

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Creighton vs Auburn

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Rupp Arena

Creighton Bluejays

Coach Greg McDermott

Media Conference



teams play disciplined, physical basketball and I'm not surprised they have had the season that they've had.

Q. Greg, I believe you and Bruce faced in the 1999 Division II tournament when you were at Wayne State. I'm curious if you remember anything about that game?

GREG McDERMOTT: That might have been Wayne State, Michigan. I was at Wayne State, Nebraska. I don't think I've ever coached against him.

Q. Coach, you talked about the challenges that Auburn is going to present. How much more important, considering the season you've had with Kansas and last season with UConn, to trust in your preparation and your ability to handle teams like this?

GREG McDERMOTT: That's important for every game. We have a process that we follow, a routine that we follow, whether we're preparing for a start of the season scrimmage or whether we're in the NCAA Tournament. Our guys know what to expect, what we're going to do to a day out, what do day of the game. Our opponents change and we treat them all the same regardless of their ranking. That process has served us well, and hopefully it will serve us well in this situation.

Like the SEC, the Big East prepares us for a lot of things you see in the NCAA Tournament. The physicality of St. John's is going to serve us well, even though we didn't win against St. John's last Saturday. That will help us tomorrow because of what Auburn is going to throw at us from a physicality standpoint. We both play in great leagues. Obviously SEC had an unprecedented year with 14 teams in the tournament. You hope that the conference you play in shows you everything you need to know and helps you get ready for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Greg, obviously going up against Johni Broome tomorrow, the pass ability, rebounds, blocks, scoring, what do you see from him on film and how do you marry what you see with actually trying to stop him in a game?

GREG McDERMOTT: He gets the basketball so quick inside. He sets it up with some shot fakes and head fakes

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Creighton Head Coach Greg McDermott. Coach?

GREG McDERMOTT: Excited to still be around talking to you. Looking forward to an incredible opportunity tomorrow against an awesome team. Auburn has essentially been the number 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament for about six weeks. They've played at such a high level for such a long time. We're faced with a lot of challenges, their length, their athletic ability, their physicality, their pace.

They're a hard team to prepare for in a short period of time because of the things that they do. And obviously they have one of the best scorers in the country that's been a model of consistency all season long. There's a lot of challenges, but we're excited about the opportunity, and ready to let it roll and see what happens.

Q. Greg, I believe this is the first time you've gone up against Bruce Pearl, and both you guys have been head coaches for over three decades. What do you know about Bruce's teams and him as a coach? What do you expect from the match-up tomorrow.

GREG McDERMOTT: Well, he's much older than me, he just turned 65. I've known him a long time, he was an assistant at Iowa, I grew up in Iowa, when he was with Tom Davis. We both started at the Division II level as coaches. At that point in time, there weren't a lot of guys making the jump from Division II to Division I, so when somebody does you follow their progress.

He was successful in Indiana, won a national championship there, turned the Milwaukee program around in short order and went to Tennessee and did great things. So I don't think anybody is surprised by what he's done at Auburn. He's been good wherever he's been and his



that we're going to need to stay disciplined on. He's one of the best offensive players in the country at his position, and I've got one of the best defensive players in the country in Ryan Kalkbrenner. We can't let him beat us in multiple ways.

If he's going to score some points, then we have to take away his passing. If we're going to take away his points and double team him, then he can't get points. He's just got to be able to get assists. So we can't be in a situation where he's beating us every which way.

That maybe sounds easy. It's very difficult to do. I think our guys understand the plan that we're going to try to put into place and we'll see if it works. If it doesn't, we'll adjust and try something else.

Q. Coach, around the nation you've got so many assistants that have gone on to be great head coaches, Coach Miller heading to Murray State. Can you talk about your process with your assistants to be able to bring them into now heading up teams?

GREG McDERMOTT: It starts with recruiting good people to start with and people that are passionate about the game and passionate about wanting to grow. I've never felt that the guys that have worked for me were ever that concerned about getting a head coaching job. They were just concerned about doing their job.

I'm a little bit different in that I probably empower my assistants a little more than others. They have more responsibility, they have more of a voice in practice. I think I owe it to them for their development to allow them to do that.

I got my first head coaching job at age 29 at Wayne State College. And I made a ton of mistakes, but nobody knew about it. These guys are getting opportunities to make mistakes while they're an assistant coach for me, and we can talk through them. So I think they're a little bit better prepared when they do get their own head coaching job.

So really proud of Ryan and obviously Coach DeVries just got the Indiana job. Coach Huss had a great run at High Point this year. T.J. is playing at Iowa State right now. So there's a lot of guys that have done really well, but they were really good when they came to me and they poured their heart and soul into our program, and they were rewarded because of that.

Q. 1 versus 9 going into this, in March anything can happen. Do you look at it as an underdog role?

GREG McDERMOTT: They understand how good Auburn

is. We played a heck of a team yesterday that probably wasn't an 8 seed. But in the NCAA Tournament, you can't get too caught up in who you're playing. You've got to lose yourself in the preparation. The good thing is because of our league and our nonconference schedule, we've played a lot of really good teams. And because you've played really good teams, you understand how to prepare for a marquis game against a great team.

So I think our preparation will be good. Will it be good enough when you step on the floor against a talented team? I don't know. We're going to roll some of freshmen out there, and they've got a lot of old dudes that have been around awhile.

I think it will be a fun game and it's a great opportunity for our program and for this team in particular.

Q. Greg, your team commits the least fouls of anybody in the country. I was just curious, what's the key to that, to be a good defense without sending teams to the line?

GREG McDERMOTT: Will you tell the referees that before the game tomorrow? Remind them we commit the fewest fouls in the country, ever in the country. Not just this year, this is the fewest I think in the history of our game. It's part of our madness, it's part of what we do, it's part of what we teach.

Even us old coaches, analytically there are things you're trying to win and there are things that you understand because of the make-up of your team you're probably not going to win that analytical battle. So what area can we win?

One area we're trying to win is the free throw battle. We want to make more free throws than our opponents attempt. To do that -- and we want to play fast. If you play fast, you don't want the game to stop with a bunch of fouls. So it all kinda goes together. But we teach it.

Where Coach Pearl is teaching them to poke and grab and rake and force turnovers, we're not going to foul. We're not going to take chances. A bad shot by the other team is as good as a turnover in our opinion. It's just a philosophical way of looking at it that we have chosen because of our personnel. It's a must for us to be successful.

If we have 22 fouls tomorrow we're done. Start the engines, we're out of here. We've got to be disciplined in that regard, but it's something that we work on.

Q. Greg, older players are not uncommon in this era of college sports, but as Steven and his son and his wife



get more attention after being all over the broadcast yesterday, what does that perspective experience bring to him as a player and anything to your team in the locker room?

GREG McDERMOTT: I've never had a married player and I have two of them on this team, he and Ryan Kalkbrenner. Their leadership has been great. They've really included the rest of our team in their lives. Our guys are going over to their house to watch TV and hang with Tommy and Peyton or hang with Ryan's wife, Rachael.

So it isn't like they all go their separate directions after practice. They've included our younger guys into their families as their families are starting to grow. It's been really cool. When Tommy comes to practice, he's the most popular person in the gym with all our players. It's been fun.

I'm just so happy and proud and grateful that Steven and Ryan are getting this opportunity in their last year to win another game in the NCAA Tournament and put us on the stage tomorrow to have another opportunity. Because they've certainly invested a lot in our program. They've sacrificed a lot. They've been about all the right things and their leadership has been off the charts.

Q. Coach, being in the Big East obviously you face a lot of good shooters, Auburn has Miles Kelly. What have you noticed about his play and Auburn's ability to open things up and get him the ball?

GREG McDERMOTT: They have so many guys that can shoot it with range, and Kelly is certainly one of them. Tahaad Pettiford shoots it 6 feet behind the line with ease. So it stretches that defense out a little farther. So if you're going to help on Johni Broome, you have to come from farther and your recovery is more difficult.

So Bruce has done a great job of surrounding a great interior player with the right kind of players on the perimeter to make that group work.

We just have to -- like we did yesterday, I thought a lot of Louisville's three-point shots were challenged. And they're still going to make some of those because they have guys that can really make tough shots, but we just can't give 'em the easy once, we can't give 'em the step-in threes with nobody there.

That will be our charge. Whether we can execute it, it's yet to be seen.

Q. Greg, when you have all day and you have a chance to watch a lot of teams, specifically with

Auburn, what was kind of the advantage of that? How do you take that and apply it later on that day when you talk to your team?

GREG McDERMOTT: It gives you a little more time certainly to get ready for a noon practice than playing late at night. My staff had Auburn ready to go as soon as the game was over, so we were able to talk about it right when we got back to the hotel and watch enough film that we could formulate a plan and tweak it as we go.

Part of playing an early game in the NCAA Tournament is while you're watching Auburn, you have the TV on and you're watching some your buddies suffer trying to win a game in the tournament. Once you get that win in your back pocket, it's kind of enjoyable to watch somebody else suffer.

Q. You've been through so many NCAA Tournaments, Ryan has been through so many NCAA Tournaments at this point. How much does that give you a sense of calm during such a high-pressure time of the year?

GREG McDERMOTT: We'll find out if we're good enough to play against a team as good as Auburn. That will be decided on the court. I don't think we will panic. I just think our guys really have a tremendous amount of belief in one another. They're extremely connected, and that unity is why we are here. That's why we were able to dig out of a 7-5 start, and it looked like we were road kill for the rest of the year.

And we found a way out of it and reinvented ourselves, guys embraced their roles, they grew in their roles, they were champions in their roles. Very few egos on this team. Because of that, when things get tough, they don't point fingers. When you don't point fingers, you can get through adversity, because if you aren't pointing fingers, that means you are looking inside and trying to figure out what I can do better to help remedy the problem I've got going on right now.

I have a whole team of those guys. When guys are looking in and trying to figure out what impact can I have to help this team, you have a better chance of fixing things. And this team has been -- as I told our local media all year long, it's one of the more gratifying seasons I've ever had, because the sum of our parts is really, really good, and it's because of how connected we are.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time, thanks.

GREG McDERMOTT: Thank you.



