

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

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Utah State Aggies

Danny Sprinkle

Great Osbor

Darius Brown II

Ian Martinez

Media Conference

Q. Great, they have a lot of height on their team. Most of their starters are about 6'8", 6'7", 6'7" and 6'11". How are you going to stop their physical advantage from stopping you to score?

GREAT OSOBOR: I feel like we just have to keep playing in our system, to be honest. I don't have to do nothing special. I just have to be who I've been all season and rely that the ball will find the right person to score, whether that's me or whoever it is. I'm going to do my part, and then I trust everyone else to do their part.

Q. TCU is a team that has played several years together, and they've also been to the tournament several times. Do you feel like the experience of either team will play a factor in this?

IAN MARTINEZ: I mean, I think it does play a little bit of a role, but taking into account what we've done this year with some new guys and the mentality that we've had since the first day, I don't think it'll be that big of a difference. I don't think that's going to be the main factor. It will be just us playing our game, just what Great said.

If everybody does what they have to do, we'll be more than fine.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, I don't think it'll be that much. At the end of the day it's just a basketball game, no matter where it is or what type of setting, NCAA Tournament or regular season game, it's a basketball game, and the experience will come in handy, maybe it will, maybe it



won't. We'll never know. It's just one game.

I think we just do what we've been doing all season, and we'll be fine.

Q. You've had a few days to study and get ready for TCU. What can you tell us about some of the challenges and some of the things you're going to be facing against TCU?

GREAT OSOBOR: TCU, obviously it speaks for itself, they're in the Big 12. They made it to the tournament from the Big 12, so they're a really good team. They lead the country in transition points, so we know, we've made that a focus over the past two, three days, like we need to get back on defense because you don't want to gift any team easy lay-ups in transition. Obviously they're a physical team.

Coach has stressed over the past week we need to come match the intensity, which we feel like we didn't do the best job against San Diego State the last game, so I trust my team that this game we're going to come back and bounce back.

IAN MARTINEZ: Yeah, like Great mentioned, physicality is going to be a big point in this game. If we come in with the right mentality and just try to give out the first punch, then we'll be fine. That's the main focal point.

Q. I know length got mentioned as far as TCU's height and length. They seem to use that in getting steals and offensive rebounds. How much emphasis have you put on that in terms of making sure you guys don't have those turnovers into steals and making sure you're getting defensive rebounds?

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, that's been a real focus but I think what's been really good about this is Mountain West has prepared us for this. We've seen so many different types of teams throughout the whole year, teams that play really fast, teams that play really aggressive on defense and teams that are just solid on defense and love crashing the glass. All those teams in the Mountain West prepared us for a game like this.



Obviously that was the focus, but it shouldn't be anything new to us, if we just focus on what we're supposed to focus on and follow the scout and all those things, I think we'll be fine.

IAN MARTINEZ: Like Darius just mentioned, a lot of those things prepared us, like San Diego State, we seen that they crashed the glass really hard, and we didn't do a great job as of last game, so that's also a big aspect that we've been focusing on lately, and not letting it happen again, and it has a lot to do with the physicality that we want to come in and play in.

Q. Darius and Great, what has it been like going through and going to go through March Madness again with Coach Sprinkle? What has it meant to get back here with him and try to make a run?

DARIUS BROWN II: I mean, he's been huge throughout this whole year, just that steady factor of especially coming over with a new team, not knowing anybody but knowing the whole staff -- not just Sprinkle but the whole staff and them being a huge part of familiarity, at least for me, and then Great being the only player.

But I think that this is -- it brings a sense of comfort being in the tournament again with the same coach. It brings a sense of comfort because it allows me to kind of still be me. I don't feel like I have to be any different, and I think that'll go a long way and it'll probably carry over in the game unconsciously. Not something you think about. But it's been really huge.

GREAT OSOBOR: Obviously to be here -- this is my third time in the NCAA Tournament thankfully, and the past two times I came with Montana State, it was a blessing just being able to go with a good program like Montana State. It was big time.

I'm just grateful that me and DB were able to come here and continue a tradition -- Utah State is an amazing school and they've been going to the NCAA Tournament, so just the fact that we're able to come here with 13 new guys and carry on the tradition that the Aggies have of going to the dance, it just speaks volumes of like everyone bought in from the staff to the players, and it just speaks volumes for what Coach Sprink decided to bring to Logan, Utah.

Q. Great, TCU players mentioned that they didn't believe anybody had forced you to make cross-court passes out of the post this season. They felt like that was a point of emphasis that they were going to try to force you to pass cross-court instead of the same offensive side. What are your thoughts on that and do

you feel comfortable doing that if need be?

GREAT OSOBOR: I mean, I think I'm pretty confident in my passing abilities. Whoever is open, I think I'm going to find them. We'll just have to see in the game.

Q. I know you're an 8 seed, so seeding-wise you'll be favorites, but a lot of people are -- obviously TCU is the point favorite from Vegas. Have you taken it upon yourselves to have that little chip on your shoulder continuing into the NCAA Tournament?

IAN MARTINEZ: Yeah, personally I do like that. Since the beginning of the year, people have always been doubting us, and we're just trying to block out the outside noise. It don't really matter what nobody said. They're going to end up switching up anyways. I feel like, yeah, it gives me that kind of -- I want to go get it more, more than I wanted it before.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, I personally love it. We've been doubted all year, coming from the no returning points and picked ninth in the Mountain West and winning an outright title, and now it's no different. They're coming out of the Big 12 conference.

We knew from as soon as we saw who we're playing that we weren't going to be favored in this game. It really doesn't surprise us at all. We'll be ready.

Q. Ian, what happened to your eye?

IAN MARTINEZ: I think it was Fresno State in the first round in the tournament. I didn't even see it coming to the honest. I crashed the board, I didn't get the ball. I was running back. Next thing I know I just got hit in the face and I got called for a foul.

So yeah, I don't even know what happened. But I'm trying to cover it up because it don't look good. It don't look good. This looks better than when I have it off.

Q. Obviously you've only been in Indianapolis for a short period of time, but what can you say about this city and what it means to be playing here in a city that's termed "basketball country"?

GREAT OSOBOR: Obviously we just got here yesterday, but even just going to the different practice gyms and seeing all the different support that basketball has here -- we went to a high school gym yesterday and that was really awesome to see how basketball is just being developed from the grass-roots level up to the other universities we just practiced in before we got here. It just speaks volumes of the basketball level in Indianapolis, and

it's really impressive to see.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, like what Great said, we just got here, but the city has been great, and the skylines are really nice. You can stay warm downtown. That was nice. We walked somewhere for dinner, got to stay inside the whole time.

Yeah, kind of like what Great said, being at just the different schools, it seems like there's a rich culture here as far as basketball in the state of Indiana, and I've heard that, and now it's really cool to see it.

Q. This is obviously playing on a big stage. How do you guys stay focused and ambitious by also taking in the media and the lights and the fans? In what ways do you absorb it but also stay focused on what's ahead?

IAN MARTINEZ: I just kind of like roll with it. I don't pay too much attention to it, like all the social media and things like that. Sometimes it can get to your head. But I try to just stay away from it. I just came here to play basketball, and I want to enjoy that, have fun.

There's not many Costa Ricans playing at this level, so for me personally, I just try to look at the good stuff and not try to stress too much about it, just have fun with basketball.

Q. For all of the student-athletes, just what it was like to go through the Mountain West and your takeaways from the conference itself. I know you said it doesn't always get the respect you think it deserves but the level of talent and competition that you think can prepare you for the NCAA Tournament.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, I think the Mountain West is obviously one of the top conferences in the country. I think we showed it night in and night out just playing against each other, every single team from top to bottom, just really good teams, and it was hard, physical, and it was just -- I don't know about how many people watch those late-night games. I know those games got pretty late, especially in the East Coast out here. We had a couple late starts. We had a home game that started at like 9:15 one time.

But I know that it's a really great conference, and hopefully the whole conference has a great showing. We're rooting for all the teams in the Mountain West to keep advancing.

IAN MARTINEZ: Coming from the Big Ten, I thought the physicality was up there on par with the Big Ten, so definitely some great basketball played there. There are a lot of good teams and they have different play styles, like

New Mexico, we see they can play really fast; we see Boise, they have a lot of size, they're big; a lot of teams, Colorado State, really good offensively.

Yeah, I think all those good teams prepared us to come in and play some good basketball here in March Madness.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Obviously an honor to play in the NCAA Tournament. Our program is becoming accustomed to it, which is a good thing. We're happy to represent the Mountain West, which we think we had one of the best seasons ever in our conference's history and we hope we represent pretty well.

But obviously we've got a TCU squad that I've known Coach Dixon for a long time, I know how his teams play, I know how tough and grimy and gritty they are and we're know we are going to have to play our best at 9:55. But I think the guys are up to it.

I think the Mountain West schedule has prepared us for the physicality that this game is going to entail, and anytime you play in the NCAA Tournament, you can't take two minutes off. It can't take you two to three minutes to start the game, to be aggressive. You've got to get all of your anxiety and nerves out of the way and when that ball gets thrown up on the tip, you've got to be ready to rock and roll, which I expect our guys to be tomorrow.

Q. You mentioned you needed to start off quick. The last couple of games that didn't seem to be the problem. You started fast then faded a little bit as the game went on. Is that kind of the thing you're going to try and address in this one, where you start fast and keep going?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah. Hopefully. Yeah, you have to start fast and you've got to stay fast. Obviously there's going to be lulls throughout the game. It's a game of runs. But we have to limit those runs, and some of those runs that occurred to us, as you mentioned, in the Mountain West tournament, were due to foul trouble, and a lot of it was our fault, whether it was undisciplined plays or undisciplined fouls. We have to have certain guys on the court and they know that and we have to play smarter and play better so we don't have those lulls.

Q. Mason didn't play against Fresno State, had less time, decreased time against San Diego State. What's the status of his injury right now?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, he's been practicing all week, and he looks as good as he's been here in the last two, two and a half weeks. A lot of his decreased time against San Diego State was because of foul trouble, and he's one of

those guys that we need on the court. But he looks good right now.

Q. Just talk a little bit about TCU. Obviously you know Coach Dixon really well. He kind of joked a little bit about you guys may not have returned any points but you brought some guys with you that you knew about. Just talk about your relationship with Coach Dixon.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, when I was a player at Montana State, he was an assistant for Ben Howland at Northern Arizona. Kind of had that relationship since then, and obviously I've followed his career. He's been kind of one of those guys I looked up to, just from being in the Big Sky and knowing him and Coach Howland when they went to Pittsburgh and obviously had tremendous success.

Then watching what he's done at Pittsburgh and TCU and how he's kind of created his own identity and just become one of the best coaches in the country. He's had tons of success.

I love how he coaches and how his teams play, and you can kind of tell, they take on his demeanor. They're a tough, physical team, no-nonsense, disciplined, and he's always been kind of one of those guys I've always watched.

Q. What did you think about Montana State carrying on your legacy three-peating?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Super proud of Coach Logie and the players. As somebody that wore that Bobcat jersey, I take an immense pride in that, and it's awesome to watch them on TV last night and everybody talking about Montana State.

I'm not here without Montana State, and I've been -- I'll say that. I'm not. They raised me, and I'm here today because of that.

I take an immense amount of pride in Montana State university. It was awesome to watch. Me and Great and Darius and Xavier, we watch all their games, whether we're in the hotel or conference room or whatnot, and that'll never go away.

Q. TCU uses their length, gets a lot of steals and grabs offensive rebounds. How much focus do you have to put on those things, not having turnovers and not giving up offensive rebounds?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, that's kind of the key to the game. Our offense has to be great. Our ball movement, our body movement has to be on point because they're

one of the best transition offensive teams in the country. They're averaging almost 18, 19 points a game in transition.

If you let them start getting going with that off silly turnovers and live ball turnovers, it's a recipe for disaster.

Then once you get them set in their offense, you have to rebound. They're one of the best offensive rebounding teams in the country, and so really the game is going to start tomorrow, when they shoot it and that ball goes up on the rim, we have to have some contact box-outs, and you have to go get it.

Q. Is there any team in the Mountain West that are comparable to TCU? Is there somebody you can use as an example?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Probably more in the San Diego State and UNLV type mold, especially from a defensive standpoint, from a length and athleticism standpoint. I'd say probably those two teams.

Q. I wanted to ask, you've made it to the first round of the NCAA Tournament the last few years that you made it here with your team today. What does it mean to make it here with this team after being in this exact same situation last year and your former team not making it to this point?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, it's been tremendous for the team, the staff, the university, the athletic department because not even a year ago, 11 months ago when I got hired, we didn't even know who was on the roster. We had three players and two of them redshirted last year.

For this group to come together in a short amount of time and to do it in the Mountain West conference that was as good as it was this year, and to have 27 wins is an incredible accomplishment for our players. They're the ones that make the shots and get the rebounds and are practicing and lifting weights. For them to come together and have the chemistry that they do, because everybody is selfish to an extent, and when you bring in 13 brand new guys, everybody is trying to show how good they are, but they really bought into each other's success, and that's why we've had the season that we've had.

Q. Coach, last two seasons you've faced Big 12 opponents in the first round of the tournament, Texas Tech and then K-State. How do you think two facing Big 12 opponents can prepare you for this year and what do you have to speak on as the conference as a whole?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, I don't know why the selection committee keeps giving me Big 12 teams. It's for me and my staff. We've been to the last two NCAA tournaments. This team is totally different. They don't know.

But the one thing I know going through the Texas Tech and Kansas State game is like the size and length and physicality, it's different than what we were accustomed to at Montana State.

Now, we see some of that more in the Mountain West, so I don't think -- it's not going to be quick as big of an adjustment for our group right now because they've played against the San Diego States, UNLVs, the Boises, I can go down the list of our entire conference. I think we're more built for it right now, and hopefully that shows tomorrow night.

Q. Making it this far is obviously an honor in college basketball. How do you keep your guys focused but also let them enjoy the moment?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, I think this group has had a business-type mindset all year. We've been here and we were picked ninth. We've been here and every game is a trap game. Everybody has been waiting for this group to fall off, and we haven't.

Keeping our guys focused isn't going to be that big a deal. They're hungry. They're ready. Great and Darius obviously played in the tournament last year. Great has played in it the last two years. Ian Martinez played in it at Maryland. Mason and Issac, they were redshirts but they came and saw the festivities last year when Utah State went. Hopefully that experience will help us tomorrow night.

But I just see the look in our guys' eyes. They're not wide-eyed of everything going on right now like maybe my first year at Montana State we were a little bit like that.

Q. Last time USU played TCU was in 1982 and the series is 2-0 in favor of Utah State. What do you think of that, and how are you going to keep that legacy going?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Well, that's awesome. That's some good karma for us. Hopefully we can make it 3-0 tomorrow night. Since 1982? You said that was the last meeting? That's a long time ago. Yeah, hopefully we can start up a new streak.

Q. What does this group of guys mean to you? You've coached a lot of great players, and of course you have Darius and Great coming back playing for you. But

with this new team, what do they mean to you outside of the X's and O's?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, they mean a lot. I know that's kind of a general statement, but the care factor that this team has and some of the shared experiences that we've gone through, from the summer -- like it was ugly. You would have never thought we'd be an NCAA Tournament team. If you watched us practice in the summer or the fall, I would have told you you're crazy if you said we were going to win 27 games and be in the tournament, to be honest.

But the care that they have for each other, the care they have for wearing that Utah State jersey, for them having faith in our coaching staff and letting us coach them hard and believing in us -- even when things weren't going well in the summer or the fall, this group listens to everything we said, and they did it.

I'm glad they're being rewarded for it because a lot of teams you don't get the reward of playing in the NCAA Tournament. We know we're very fortunate to be here. But this team has been -- it's been special. To have 13 brand new people and to do what we've done this year -- I've said it before, in the landscape of college basketball nowadays with NIL and transfer portal, I don't know if what we've done this year and winning an outright Mountain West championship with 13 brand new players and not having resources that a lot of schools have for recruiting, I don't know if that'll ever be done again. I'm sure at some point it will, but when you're at the Power Five and Power Six level, it's hard because you have to get really, really good players, and we were very fortunate getting some of those guys in the portal.

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