

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Boise State Colorado vs Florida

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**Colorado Buffaloes**

**Tad Boyle**

**KJ Simpson**

**Tristan da Silva**

**J'Vonne Hadley**

Media Conference



They're a well-coached team. They're a good program. They're going to make sure that they come out firing because they know we have a game under our belt, as well. Got to make sure that we come out hot.

J'VONNE HADLEY: Yeah, they understand that we have a game under our belt, so like Tristan said, they're not going to come out sluggish. It would be cool if they did, but we're not expecting that. They're a good team, good-coached team. It's going to be another physical battle, like just Boise State was, and we have to understand that, and we just have to go out and execute.

**Q. KJ, what do you make of the matchup with Walter Clayton, Jr., what do you see when you watch him on film and what's it going to take for you to get the most out of that matchup?**

KJ SIMPSON: Yeah, obviously have respect for him. He's done great things over there at Florida. He's just a three-level scorer. There's not a shot that he doesn't like. I'm just going to have to -- we're going to have to as a team have great team defense and kind of make shots tough for him to get up that usually he's capable of knocking down.

It's just going to take guarding as a whole team, honestly, for a couple of their guys to kind of take them away from what they're comfortable doing.

But looking forward to it. Respect him as a player. He's a great talent.

**Q. Playing one game and kind of getting your feet wet in the tournament and having it under your belt, any advantage going into this having been through a battle already?**

TRISTAN DA SILVA: I mean, sure. Just as you said, having a game under your belt kind of gets you going, kind of get the jitters out the first game of March Madness. But this time of year, there's no bad teams no more. I'm not expecting them to come out and have a bad start, be sluggish.

**Q. With a quick turnaround and a team that is halfway across the country you've never seen, how tough is that cramming and digesting the scouting reports to get to know who you're playing tomorrow?**

KJ SIMPSON: It's crucial. It's crucial. You can't make any errors, especially around this time because anything that you don't study or don't prepare for, it will come back to bite you and it will have consequences.

Obviously around this time, everything is going to be a quick turnaround. We have to get comfortable with that and understand that and acknowledge it and just do our best. Coaches do a great job for the scouting report.

But I think we'll be ready for this quick turnaround. Everyone is mentally prepared and mentally focused.

TRISTAN DA SILVA: Yeah, I mean, I'd say obviously we're not going to get a second shot at these guys, so it's crucial that we trust the coaches, trust their scouting report, trust that they've prepared us the right way to step out and guard our matchups the way we're supposed to, guard them as a whole team the way we're supposed to, because obviously we're not going to play them again. So we're not going to figure it out after the game, watching film. We've got to make sure that we're locked in from the get-go.

**Q. How comforting is it to know that you guys play really good defense and that defense travels and when it gets down to it you will defend? How comforting is**



**that feeling?**

J'VONNE HADLEY: Yeah, that's what it comes down to, like you said, especially in March. Just like Tristan said earlier, there's no bad teams, especially where we're at right now. We know that some nights the ball is not going to go in the hoop. We know that, understand that, and at the end of the day it comes down to defense and rebounding. Those are the two things that Coach always emphasizes and we believe in. So we have to go out and do those two things.

**Q. I feel like Eddie kind of changed the game with his energy in the second half. What is it about his background, his story, the way he grew up and what's happened to him in his life, what does that do for you guys, inspiring-wise?**

TRISTAN DA SILVA: Yeah, I mean, it's really inspiring. You really see him give us that much energy, even when you're sitting in the stands, when you're sitting on the bench. Just imagine standing out there on the floor with him, playing with him.

He has that type of characteristic about him where he can just change the game through his energy because he drags us all along with it.

I think especially in close games when he does that, it gives us an extra boost for sure.

KJ SIMPSON: He's a special talent, special person in general. That's why we really wanted him to come here, because we knew what he could bring to this team, not only on the court but off it, as well. Like Tristan said, his energy, that's just who he is as a person. When he goes out there and plays hard for us, it kind of makes you want to play hard, as well, and bring your game up another level.

**Q. A bit of a slow offensive start last night. What's going through your mind today to prepare, to ensure that that doesn't happen again tomorrow against Florida?**

J'VONNE HADLEY: I would just say moving on to the next play, especially for me personally. I haven't had a good offensive couple games these last couple games, and just understanding that it's coming, trusting in yourself, trusting in your work, and just believing that your teammates will help pick up those extra shots that you're missing and stuff like that.

So just believing in yourself and believing in your team that the next play is going to happen, next game, whatever the case may be.

TRISTAN DA SILVA: As J'Vonne said, you've got to trust yourself, trust your teammates, trust the system. I feel like that's when we get the best looks, that's when we play the best, when we share the ball, when we make sure we get the best shot for the team, no matter who's taking it.

I'm not too worried about J'Vonne's offense or Cody's offense or even KJ in the first half. I wasn't really worried about it because I know the amount of work they've put in. I trust them every time they take a shot, every time they make a play.

There's just stretches like that. I had a stretch like that, too, midway through the season this year, and you've just got to keep playing, keep trusting, got to keep playing defense, rebounding, what he's done a great job of last night. I think, yeah, it's going to come.

**Q. KJ, you had the big finish last night and it's not the first time we've seen that. What is it about your mindset or approach that no matter what happens in the first 35 minutes, whatever frustrations you have, that in those last five minutes you're ready to make the plays that your team needs?**

KJ SIMPSON: Yeah, these guys alluded to it. It's just having short-term memory. You're going to have off nights. As much as you don't want to, that's just basketball. Sometimes it's not going to fall for you. It was just one of those nights, unfortunately, but I knew coming down the stretch that my team needed me to step up as a leader, a veteran of this team, and I'm just mentally prepared for that. That's just having short-term memory, understanding that I've got to do other things than just scoring.

Offense isn't all basketball. That's why I went out there, we needed rebounding and I made sure to get rebounds for the team and do whatever is necessary to win. Down the stretch I was able to make a play offensively for my team that we needed, and I'm mentally ready for that.

**Q. You guys have been such a good rebounding team all year long, and last night you're minus 10, give up 19 offensive rebounds. Obviously you guys are well aware you need to address that moving forward, especially against a team like Florida?**

KJ SIMPSON: Yes, most definitely. That was one of the focal points about Florida. Ironically, we poorly rebounded the ball last night, but I think mentally we understand that. Boise State was just a heck of a team. We knew it was going to be a dogfight. We knew how hard they play. They brought the fight to us.

I think going into the Florida game we'll be more mentally prepared for understanding what Florida is good at and taking away those rebounds that they are good at getting.

But yeah, that is definitely a focal point. Obviously we recognize it, and just have to understand it and lock in on it.

**Q. What's the message to Cody? Minutes are up and down, he's been through injuries all year. You still know you have a five-star on the bench. He's young. What's the message to him?**

J'VONNE HADLEY: Everyone goes through it. That's mainly the message. No matter how old you are, junior, sophomore, super senior, seventh year, it doesn't matter. Everyone is going to go through injuries. Everyone is going to battle different things, whether it be personal issues, stuff on the court, off the court. It doesn't matter, everyone is going to go through something that's going to throw off their game a little bit. Everyone is going to experience something.

Just sticking with it and just knowing that -- like I reiterated earlier, your teammates are there for you and they're going to pick up your slack.

TAD BOYLE: Obviously short night. It's going to be a long day today, but really excited to advance in this tournament and feel very fortunate to have survived a very, very talented and hard-nosed Boise State team. That was not an easy game for us. Give up 19 offensive rebounds and come out with a victory means you're doing something right, and last night for us, we guarded our tails off, holding them to 34 percent.

We'd like to have a little bit better offensive performance tomorrow night or tomorrow afternoon against Florida, but we'll see what happens then.

**Q. Obviously you guys have been bringing Cody off the bench since he came back from the most recent injury. What were the conversations like with him? It's not always an easy thing when you bring a player of that caliber off the bench, and how do you keep him prepared when his minutes are down from what he's used to?**

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, Cody and I are going to visit a little today. Again, it was a short night last night, and I'll reiterate to him kind of what I said before. His year has been tough in terms of start, stop, start, stop with his injuries, and unfortunately this one came at a time of the season where we haven't had a lot of quality practices. So he's rehabbing on the side, trying to get back into shape

with an ankle. It's hard to get the cardio that you need to come back once you're out two and a half, three weeks, whatever that was.

We were clicking pretty good. Our chemistry was good. We knew -- he was probably averaging 28 to 30 minutes a game before he went out, and then I knew he probably couldn't play that just from a cardio situation. I said we'll bring you off the bench, and I think he played 19 minutes against Oregon and has done some really good things.

But we haven't had any quality practices, so that's been really unfortunate for him to get those game reps and practices, which are so important.

Julian Hammond is kind of going through the same thing. He's close to being ready, if not ready to play, but we haven't had a practice in two or three days where we've been able to do stuff.

It's hard to play this game when you don't practice, and Cody -- I think the timing of that ankle injury has been difficult.

But I've got confidence in him. I really do. And his teammates have confidence in him. Every game is a different game, and who knows what's going to happen tomorrow. You've just got to be ready when your number is called.

Coming off the bench sometimes is different than starting.

But Cody is a competitor. He's a wonderful young man, and he's a team-first guy, which I appreciate. We're going to keep encouraging him and helping him as best we can.

**Q. Three straight weekends you guys have been on the road in big kind of must-win games, followed by quick turnarounds. I know it happens through the course of a season, but having them all back to back as you've gotten to this point, what have you and your staff focused on about making sure these guys stay ready and stay fresh and stay sharp for whatever is next?**

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, it's interesting going back to the question with Cody and really Javon Ruffin and Bangot and everybody else that's coming off the bench, Assane Diop, you've got guys that need those game reps and they need to keep their cardio in shape, and then you've got guys playing really heavy minutes that may need their rest.

So it's finding that balance and making sure mentally and emotionally these guys are ready to play. It's been a long season. Every one of our guys on the team knows what

they need to do. It's just getting them mentally and emotionally to the point where we're at the best of our ability when we tip it off against Florida.

We feel like we've been in a one-game elimination tournament since the middle of February, so this is nothing new, and here we are again here now towards the end of March.

This is nothing new to us. We'll be ready to go. Our guys are very, very good at digesting game plans and digesting personnel. They don't know anything about Florida yet. We haven't even talked about it with our team. We'll do it when we get back to the hotel because we just bussed over from Dayton here this morning.

They'll be ready to go by tomorrow afternoon.

**Q. Tad, yesterday was a physical game. You had a team that rebounded very well. You've been a great rebounding team all season long. Is that going to be of a premium tomorrow night against this Florida team as you've looked at them?**

TAD BOYLE: Absolutely, yeah. Watching film on that bus ride over this morning and at breakfast this morning, without a doubt. Florida is a very, very good offensive rebounding team. I think they're 15th in the country in offensive rebounding percentage.

We've got our hands full there. They've got great length inside. They've got two really good bigs and one that comes off the bench. Even though they lost their starter in their conference tournament.

But Florida presents some problems at the rim. Without a doubt, we're going to have to have a better showing on the glass tomorrow than we did last night against Boise.

Again, Boise deserves the credit. They were the tougher team on the glass. But we bowed up when we had to and got stops and rebounds when we had to down the stretch. It's just the game wouldn't have been that close if we would have done that all game.

We've got to be physical. These games are very, very physical. It's funny, that conference tournament, the Washington State game in the semis, the Oregon game in the finals and last night against Boise, these have been three back-to-back-to-back physical games, and I don't expect anything different tomorrow.

**Q. Florida is the 18th fastest tempo team in the country. Coach Golden said he wants this game to get up and down a little bit and see if you guys can run**

**with them. What's your plan limiting that part of their game and are you comfortable if this turns into an up-tempo, track meet type of game?**

TAD BOYLE: We're fine playing fast. I love playing fast, without a doubt. What I'd like is they're a very good transition offensive team, so our transition defense will be tested.

The best way to have good transition defense is to take care of the ball on offense and to be efficient on offense, so they're taking the ball out of the net. I'd like them to be running after makes, not after misses. If they're running after misses, we'd better get back and shore things up because they will pitch ahead. They are very good in transition.

But I think we are, too. Obviously we play in Boulder, and we want up-tempo games for sure. I'd love an up-tempo game because we haven't had one of those in a while. Our guys would be ready for that.

But it starts with our offense, taking care of the ball, because it's not like we want to trade baskets with Florida. We want to get stops. I think that's where our defense and rebounding mentality can help us in games like this. We have to go out and do it, go out and execute, but it should be an interesting game.

**Q. Coach, it's been a long and hard road to get here. You said you've pretty much been playing in elimination games since mid-February. What does it mean for you and the team to be here in Indianapolis still dancing?**

TAD BOYLE: It means everything, especially for two of our seniors. Luke O'Brien and Tristan da Silva were in Indianapolis, we played in Hinkle Fieldhouse four years ago against Georgetown and lost to Florida State a couple days later. They started here as freshmen in the NCAA Tournament, now here they are as seniors going out and hopefully advancing in the NCAA Tournament.

It means a lot for those two kids, means a lot for our program. It's kind of coming full circle. It's nice to see everybody here. It's a totally different experience than what those young men had when we were in the bubble, so to speak. It seems like a lifetime ago, but it was really only, what, three years ago, four years ago, whatever it was.

It means a lot to be on this stage and to have our players -- because I know how hard they work. Look, they're not the only ones that work hard. I'm sure the Florida players work hard and players all around the country work hard, but



when they're your players and you see them rewarded for that hard work, it's very heartwarming as a coach.

**Q. What does making it to the tournament with this group of guys mean to you? You've been coaching at Colorado for 14 seasons, coached for 18. What does this group of guys mean to you?**

TAD BOYLE: This group of guys are going to go down in school history. We just won our 25th game last night, and that's a school record at Colorado.

We hit 24 a few times and bumped our heads, so we'd love to make that 25 turn into 26.

But again, a special group of guys.

We added a couple freshmen this year. Obviously Cody is one of them and Assane and Bangot and Eddie Lampkin we got in the transfer portal. But to see the core group of our guys that have been homegrown, they came to Colorado as freshmen and now they're going to be juniors or seniors.

You see Julian Hammond, you see KJ Simpson, Tristan da Silva, Luke O'Brien, to see guys grow up in your program and get better every single year and then you make additions like J'Vonne Hadley and Eddie Lampkin and our freshman class you see them come together and have success, that's what it's all about. That's why you do what you do.

**Q. KJ Simpson had the big finish last night. It's not the first time we've seen him do that late in games. What is it about his mindset, his approach, whatever it is, that whatever happens in the first 35 minutes you know he's going to be there in the last five?**

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, KJ is really special in that regard. He's a supreme competitor. He plays extremely hard. He competes on both sides of the ball. I heard him say here earlier, scoring is not everything. Although he's an important scorer for us.

KJ was uncharacteristically inefficient offensively against Boise State. He's been a tremendously efficient point guard all year long, from an assist-to-turnover ratio, from a shooting percentage, from both three and two. He believes in himself. He knows that I believe in him. He knows that his teammates believe in him. He's got a great family that believes in him. He's got a great support system, and he's an ultimate competitor. When you put all those things together, you've got a guy down the stretch who's not afraid to make plays. Even if he struggled the first 35 minutes of the game. Nobody is perfect. This is a game of

mistakes, and everybody is going to make them. Coaches are going to make them, players are going to make them, but KJ down the stretch, I've got a lot of confidence in him.

**Q. With Javon Ruffin, seeing where he's come throughout the season, obviously not expecting to have him at all and then seeing him play some big minutes for you in the NCAA Tournament game, did you take a moment to process what that must like for a guy like that who's not expecting to play this season and then is playing an NCAA Tournament game?**

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, I think every player that plays, they contribute in one form or fashion. What Javon has brought to this team is an energy. He's been playing with great energy. He's a great ball mover. That ball moves, and he's a threat from the three-point line.

He's been playing very, very well, again, in the practices that we do have, and he's got a great attitude. He's kind of there when you need him, which is very reassuring as a coach.

Last night he gave us some really good minutes and gave us some good energy off the bench, and that's what we need. We need that from everybody.

The old adage don't count the time, make the time count, if every one of our players will adhere to that and just compete to the best of their abilities when they're on the floor, we'll be fine because we do -- this team does have depth, even though I've been riding J'Vonne Hadley and Tristan and KJ pretty heavily, and last night even Eddie and Luke, we really went with that lineup.

But tomorrow could be a totally different game, especially if it's an up-tempo game like we talked about where we're going to need more guys.

**Q. What does it mean to you to have played in the last Pac-12 basketball tournament and then represent the last iteration of the Pac-12 in the NCAA Tournament?**

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, it's a little bittersweet. We're very proud to have spent 13 years in the Pac-12. It's a conference I've grown really fond of, and it's unfortunate that at the end happened the way it did. But again, there's so many things in life you can't control.

We're excited to be going to the Big 12, which is one of the best basketball leagues if not the best basketball league in the country for the last 10 years or so. It's bittersweet to be representing the Pac-12 and seeing that league kind of go away with all the tradition that it has and the great institutions that it has on the West Coast.

We were there for 13 years, and it was the bulk of my career. Colorado my first year we were in the Big 12, and now next year we'll be going back to the Big 12. I'm so old, I played in the Big 8. I hate to date myself there. But we're excited to be going back. I'll be very, very proud to represent the Pac-12 in this tournament.

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