

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Utah State vs UCLA

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Utah State Aggies

Ian Martinez

Dexter Akanno

Mason Falslev

Aubin Gateretse

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Utah State student-athletes Mason Falslev, Dexter Akanno, Ian Martinez and Aubin Gateretse. Questions for our student-athletes?

Q. Mason, I know you've had a chance to watch film on UCLA and do some prep. What have you learned most about the Bruins and what you guys are going to face?

MASON FALSLEV: Obviously they're a big team and more defense orientated. So we've got to push in transition and try and rebound the basketball.

Q. There's not a lot of guys in college basketball, or in basketball at all, who are 7'3", and UCLA has one in Aday Mara. What did you think of him when you saw in scouting, and how would you combat that in a game if you got a heavy dose of him?

IAN MARTINEZ: We've got to use our speed to beat him. Like you just mentioned, he's 7'3", really tall. Luckily he's not too heavy so we can fight that physically to some extent, but most with speed would be ideal to beat him.

Q. Dexter, were you able to offer any insight into UCLA having been at Oregon State?

DEXTER AKANNO: For sure, been playing against them for about three or four years, and definitely know a little bit about their personnel. Their guard plays really well. They're really oriented around their bigs.



So playing with Tyler Bilodeau last year, they got their other transfer, No. 3, and then also Mara coming off the bench, they're going to be focusing on them and how they play.

So focusing on rebounding the ball and pushing it in transition, that's going to be huge for us.

Q. Dexter, being teammates with Tyler for a couple years, what insights you have on him and the way he's playing this year for the Bruins?

DEXTER AKANNO: First and foremost, really proud of him. And really proud of our team as well, just being able to be at this stage, and thank God for putting us into this position today.

Just a blessing going into this next game playing against him. And just seeing his progress throughout the years, just a hard worker. It's going to be exciting playing against him.

As far as the way that he plays, we kind of all know that he's focused on kind of the mid-range and popping out to three, facing up, taking different fade-away jumpers, stuff like that. So trying to be physical with him is going to be big for us.

Q. Dexter, talk about getting to the NCAA Tournament for the first time.

DEXTER AKANNO: All glory to God. This is a huge blessing for me, and just being with this team has meant a lot for us and meant a lot to me as well. Just trying to soak it all in, enjoy the moment, and just keep it going as long as I can. So just enjoying this.

Q. A lot is made about time changes when you have to travel, especially when you have to travel east for this. How much does it help you guys to play a game at a time that you all are used to in your time zone? How much of an effect on your body clock does that have with the travel, and how does it help that you're playing kind of at a time that you're used to?

IAN MARTINEZ: I think it can be helpful for us to stay in



... when all is said, we're done.®



our routine. Everybody has their own routine, and we also have one as a team, you know? So not having that big of a time change is beneficial on just resting and preparation before the game.

Q. Aubin, UCLA likes to post up a lot. What have you seen as far as defending their bigs, talented bigs? What preparation have you done to be ready for that?

AUBIN GATERETSE: Like Dexter mentioned, it's going to be huge to be physical. Don't let Mara get close to the rim. So being physical, getting aggressive and getting the rebounds in transition, and using our speed to beat their size.

Q. Mason and Ian, can you talk about how you've helped some of the younger guys get ready for this experience? I know that you talked on Sunday, but what have you done to get the rest of the team ready for the tournament?

IAN MARTINEZ: I think the main part of this whole experience is just reminding everybody that this is a time that we all wait for this. We've been preparing for this since we came together in, what, May, June.

So obviously you may feel some type of pressure or whatever it is inside, whatever. Just kind of reminding them that they gotta have fun, we all gotta have fun as a team. We still come out here and compete, but I feel like that's one of the main things that we gotta keep in mind.

MASON FALSLEV: Yeah, I agree with Ian. For all the young guys coming in, like, this is an amazing moment and something you dream about for a long time. Just go out and have fun. That's what I've been telling all the guys, is, you know, it's been a long time since we played a team like UCLA, so just go out and enjoy it and embrace it. Don't hide from it. Go out and show the world what you can do.

Q. Mason, what do you feel like your conference -- or your program and playing in that conference, the style that they play is something that people don't know about that you all hope to bring to the tournament?

MASON FALSLEV: I think the Mountain West is pretty physical. I think, especially our team, we do a little something different. We play a match-up zone, whatever you want to call it. So I'm excited to see how teams handle that.

It's hard to play against a different defense. I think teams are used to seeing man-to-man all the time. So it will be fun to throw a little bit of zone/man-to-man at them.

Q. I wanted to ask, is there anything that has changed for you this year being with a different team, albeit in the tournament once again?

AUBIN GATERETSE: It's very different. First of all, last year was my first time in New York. So the atmosphere is very different. But in here I feel like I'm very confident in our team to make a run in the March Madness. I feel like we got all the tools. If we do what we can do the best, I'm sure we're going to be great and win a couple games.

Then last year we obviously played back-to-back champions. So we try to do our best. It obviously didn't go the way we wanted. As of here, I'm super confident in our team.

Q. Mason, this is your third NCAA Tournament in three years. I know you redshirted that first year, three different coaching staffs, three different styles of play. What's been the common element throughout those three years that have allowed teams to be as successful as you have been three years in a row?

MASON FALSLEV: One thing that's been similar with all three teams is the way we get along on and off the court. I think we have the same type of bond this year. We all get along. We all want the best for each other. We all want each other to succeed. So I think that's the common denominator.

Q. Ian and Mason, because last year you were on a team that broke a 20-year run of Utah State not having won an NCAA Tournament game, so what kind of changes this year where the monkey is off the program's back with getting that win last year? What's the goal? Obviously you want to win the game at least, but are there further goals now that kind of the initial barrier got broken last year?

IAN MARTINEZ: Obviously last year we were very excited to, like you mentioned, broken that streak or drought, whatever you want to call it. But we have the same goal this year, you know. We believe in our team. I think we have a lot of depth, we have a lot of great guys. We have the talent and the tools to get on the run.

So same goal. We are trying to get as far as we can.

MASON FALSLEV: Yeah, you know, it will be awesome to make a run, and I think our team is capable of it. One thing about our team, you never know who is going to go off. We have so many capable scorers and so many people that can do so many things, it's hard to prepare for. That's the one thing that I don't think we had as much last year. But I'm excited to see what some guys can step up and do



this year.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time, gentlemen.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

