

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Grambling State vs Purdue

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Grambling State Tigers

Donte' Jackson

Jourdan Smith

Jimel Cofer

Media Conference



JOURDAN SMITH: You know, with Purdue, that's a big guy, so we don't have anybody that size, obviously. So we're going to have to do a lot of different things, a lot of things he's never seen, a lot of things he can't get used to. So even in the first half we might do some things but he might get used to seeing that type of coverage, so we have to switch it up.

JIMEL COFER: Like he said, we're going to have to switch up a lot of things, but I'm confident in our coaches, that they have a game plan for it.

Q. Jimel, talk about the last 24 hours.

JIMEL COFER: The last 24 hours, it's been a new experience, I guess. My phone has been blowing up a lot. Been having to respond to a lot of messages here and there. I guess it just comes with -- it was a big win last night, and I was a big part of that.

Q. Jourdan, same to you, the last 24 hours?

JOURDAN SMITH: It's been a whole lot of emotions, a bit nerve wracking, but at the same time we know what we're here for. Just trying to keep the main goal the main goal.

Q. Jourdan, talk about Purdue.

JOURDAN SMITH: We're excited. We feel like this is another team in our way, a team we're capable of beating when we go on the court every day. Like Coach said, it's just another team we've got to try to go 1-0 against.

JIMEL COFER: Like he said, just another team in our way, and we feel like we've got the talent that we can go out there and play versus anybody.

Q. Last night after the game when your coach was asked about the next opponent, he laughed and said that they were not only going to throw the kitchen sink at Zach, they were going to throw the kitchen, the house, the backyard. Exactly how do you go about doing that? And more seriously, could you describe from what you've observed, if anything, the challenges that he poses?

Q. I'm curious how you guys used the frustration from last year's SWAC championship to propel you into this, and was this a season-long thing?

JIMEL COFER: I mean, I wasn't here last year, but I know that loss probably hurt some of our guys last year, and I just didn't want to have that feeling for myself this year.

JOURDAN SMITH: You know, that loss meant a lot to us last year, especially with the type of team we had. We were a real close-knit team last year. So losing that game, it was a lot to take on coming into the season, so it was definitely a season-long thing.

At the end of the day that just gave us more motivation to do it this year.

Q. How much did you talk about that throughout the season, the off-season, when you got back to the SWAC tournament?

JOURDAN SMITH: Off-season it was on my mind the whole off-season, honestly. There was days I couldn't sleep just thinking about that.

Then when the season started, it was just trying to get back to that moment, just chopping wood, going day by day. Honestly and truthfully it's still something I think about.

Q. Going back to that, what did it mean for you to be able to win that game last night and make the trip down here, the short trip, but it's a short turnaround?



JOURDAN SMITH: It meant a lot, especially with the type of season we're having this year and the type of chemistry the guys have. We just feel like we didn't want the season to end, so we just wanted to play hard and keep going.

Q. Did the early-season struggles have anything to do with your ability to deal with a significant deficit in the second half last night? The fact that you've been able to deal with disappointment and come back from it, was that a factor last night at all?

JIMEL COFER: I feel like our early struggles definitely did play a big part in that because it was somewhere that we had been before, and just got to keep working, and at the end of the day I knew we was going to pull out the victory.

JOURDAN SMITH: It meant a lot to us, having the type of schedule we had and the type of things we went through in the beginning of the season because going into last night's game we were down, I think, like 12, but at the same time we knew what was going on, and we knew it was our mistakes that was making them get the big lead. So we were going into time-outs and going into halftime, and like Coach said, we're good. Coach was confident. It was an adjustment we had to make for ourselves and the type of intensity we had to pick up on defense.

DONTE' JACKSON: Thanks everybody for coming out. Happy to be here. Ready to get going. Excited about the moment still. What a task, Purdue.

Q. You mentioned last night that you hadn't been sleeping well the last few days, but how much sleep did you get last night, and how much film of Purdue have you watched so far?

DONTE' JACKSON: Not a lot of sleep. We kind of got here maybe about 1:00, maybe almost 2:00 in the morning. Tried to take some film in about 4:00. Tried to get a little rest. Phone rings at 7:30 in the morning. I'm like, are you serious? My fault for not putting the phone on silent. I couldn't put in on silent because my kids are at home. So if they call, I've got to be available.

It is what it is. Right now no rest for the weary. Got to keep trying to fight the good fight.

Q. You struggled a little bit last night guarding the three, especially in the first half. I know that everybody looks at Purdue and says Zach Edey, but I think Purdue is one of the most efficient three-point shooting teams in the country. Was that a good test to see that team going into a team that's ideally the way it works, trying to get a lot of open threes off having a

7'4" guy inside?

DONTE' JACKSON: To me it's a little bit different, though the way they play compared to the way Purdue plays. We know we're going to have to guard the ball screen and they did a lot of ball screens, but they also throw it into Zach and try to get that double-team and then throw it back out for rotations, whereas yesterday their post player, he drove it from the top of the perimeter and kind of was a mismatch problem. It was kind of different in that aspect.

But we've got to be ready to guard the three because that's the thing -- you put a lot of focus on Zach, and the next thing you know you give up these threes and now you're out of the game. I always tell people all the time, twos don't beat you; threes do. So we've just got to be prepared to play.

Q. How have you seen this team grow from the SWAC tournament loss last year to through the off-season, through the opponents that you've played that were NCAA teams to last night?

DONTE' JACKSON: The team has grown a lot from -- I'd even take the summer when we went over to Puerto Rico and you get all the guys out there playing as individuals, and you're winning these games, but in my mind we're winning on individuality, not playing as a team.

We've grown from that preseason moment to even non-conference when I'm trying to -- you guys may not know, but we beat Colorado last year in the SWAC/Pac-12 Challenge and now we've got to go return the game to Colorado and I'm trying to let the guys know, the way you're playing we're going to lose by 50. You've got to understand we're going to lose by 50. They're like, we're fine, Coach.

No, we're not. We're not that good right now.

Long story short, we go to Colorado and we almost lose by 50. At that point in time you're watching them kind of slowly but surely grow, and the point spreads are going down, going down, going down, going down to where we get a little confidence at Drake, where going into the half we're down two or three, maybe four points, and go into the locker room down six at that point, and you could see the light bulb come on with all the guys, we can actually win this game.

That's the feeling you want them to have. You want them to find that belief moment where you're believing in yourself that you can actually go out there and accomplish the task that's being asked of you.

As we get to that point and we get the SWAC, we start running off games. Then unfortunately we got I want to say four sophomores and some younger guys, junior college guys, that don't understand that every team is a good team in Division I basketball. You can't have days off, otherwise you'll lose.

So we had some moments of complacency even during the season, during the SWAC season. We had that last game against Alabama State, which for some of my assistant coaches, they were just mad and just upset, and I'm like, great, we lost. We can reset the button because with this group sometimes we've got to reset the button.

We had a chance to reset, and they kind of just was ready to roll through the SWAC and they defended at a high level. Same as last night, they defended at a high level that second half, and that's been the real change, that they actually bought into guarding. When you can defend and rebound, you've got a chance in a lot of games.

Q. For you and the program, there's a lot of opinions about expanding the tournament and whatever, but what kind of opportunity was it to have your program on display, only four teams playing last night in a win/go-on event?

DONTE' JACKSON: To me as I sit up here and kind of reflect, it meant everything. It meant so much. The exposure that we're receiving as a program is national exposure, and we couldn't get this no other way. Just the exposure along for the institution, exposure for our band, exposure for our cheerleaders, and just being part of something that's the biggest thing in sports. It's probably the Super Bowl and then the NCAA Tournament, or in some people's eyes, the NCAA Tournament and then the Super Bowl.

This has just been everything and then some, just being able to play in this tournament and just being able to -- just being able to be a part of something that's a life-long legacy because these guys can make their moment at some point in time, and that moment lives on forever.

Q. As a local kid, Jalen gets to come home and has a tall task ahead of him but I'm sure he's excited. Talk about his role with this team and how he's helped you guys get here.

DONTE' JACKSON: Oh, Jalen has been incredible. I watched Jalen for three seasons over at Alabama A&M, and hitting game-winners on us and things of that nature, and he transfers over to Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In my opinion, I told him he shouldn't have left Alabama A&M. You're averaging 17 points a game. Why do you leave a

situation when you're averaging 17 points a game?

Long story short, we get a chance to recruit him and get him over to Grambling, and he's been a guy that for us has been a post presence, a guy that we can have finish games because he has great touch from the free-throw line and just somebody who's just been an everyday guy for us.

He understands the magnitude of most games, and he's a guy that wants to win his senior year. Even for a guy that accepts as you're coming in prior -- you're a two-time all-conference player but then you come to our team, you don't get all the touches that you've got in the past but you accept being a sixth man and being the next guy, the first guy to come off the bench for us.

It's just big for him to be here, big for him to be a part of this because in my opinion we wouldn't be here without Jalen Johnson.

Q. How do you look at last year's game against Purdue? Do you use that? Do your players feel confident?

DONTE' JACKSON: Honestly, I feel like that's old news. That's last year. Right now we've got to figure out the best game plan for us. We're not Fairleigh Dickinson, we're Grambling. We've got to go out here and do what's best for us and try to devise a scheme to put our guys in the best situation and score the ball at a high level and defend at a high level.

Will I watch that film? Yes, I'm going to pick apart that film left and right and try to figure it out, and I'll try to pick apart film from other, I guess, smaller colleges that Purdue will play.

Doesn't really make sense for me to watch a lot of the Big Ten film because we're not the Big Ten. It doesn't help us a lot.

We've got to try to find those little creases that's in their armor that we can be better, that we can find a way to attack them.

Q. The players mentioned that when you were down by as much as you were in the second half, you were still very confident in the huddle. What were you seeing that made you feel that way?

DONTE' JACKSON: Well, I felt that the reason why we were down was because of us. Several bad turnovers, six missed lay-ups, and I just told them at the end of the day we make our lay-ups -- okay, if you make an aggressive turnover trying to attack the basket, I can live with that. But

the turnovers where -- we had a turnover where Mo would catch the ball, no just dribbling, the guy standing in front of him steals it. We can't have that turnover, we're a better basketball team than that.

Just some of those turnovers we had, and the missed lay-ups, that was on us. Then we had a bad -- we were doing, in my opinion, a poor job just with our intensity level because one thing that you can control, no matter what the situation is, you can control how hard you play, and that's something that carries. I try to tell our guys all the time, I can't tell you how many shots you're going to make, but I can tell you what you can do. You can play harder than the guy in front of you.

Defense, effort, intensity travels. That travels to any gym in the country. I don't know if you make shots.

That was one of the main things that we had to go in there, adjust, and we looked at that ball screen coverage, we just wasn't doing a great job of pushing them to the sideline, like our game plan was to keep them out of the pick-and-rolls and attacking the middle of the court.

So once we made those adjustments, I felt like we were right where we needed to be. So there was no reason to panic because we'd been in this situation where. Heck, we were down to our rivals 17 points at home and we came back and won by 17.

I'm not going to panic because it's not going right. We've got to stick to what we believe in and what got us here.

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