

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Arkansas vs Kansas

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Providence, Rhode Island, USA

Amica Mutual Pavilion

Kansas Jayhawks Coach Bill Self

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: When you're ready, Coach, we'll open it up for questions.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Flory Bidunga, clearly has the athletic ability. How has he become a better basketball player in his time with you?

BILL SELF: I think he's gotten better, but there's a big two or three steps he can take. To your point, he's very young in the game. He's got to develop some ways to score more points. Right now, he's a rim-runner, a lob threat, scores off of putbacks and in transition, but he's got to get where he's a better scorer, but I think his ceiling is as high as anyone in our program, and I think his ceiling is one of the highest we have had at Kansas for the last several years.

Q. When you first saw this bracket and pod with you and John and Rick here, what was your reaction? Do you think the committee likes a good story line putting you all here, and what about the fact that only one of you three Hall of Fame coaches and teams is going to come out of here?

BILL SELF: I don't look at it quite as deep as some other people do. I looked that we were seeded probably where we deserve to be and who you're going to play on the ten line. I said a week ago that it's going to be Arkansas. I said, you watch, we're going to play Arkansas. I didn't have any idea who the two would be, but I think it's fine for us. I would think, and I don't know positively, there will be a little story line with Kansas and Arkansas, but the potential of a Calipari-Pitino second-round game may put Kansas in a favorable light, to be honest with you.

We've been talked about enough over the years and over time. I'm kind of looking forward to having people talk about others and maybe we can kind of sneak up on somebody.

Q. Bill, Rylan Griffen, how much can his experience help and how can we bust out of his shooting slump?

BILL SELF: We got to get him looks. He can shoot the ball, but he hasn't consistently of late.

To your point, last year at Alabama he got on a pretty good run in the tournament. So hopefully he will remember that and have confidence from that.

Q. About Zuby Ejiofor, can you tell us what your dialogue with Coach Pitino was with him and what your impressions were with player development?

BILL SELF: Oh, I think Zuby has done fantastic. They have done a great job with him. I followed St. John's more than normal just because of Zuby. I think that Rick over time has done as good or a better job as anyone has done in developing guys. I thought he made a great choice. We did not want Zuby to leave. It was going to be kind of a crowded house, and maybe the immediate opportunities are not much, at least the way it looked at that moment, so we supported whatever he wanted to do. He was terrific in the time that he was with us. It was just too short.

It doesn't surprise me because he's an athlete that's very smart and he's a sponge and he's tough. Those seem to be good combinations in playing for Rick.

Q. The last 15 years or so, generally you have had a bus ride or a short flight home-ish games, high seed. Is this experience different coming a pretty long flight away and being a crooked number seed?

BILL SELF: You know what, Pete? It may feel different to Kansas people. I don't know if it feels different to me. I was at Tulsa. Since 2000, what's that been? 25, 26 years since 2000? That was the last time that we were outside of four seed. So we were a seven in 2000 at Tulsa and we made it to Elite Eight, and ever since then, we have been a four or better. So to your point, we have probably played consistently closer to home usually, but if we're not going to be one of those, I think being close to home also can add pressure, too, because of the expectations and things like that. I think there's less distractions when you get away. So I'm looking at this as a very positive thing. Love

Providence.

Q. Bill, back on Zuby, is that just one of the drawbacks of this age, a guy doesn't play a lot as a freshman, you probably would have liked to play him more. I think he might have had some injuries that year, too.

BILL SELF: Yeah, we had, he and another freshman named Ernest Udeh, who is at TCU, and they split time. We played KJ Adams at the five. That was -- we were a pretty good team. We were a one seed, and that's when the portal opened and Hunter became available and we took Hunt. So you can imagine that would be a situation where if the portal... if there was immediate eligibility back then, I'm not sure that Zuby may have, but I'm not sure he would have left. But with the immediate eligibility and Hunter can come in and be eligible immediately, I thought that was a pretty good decision on his part. I'm not saying Hunter over Zuby, I'm not saying anything like that, but you recruit a guy who was just an All-American to come in with two kids that struggle playing 10 or 12 minutes a game, it probably looked like it was too crowded a house.

Q. When you're talking about how Pitino developed players over all these years, we just talked to Cal, you have all had these long careers made of Hall of Fame coaches getting out of the game and the next evolution of it. What do you think is the key for you guys still being here, still back in March trying to make some noise?

BILL SELF: I can't speak to everybody else. I think the biggest key, and I think we all go through it, is why did you really get into the profession? You did it because you love the sport, you want to impact kids, but you also love to teach. And the way it's set up now, it makes teaching possibly more in a frustrating-type mode because you may not get them for two or three or four years where now when you plan, your long-term plan is over 12 months as opposed to 24 or 36 months.

I think the key is not getting it twisted on what you really love to do. I do think it's challenging with the way it's set up in order to do that. Obviously, Rick and Cal, they've been so good at it for so long and we've been pretty good at it for a while, too. We talk about how everything sucks because it's not the way it used to be and there was probably some things about our sport that needed to change and we're kind of in the middle of the change where there's some discomfort, but I really believe the way that our sport looks today, it will look different in two or three years and will balance out. We just all need to ride it out.

Q. When you guys played against Arkansas in the

pre-season, Boggie Fland was there and he's been out, but now he's back. What have you seen from Arkansas with and without him? What does he bring to their team?

BILL SELF: Well, they dominated us in the exhibition. Hunter didn't play. Rylan didn't play. Shag didn't play. If I'm not mistaken, Aidoo didn't play for them. Nelly was not quite healthy yet, even though he played.

Athletically they were much more physical and faster, especially at the guard spots. Granted, I watched them quite a bit through year and watched a lot here of late, but it seems like, to me, the emergence of Brazile and Richmond to me, has keyed everything. D.J. is playing a high level, the other guys are playing at the level they were expected to play, too, in my opinion. But those two have taken off since we played exhibition, and Boogie was probably the best player in that exhibition game. So getting him back I'm sure will be a bonus for them.

They present a lot of challenges because they're athletic and they're shooting the ball more consistently now and they've shown that when they're good, they're as good as anybody.

Q. And you and John Calipari have competed. How much do you reflect on those meetings as you look ahead on this game?

BILL SELF: Probably not much. As least I won't much. I can reflect back and say out of bounds under short clock, 30 seconds left down three, John ran this. I can remember those things. We are all kind of creatures of habit, so to speak, so I wouldn't be surprised if he wouldn't try to do something similar or whatever, but I don't really see it coach versus coach. I see it team versus team.

I do know there are some things that they did in that exhibition game we would like to slow down and take away and hopefully it benefitted us by getting our butts beat -- kicked by them in that exhibition game that helped us prepare for this game.

THE MODERATOR: Time for one more.

BILL SELF: Did you have one?

Q. (Inaudible).

BILL SELF: Depends if they're switching to ball screen or not.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thanks.



