

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**TCU Horned Frogs**

**Jamie Dixon**

**Chuck O'Bannon**

**Emanuel Miller**

**Micah Peavy**

**JaKobe Coles**

Media Conference



**Q. JaKobe, all you guys up there have been together three, four years now. What's been your favorite thing about spending time with this group whether it's on the court or off of it?**

JAKOBE COLES: Man, that's a good question. We spend a lot of time with each other on and off the court. There's so many memories that I could tell you about. But just to be around these guys each and every day and to see us grow from year one to year four has just been amazing. We've had many great memories, so I couldn't just give you within.

But I love these guys. They've been here for me just like I'm there for them, and we're trying to go here and get a win, so that's what we're excited about.

**Q. Xavier, they've got a pretty good big man. How are you going to approach trying to slow him down tomorrow?**

XAVIER CORK: Right now I think we're just going to try to play physical with him. We didn't see a lot of teams making him make like a cross-court pass, so we're going to try to make him do a lot of those. He's been able to make easy passes out the same side.

So we're going to look to make him try to work and make cross-court passes and just make him work more for his buckets that he's getting.

**Q. You all have accomplished something that has not happened in TCU history: Three times in a row now to the tournament. What's going to make this year different and what's going to have to happen to advance?**

CHUCK O'BANNON: Well, you know, staying consistent basically. Like I said before, we put in a lot of work. We've been here before. All five of us, we're veteran guys. We know what it takes. We're just going to have to come together, stay solid for 40 minutes and hope to come out with a win.

MICAH PEAVY: Like he said, we've been here before so

**Q. Chuck, Dixon said he wanted to reward the guys that were defending the basket and giving the most effort in practice. How much does it mean to be back in the starting lineup in March Madness?**

CHUCK O'BANNON: It means a lot. A lot of work has gone into this program over the past four years since I've been here, and I want to end it with a bang, so we're coming out, our last tournament and we're hoping to do the best we can.

**Q. I man, how is the ankle?**

EMANUEL MILLER: It's been better. The past two days I've been in practice, getting loose, getting a feel for it. Before then I was just getting treatment, recovery, trying to get back to 100 percent.

It felt good today in practice, so I'll be out there tomorrow.

**Q. Micah, how much do you think you've grown this year both as a defender and with your offensive game?**

MICAH PEAVY: Talking about the offense, I feel like my confidence from last year to this year is a lot better. I think my teammates could say the same. It comes from my coaches and my teammates just constantly telling me to shoot the ball or just to be confident in myself, so yeah, I think.



we're just going to take -- we've lost in the same round every year, so we're trying to get past that, and we know what we've got to do so we're going to take every game one at a time and hopefully we get to next weekend.

**Q. You guys, your starting lineup compared to Utah State's starting lineup has an overall height advantage. How are you going to use that physical advantage to win in tomorrow's game?**

XAVIER CORK: I would say that we're going to use it mainly defensively. I would say that over the past couple practices we've been making a big emphasis on defense and using our length as an advantage, because we have a very lengthy team and I think we can bother people just off of pure athleticism and length.

EMANUEL MILLER: We're known for our offensive rebounding, our height advantage plays a factor into that. Our toughness plays a factor into that. We know they're a hungry, gritty team, and they want to win, but we also want to win. So dominating the glass every possession is going to be key.

**Q. Chuck, have you talked to your uncle about the video game, the NCAA game coming back?**

CHUCK O'BANNON: No, not coming back, but we used to talk about it back when it first started a few years ago, but not recently.

**Q. Out of curiosity I think a lot of people have asked football players about the game coming back. There's not been a lot of talk about the basketball game. How much chatter is there amongst you guys who currently play now about having an NCAA basketball game? How cool would that be?**

CHUCK O'BANNON: I think it would be pretty cool but I haven't heard anything about it. A lot of us haven't even talked about it. Trevian Tennyson on our team, the shooter, he really likes the NCAA game. He still plays to this day. He tells me about it all the time.

**Q. Eman, we know Avery and Trey will be important for tomorrow. How are they feeling? They've been in a little bit of a slump. How do you think guys have been encouraging them for a breakout performance tomorrow?**

EMANUEL MILLER: They're great players. Jameer is new to the tournament, but at the same time, they're experienced within their age. They've been in this game for a long time. They've seen a lot of defenses. They've seen a lot of guards. They've matched up against a lot of

guards. They're special players.

It's just the practices they've been playing really well, taking care of the ball, getting off the ball extremely well, and just being the great point guards they are.

We instill confidence in them because we know they're capable players that can go off at any second.

**Q. How much did you know about Utah State before you saw the pairing come up on Sunday? Did you know anything about them?**

XAVIER CORK: Starting a couple weeks ago is probably the first time we've really heard of Utah State. We really looked into a lot of their scheme and how they play and just had to try to learn from the bottom.

JAKOBE COLES: A couple days ago we didn't know too much about them but just over the last couple days they've got a really good big man, they've got a really solid point guard that's going to take care of the ball. But ultimately it's just up to us. We can talk about them all day, but it's up to us what we should do and how we prepare and we've just got to go in, focus and execute on each play down the stretch, and we're going to come out with the win with that.

**Q. Last time TCU played USU was in 1982. In the series they're 2-0 against you guys. How are you going to change that?**

EMANUEL MILLER: Win it. Go out there and win. That's the only way we can change it. They're 2-0, that's something new that I just learned and that just adds fuel to the fire, because since we've been here we've been wanting to do something special. So why not add this to the books?

**Q. You guys are an elite offensive rebounding team. In this day and age of college basketball, a lot of people are conceding offensive rebounds to get back defensively, but does it show Coach Dixon's belief in your athleticism that you can still get back and defend in transition and still offensive rebound because you guys have certainly shown the ability to offensive rebound at a high level?**

CHUCK O'BANNON: Yeah, one of Coach Dixon's emphasis is on offensive rebounding. He likes tough guys, tough teams. As long as Coach Dixon has been around, he's had a tough team, and he always wants to instill that in us. Even if we're playing tough, he wants to call us soft every once in a while just to get us going. At the end of the day, that's what we want to make an emphasis with is offensive rebounding.

JAMIE DIXON: Honored to be here. This is the practice floor, huh? Is this the practice gym?

**Q. This is for the Fever.**

JAMIE DIXON: Honored to be here. I was looking at it, and I've coached in a lot of tournaments as a head coach and had never been to Indianapolis as a site, so excited to be here. I've been here, obviously, a lot with Final Fours, recruiting, NABC meetings, NCAA meetings, different things. Love the city, love the town. It's an honor to be here.

Obviously the history and the basketball and all the things that come here.

Best trip I ever made was to see Desmond Bane play when we were recruiting him, so that worked out well. Hopefully this will compare to that.

We had practice earlier. It was a good practice. We'll get some shooting in here today, but I liked what we did. Short, brief, to the point, and get our shooting in at the arena. Excited to be here.

Feel like we've had some injuries throughout. Maybe at this point now maybe a little bit healthy. I think we're better. As the year has gone on, we didn't get quite get to where I wanted to get to offensively and defensively, but making some strides in these last couple weeks, not so much with the wins and losses because our league is so challenging but in some of the things we're doing I think we got better, defensively especially.

Looking forward to tomorrow. I know there's a lot of games going on. I just saw Duquesne won, so very happy for Keith Dambrot, but it is a Big 12 team that they beat. What a story about Keith, though, Coach Dambrot. He's a dear friend.

**Q. The guys seemed like they were in a really good mood, joking and laughing. What's been the energy around the team?**

JAMIE DIXON: Loose is not a problem for us. I'd say loose and focused is what I'd like to get to. But I've said all along, sometimes I fault myself for the summer and the fall and -- we're loose. We're a loose team. I encouraged it all summer long, all fall. It's kind of who we are, and we've got a very outgoing group, a lot of personality. They laugh at everything. I don't know if that comes to wins and losses. I want loose, but I think execution-wise, we come up short in some areas, like every team, and sometimes I wonder if we're too loose.

But yeah, doesn't shock me. All five of those guys are very outgoing. But at the same time with basketball, all we talk about is winning and losing, but it's a very outgoing, engaging group, those five guys that we had out here and really the whole group, on campus, involved, classes, other sports, walking around campus, any events that we do, whether it be Christmas tree lighting or Halloween, the boo party that we do on campus. They're just an outgoing group.

I want them focused at the same time, but you know what, they're a great representative, as I'm sure they've been here for you guys in talking, they're outgoing, they're engaging, they represent TCU well, and I'm proud that they're playing and representing us here tomorrow and throughout this year.

**Q. Sunday night when we left you said you were going to start watching film on Utah State. You hadn't seen much. What have you learned in the last few days?**

JAMIE DIXON: I had seen them a little bit, but just their big guy, how good he is. I'd call him great.

But looked at their history, how they got their guys, and I know they had brought in -- they say they had no scoring returning but he brought the players with him from his alma mater Montana State. That was the first thing he said to me when I saw him a month or two ago, I had no scoring, and then as I looked it up, you brought the players with you from your alma mater. So I'll give him an asterisk on that one.

But funny that we're playing Montana State because we hung out -- I was in California to see some kids at Christmas, day before Christmas or whatever that day is we can go out after the dead period there and I was recruiting, so we hung out and watched some games together, so I've known him for a long time.

Very balanced, they're old at the guard spots. I think there's two sixth-year guys that have played all kinds of minutes, like five years of basketball, the ball in their hands in Martinez and Brown, so that's what I learned.

**Q. That big guy, Great Osbor, well you have a big guy, too, Ernest Udeh junior, but Osbor scores more than he does. How are you going to use Udeh's physical advantage to stop him from scoring?**

JAMIE DIXON: Well, I talked earlier about us defensively getting better, and this is kind of the type of opponent that we need to be better for. Hopefully we're there. I don't know. We've gotten hurt by some big guys throughout this

season, but hopefully we've made some improvements.

Ernest was new, hadn't played a minute, hardly any minutes last year at Kansas, new as far as getting on the floor. Hadn't played a lot really in AAU as I looked at it. A lot of new stuff there.

Xavier was our returning guy, Essam was new. We kind of do it by committee, and JaKobe can play that spot, too, and then we rely on our team defense, as well, when it comes to anybody that's a high scorer like he is.

But he's amazingly efficient. There is no question what their goal is is to get him the ball. They do a tremendous job of getting the ball inside to him, and he does a tremendous job working.

He really gets out in transition, which you don't expect to see, but a big guy, they get him the ball in transition.

We've talked about it. We've worked on it. We've obviously had some time, three days, once we found out. The interesting thing was Sunday you find out and you're all excited, you want to play right away, and then we don't play until Friday at midnight I guess it is. But we're used to that. The last two years in the tournament we've been out west but we've played like the last game of the NCAA Tournament.

I didn't think we'd have that case being in the east, but I think we're pretty close to it -- five minutes away, I guess, from the last game.

I've joked that Great, got to live up to that name. He's done a good job of that.

**Q. You mentioned the experience of Brown. I think he was Defensive Player of the Year in the Big Sky last year. What stands out about him when you see him on film?**

JAMIE DIXON: And then he must have coached him at North Ridge, too; is that right? No, he didn't coach him? Recruited him? There you go.

Didn't have any guys, had some -- yeah, so the more you watch him, the more you appreciate how good he is. That's what I saw from watching film. Doesn't make mistakes, high assist-to-turnover ratio, makes open shots, tough, physical, and he looks old. You knew he was old by watching him -- how he plays, how he looks.

Those are all compliments. He's a good player.

**Q. Coach, this is more of a philosophical question, but**

**I asked one of your players about offensive rebounds and you guys are elite and traditionally as a coach you have good offensive rebounding teams and they said, Coach demands toughness. How often when you're recruiting players that they're often in high school the best players on their team and have such a huge talent advantage to identify toughness, are they born with that or can you coach that?**

JAMIE DIXON: A combination of both. I like to recruit tough guys and make them a little tougher and hopefully our other players make them a little tougher by the older guys taking the younger guys under their wing.

But it's kind of changed over the years. I've been doing it a while, so we have a lot of transfers now.

Yeah, it's both. I think you need physical and strong guys, then you define what toughness is. I think toughness can be in a lot of forms. Offensive rebounding is one, mental toughness, fighting through and executing, late clock situations, late game situations.

We speak in terms of toughness, both mentally and physically. That's what we want.

So we recruit it and we try to develop it, and hopefully when we were going back and it was -- I had no transfers in 17 years at Pitt, the seniors did the teaching. The juniors did the teaching. Now it's kind of -- falls on us a little bit more, I think.

**Q. I asked Eman earlier how his ankle was doing. He said it was doing good and that he had a good practice. Are you seeing the same thing?**

JAMIE DIXON: I thought today was good, yeah. I think in the tournament we had the game, the Oklahoma game, and then the next game, the next night, and he obviously turned it early, and I think he played a lot of minutes the night before, and we just -- we weren't -- things didn't go our way.

Yeah, certainly we had guys limping around in that game, there's no question about it. Ernest and him were. I think both are better, but we'll see out there. Ernest is -- I haven't quite figured out his gait, his limp yet, as to what it infers.

**Q. How are you guys going to approach trying to get Trey back into the groove he was in back in January, early February part of the season?**

JAMIE DIXON: Yeah, he's a shooter, obviously. He was new, so I think he's probably out on the scouting reports a



little bit more.

He's just got to recognize if you're guarded differently or harder that you can't hunt shots. Probably defending would be probably the best thing that he can do, and then that leads -- get across to him, we need him to defend first and then the minutes will come and then the shots will come.

I think execution of our plays, our sets that we do run, we run a few for him, but the main thing is he doesn't take -- maybe he doesn't get as many shots, but his percentage can't drop, and we've seen its declined a bit in fewer attempts, so it's not significant.

But we have great -- if he has an open shot, we have great faith it's going in, so that hasn't changed. I think he needs to just -- the shot selection needs to be good, and he'll make open shots. There's no question in my mind.

They've made him dribble a little bit more. Dribbling should be a pass opportunity for him, and that's what I think he's got to recognize, too, at the same time. But we've got to get him shots, transition. If we don't get in transition, there's certainly going to be less attempts for him. Good attempts I should say.

**Q. You mentioned Utah State has some experience but they haven't really played together as a team, all of them coming in at all once.**

JAMIE DIXON: Yeah, when we brought five new guys, we brought all new guards that I had never coached before. I hate to jump all in on the all new guys thing. But yeah, they're good. I don't know how the hell us you want to define it. They're good because they're old. They're good because a couple of them played together at Montana State. They good because they're well-coached. They're good because it's a good balance. They've got inside, they've got outside. They're good because Utah State is always good. They win home games. They're good.

Hopefully I'm getting that message across. They're good. We know that, and they're really good offensively, and they have a great balance between the inside and out. We're all bringing in new guys.

We're in a new world. Has anybody ever brought two players from their alma mater to their place? It's a new world. You've got a sixth-year guy. We've got a sixth-year guy, Emanuel Miller. We have guys that came to us as a 5 man and now he's a 3-4-2. He's become that kind of player. There's just a whole new world of how things have come about.

But we've embraced it, and like I said with this group, yeah, Steve has talking about how they're outgoing and fun and look like they've been playing together for four years, but they haven't been. They're outgoing personalities. Kids are kids.

Maybe this is more than you want, but I think just kids are -- everybody is talking about all these changes and different things, but when you get them on the floor, it really is the same thing, and everybody writes about they go to this many schools, it doesn't mean he's a bad kid or had problems somewhere else or what. It's just the world that they've grown up in, and they played at different teams, AAU teams, different high schools, and now they're going to play at different colleges. Doesn't mean what it used to mean, I guess, or how other people used to define it.

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