively and defensively. ACC Defensive Player of the Year and has similar feel to what Zakai Zeigler is able to do on defense. We matched up with them in the tournament last year.

Definitely a great opportunity to be going up against a defender like that. And then offensively really efficient at getting to his spots and running the offense in a really well-oiled manner.

**Q. Steven, playing in a conference, the Big East, with a school like St. John's and the kind of year they had, how was the challenge playing against them? How did that prepare you for this experience in terms of having to face Louisville and possibly Auburn in the second round?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: I definitely think conference play in the Big East is something that we take pride in as being a part of that conference and what it means to be part of the Big East and the history is there.



## answer that?

JAMIYA NEAL: I would just say their play style. They have kind of a sense of nastiness on them, especially on defense, in terms of how they play, being able to rake and speed teams up. On offense I would say their guards are patient. They have a lot of complex offense where it has a lot of flares and screens.

And it's definitely going to be a challenge, but I think, like Steve said, the strength of our schedule has kind of prepared us for things like this, and now it's time to just go out there and perform.

**Q. Ryan, obviously the expectation is that Louisville is going to have a lot of fans here for the game tomorrow. I know you guys are going to travel plenty of people as well. But in terms of a game where you think it will be a significantly pro crowd for the opponent, are you approaching this with any kind road game mentality or falling back on some of the road game habits or tendencies that you guys built throughout the course of the season?**

RYAN KALKBRENNER: I don't know if you build road game tendencies, especially with a team as experienced as our team is and as close as our team is, you just know with road games, they're going to go on a run, the crowd is going to get into it. We know how to handle that and stay together.

You obviously don't want to plan for a 10-0 run, but that happens in college basketball. So you just handle it and move on. I don't think there is anything special we have to do, especially with how close this team is. We don't get rattled by all that stuff.

Like Steve was talking about just a few minutes ago, we played against St. John's, and the Big East championship was essentially a road game for us. So if we can play in that environment and get used to that, we can play in lots of environments.

**Q. Jamiya, you came to Creighton to get the most out of your last year of eligibility. What's it like to be here on the verge of another NCAA Tournament?**

JAMIYA NEAL: I would say it's definitely what I was looking for. Obviously, like you said, I wanted to get the best out of my last season, and so far it's been the best season. And I just want to keep it going. I don't want it to end.

I love playing for this team. I love playing for Coach Mac. I love all my teammates. Those are my brothers for life.

And to get in one more practice, one more shootaround, one more game with them would just mean everything to me.

**Q. Steven, thoughts on Utah State being on site this year, and do you keep in touch with any of those guys?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: First, good to see you. It's been a while.

I was able to run into Mason Falsev and Isaac Johnson, and not only are we at the same site, but we are at the same hotel. I was able to talk to them in the lobby.

Obviously followed Utah State's year this year. They had a great year in the Mountain West, few games shy of competing once again for another Mountain West championship, which that program always does.

And it was fun to catch up with them and just see how the program is doing and what's different, what's new, what's the same and all those types of things, and also talk about how fun it is that both of us are in March Madness once again on the biggest stage at the end of the season.

Really looking forward to watching their game and having them here in Lexington as well.

**Q. I know Louisville, there was a lot of consternation or indecision about where they were seeded. When you guys saw you were a 9 seed, what was your reaction?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: Ryan talked about this a little bit to where once we get into March, personally it's a lot about the fact that every single team is a talented team and worrying less about the seeding and more about the match-up we have in front of us and trying to focus on, you know, what can we do and what can we excel at and what do they excel at and how do we stop them from that.

Ryan mentioned there is a lot of respect for Louisville and the season they've had and 10th in the AP Poll and everything that comes with that. And you look at the seeding, and it's a great 8-9 match-up coming.

We're excited for it, but at the same time I think media and fans probably jump on those narratives a little bit more than the players do.

**Q. Ryan, where did you get the '99 shorts that you wore yesterday, and was it intentional given the history of that uniform?**



RYAN KALKBRENNER: I got those from Johnny my freshman year. I don't know where he pulled them from. Honestly, I thought they looked good with the jacket that we got yesterday. But it was cool to wear 'em. Obviously there's a lot of history for that era, especially with Korver and all those guys. I thought it looked good and ended up being a good match.

**Q. Steven, your three point numbers are similar to Ryan Smith's, but you shoot a ton of free throws. Talk about your game?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: Yeah, first off, watching his film, he's electric behind the three-point line, and similar numbers. And I think he's even missed a few games lately, so his three point numbers would be higher if he played in those games.

Personally, it helps having guys like Jamiya and Ryan by my side to not only get me three point attempts that are clean looks and good opportunities for our team, but then in the pick and roll with Ryan and just the threat that he is at all times, it gives me a lot of opportunity to where the big men are more worried about him. And if I can get to the rim, they are typically late, which is going to end up being a foul.

So it allows me to get fouled in the pick and roll and then get to the free-throw line. And it's something that I've been in college basketball for a few years, and my three point ability has kept me at the level that I am at today and wanting to improve.

And getting to the free-throw line was that next step because of the analytics it shows as being an efficient and effective offensive player. So something I have focused on this year and have been able to.

Also, at the same time, realizing in college basketball, once you get to seven fouls, you're going to go to the free-throw line if you get fouled again. So with the ball in my hands a lot, trying to be aware of when a defender might be too aggressive out on the perimeter and trying to draw fouls to get to the free-throw line for my team as well.

**Q. Steven, Louisville's best player has been Chucky Hepburn, just your thoughts watching him on video, and he's from Omaha. Do you guys see him at all, or have you ever seen him in the summertime?**

STEVEN ASHWORTH: Yeah. Chucky came back this summer and was obviously in the middle of his transfer process, and we played pickup a few times over the summer, and got a firsthand look at how talented of a player he is and how good of a defender he is.

And so obviously that's going to be at the forefront of our minds, just the amount of times he's able to deflect passes and disrupt offenses with his defensive ability. And then offensively gets to his spots really well and navigates the ball screen and runs the offense at a high level.

There's going to be a lot of focus on him and the talent that he brings, and also the fact that you've got other guys that maybe are even leading the team in scoring. And similar to our team, it seems like, every given night there could be a different guy that is leading the team in a different type of way. So all hands on deck for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thanks for your time.

At this time we will welcome the Creighton Head Coach Greg McDermott. Coach?

GREG McDERMOTT: As always, so excited to be here. You can't ever take the NCAA Tournament for granted, especially this day and age with rebuilding teams every year, much more difficult to build a program than it used to be.

The fact that we've got some new pieces and went through some adversity in November and December with some injuries, really had to reinvent ourselves, makes me even more proud that we're sitting here today with an opportunity to keep playing in the pinnacle of our sport.

Really has been a very rewarding group to coach this year, and we look forward to going on the court against a very good Louisville team tomorrow.

**Q. With how good they are scoring on pick and rolls against your base defense especially, what are the keys to being sharp in terms of dealing with that part of the game?**

GREG McDERMOTT: I mean, we have to do it without fouling. That's really important and has been to us all season. You know, Chucky is playing as well as any guard in the country. His ability to navigate those screening activities is elite, because you have to respect him as a shooter and a scorer, but he might be a better passer than he is both of those, which is saying a lot because he's always been a good scorer.

Every time you make a mistake, he makes you pay for it. So our ability to really follow our rules and stay on point with the scouting report is going to be really critical.

**Q. You talked a lot about the adversity that you guys faced with injuries. How important is it for you to trust**



**the ways that you've overcome that this season when you come into March Madness?**

GREG McDERMOTT: Yeah, I mean it's huge. You don't ever want to give up. You don't ever want to give in. That's in life, that's in basketball. That was the case in November and December when we had the injuries. You just try to figure out a way.

And that happens during the course of the game. There are going to be good moments when things are going well, and there's going to be Louisville is going to make a run. They're too talented not to.

And how do you handle those adverse moments in a game usually will point you in the direction of how good a season you can have, how well the teams handle that, do they stay together, get over that play and move on to the next play quickly, whether it was good or bad.

This team has done a good job of that. They don't get too excited when things go well, they don't hang their heads when things don't, and that's going to be critical to get through a loaded bracket that we're in.

**Q. Coach, Chucky obviously is from Omaha, he went to Wisconsin, then went into the portal and went to Louisville. Is he a guy that you guys tried to recruit? Was there a thought he was going to go to Creighton?**

GREG McDERMOTT: Yeah, we recruited him. I think he came out the same year that we ended up with Ryan Nembhard.

I've known Chucky since 8th grade and know his family. It's been fun to watch him from afar and incredible how he's developed his game. I wasn't sure he could add to it, leaving Wisconsin and coming to Louisville, but he has.

That's a credit to him and also credit to Coach Kelsey and his staff for how they put him in positions to really showcase all the things he can do in the game of basketball. I've only talked about the offensive end, but he's incredibly disruptive on the defensive end as well.

**Q. Coach, you talk about the injuries that you have. How did you get this team -- the other guys to buy in and have them step up their games to fill voids and fill those absences?**

GREG McDERMOTT: It started with leadership from Ryan Kalkbrenner and Steven Ashworth. They're both very positive people. They're both everyday guys from a practice standpoint.

So the people in our program, some of the younger guys, some of the new guys, their role -- they were basically just settling into the role they were playing eight or nine games in, and then that all changed.

So I think Ryan and Steven's ability to help guide them and lead them was critical. From Jamiya Neal to Jasen Green to Jackson McAndrew to Isaac Traudt to Mason Miller, Fedor once he became eligible, Ty Davis, all their roles changed when Pop went down for the season.

They really embraced that. They haven't complained about how many minutes they're getting, how many shots they are getting. This team does not have a lot of ego, and that's why we're here. They've stuck together.

It's been in large part due to the leadership in our locker room and Ryan and Steven, on top of our coaching staff, instilling confidence in some of the those other guys.

**Q. Coach, in about 45 minutes one of your former assistants, Darian DeVries, is going to be announced as the coach at Indiana. What can you tell people about Darian and why he would be a good fit at IU?**

GREG McDERMOTT: I think it's a terrific hire, D-Rock was with me for eight years. I kept him on staff from Coach Altman's staff when I got the job at Creighton, and it was the single best decision I made when I got there. Maybe having Doug join me was a close second.

But he's such a worker and such a grinder. He has a way of connecting with people and bringing the best out in his players because they're going to see the passion on a daily basis that he goes about coaching his team. He's got a wonderful family. They're going to fit great in Bloomington, and I think they will be very happy with the results.

**Q. Greg, I know you guys are fresh off playing St. John's at the Garden, and you got that experience twice this year. I know you'll travel a lot of people to this game tomorrow. It's still expected to be a pro-Louisville crowd in here. Is there anything you talk to your guys about? Do you lean on any of the tendencies, the habits that you built from road game environments this year and how you approach that unique dynamic?**

GREG McDERMOTT: We essentially played a road game Friday night against UConn in the Garden and then Saturday against St. John's. So we just did it twice. We fully expect to have a similar experience tomorrow.

We've been in that environment. We were successful Friday night. We played great for about 30 minutes, 32



minutes against St. John's and then let it get away.

But you have to stick together. Your team unity is so critical when you are in a building where everybody is against you, and that's going to be the case. We've got a blizzard going on in Omaha right now, so I don't know how many people are going to get here. But hopefully we will have some folks in blue tomorrow.

**Q. I know the impact was there with Ryan that sophomore year breakout. When did you feel like the leadership component clicked where you could start to trust him to kinda be an extension of you on the floor?**

GREG McDERMOTT: I think he took some strides last year. With Baylor and Trey having been around, I think he was able to grow into it a little bit more during the course of the season. And then whether he liked it or not, he knew this season that he was going to have to step up because of so many guys in new roles.

That puts a huge onus on him to be an everyday guy, not just with his work ethic and showing up and doing everything you're supposed to do, but with his voice. I don't know that he -- he's not a rah-rah guy that's talking all the time, but when he speaks, everybody listens. And that is a sign of respect that he's earned from his teammates because of how he treats them.

**Q. Louisville only won eight games last year, four the previous year. When you watch them this year, as you've gotten ready for them, what jumps out at you about what Pat Kelsey has been able to do with this group?**

GREG McDERMOTT: Coach Kelsey has done an unbelievable job. Like us, they have had to reinvent their roster because of injuries early. And you can see it from watching them in December and January to how they are playing recently, how much they have improved and how guys have embraced their roles.

He's very creative offensively, defensively. They do a great job trying to take away what teams are trying to do. And they look like they're having a blast. That's a credit to Coach Kelsey and his staff that they have created a culture where they really, truly look like they're enjoying playing the game of basketball.

It's one of the best stories in college basketball from what he did last year to where the team is today, outside of the fact that the No. 10 team is playing in the 8-9 game, that's probably a pretty big story, too. But we're the recipient of that, I guess.

He's done an unbelievable job. It's easier to turn around programs quickly than it has ever been, but it's not that easy. You have to do a lot of research to make sure the pieces fit. They've done a masterful job of putting that roster together that looks like they've been playing together forever.

**Q. Coach, can you talk about -- you mentioned Steven's leadership. You've had him for a couple years now. Talk about how important he's been coming from Utah State to play for you.**

GREG McDERMOTT: He's been everything I could have hoped for and more. He probably struggled the first 12 to 15 games his first year. I think he was trying to be somebody he wasn't. Everybody was obviously disappointed that Ryan Nembhard moved on to Gonzaga, and everybody became accustomed to what Ryan Nembhard did for our offense.

And I think early Steven tried to be Ryan. He and I had a talk early in the middle of the season. I remember it vividly. I said, Just be Steven Ashworth. That's what I recruited you to do and be.

Once he did that, he's flourished. And he's improved in every facet of the game, his decision-making, his defense. He's always been an elite shot maker. He's such a positive presence to his teammates on a daily basis. He doesn't have bad days, and he does everything he can to make sure that nobody around him has a bad day. And that's a sign of an incredible leader.

**Q. Coach, I read a comment from Hubert Davis last night. He said he has never coached a game without RJ Davis and didn't know what he would do without him. That's not quite the case with you, but do you sorta feel that way about when you won't have Ryan Kalkbrenner back?**

GREG McDERMOTT: Thanks for reminding me. I've been blessed to coach that kid for five years, especially with guys always moving and always looking for the next best thing or the better deal. He's been unbelievably loyal to me, my staff and to our university. To watch his growth on and off the floor has been one of the true blessings I have had in my 36-year career. He's like a son to me. I'm so proud of what he's become, not just on the basketball floor but off the basketball floor. The confidence that he has now, that he didn't have when he walked through the door, the leadership skills that maybe he was lacking as a young person because he didn't have the confidence in himself -- he wasn't sure about himself, let alone leading someone else.



So he's just the total package. To watch him last summer walk down the aisle and get married and be there for that and watch his journey his senior year when all the eyes are on him and the pressure is on him, and he's got to make improvements in every part of his game as he tries to prepare himself for the next level. He's checked all those boxes. It's going to be very different without him. I might have to start coaching again, but it's been one of the true joys of my career to be able to coach him for the past five years.

**Q. Coach, obviously Steven and Ryan have been here, they've been leaders, and they're experienced in March Madness. What's the advice or how do you prepare some of those younger guys like Jackson, Ty, Fedor for moments like this?**

GREG McDERMOTT: Well, we try not to change, whether we are preparing for a bye game in November, or a Big East Championship in New York City, or an NCAA Tournament game. There is a process that you follow, and you have to trust that process. There is a lot of preparation that goes into it, a lot of thought that goes into it, a lot of film study, a lot of work.

We try to not treat any game any different, any bigger, any smaller, with the way that we prepare. Hopefully then when the ball goes up it's just another game. Obviously when they walk on that court tomorrow, it's going to give a few guys goosebumps, and that's okay. That's part of the experience. I want them to look around and soak it all in and understand what they have accomplished this season. But once the game starts that's when your preparation kicks in. I think we've got a pretty good routine that we follow to make sure that we're ready.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time.

GREG McDERMOTT: Thank you.

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