

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Utah State vs Purdue

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Utah State Aggies

Danny Sprinkle

Great Osobor

Isaac Johnson

Darius Brown II

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Darius, you tied the single-season assist record at Utah State last night. What does that accomplishment mean for you, being able to do that?

DARIUS BROWN II: Well, it's great. It's great to accomplish something like that and assists is probably the biggest thing that you cannot do without your teammates. They're the ones that make the shots for me. I just do my best to get them the ball in the right position. It's even more wonderful to win while doing it, so it's a wonderful accomplishment.

Q. Isaac, how do you stop Zach Edey?

ISAAC JOHNSON: Sometimes you can't. But I think what we can do is stop the rest of the team from doing some of the things that they do. I guess you can stop 'em down low. Not much you can do when it's up high. So we'll do our best.

Q. Isaac, you mentioned last night that you were thinking back to the high school game that you had against Matt. I'm curious what you remember from that game and if there's anything that you learned during that game that you can use tomorrow.

ISAAC JOHNSON: Pretty much all my energy just went into defense. It was not my best offensive game of the year because all of my energy went into defense. So if



that's what it takes again for us to have other people step up, we have a team of guys that can step up. So we'll just do our best on that end.

Q. Isaac, you mentioned stopping everybody else besides Edey. I guess what are the keys to doing that, stopping everybody else, if you can't stop Zach?

GREAT OSOBOR: Obviously, it speaks for itself. Purdue's a really good team. We are going to have our hands full, but I feel like we just need to be aggressive in everything we do tomorrow, whether that's trying to deny the post or when we do deny the post, don't let it get back out. So we'll try to do our best in making sure that we can limit what we can control, control what we can control, and everything will take care of itself.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, Purdue's a really good team and they were No. 1 in the country for the majority of the year for a reason. I think the plan is just be aggressive. You have to be aggressive with everything and you have to do all the little things. The 50/50 balls, we have to get all of those. We have to do our best to keep them off the boards and they usually out-rebound everybody they play. So we have to try to attack the boards and that's the best way to go about it.

Q. Zach Edey drew a lot of fouls in yesterday's game. He went to the line 17 times. The entire team only had six fouls the entire game. What are you guys going to do to keep him from going to the line and then also try to draw fouls on him as well?

ISAAC JOHNSON: I think just wall up as best as you can. I think he's No. 1 in the country for fouls drawn, so obviously that's a big part of their game plan, and it's a big part of why he's been so successful. So we just have to be as physical as we can, chest out, and do what we can without fouling. Don't swipe down, even though the temptation is there because it's so high up, and just be smart.

GREAT OSOBOR: Obviously, it's about being the aggressor. Coach Sprinkle always talks about the aggressor always wins. So if we take it to them and



physically try and set the tone without being the reactor, I think you give yourself a chance and in games like this, it's about giving yourself a chance to be successful.

Q. When you found out Coach Sprinkle was changing jobs, what was the process like for you guys to decide you wanted to go with him to Utah State?

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, there was a lot of anger at first. No, it was more of just like -- it was a process. I'll say that. It was a process, especially individually for me, as far as it's my last season, so I wanted to be in the best spot comfortable for me as far as playing-wise, opportunity, and a place to win. Obviously, felt that we had a really good, strong team coming back at Montana State, so it was obviously hard to see that. But going through the transfer portal and going through all the options, the best thing was for me to stay with not just Sprinkle, but the whole staff. The whole staff came with him. So it ended up coming down to an easy decision, but there was a process.

GREAT OSOBOR: Obviously, as he said, when we found out where it was, we was mad. Me and D, we're like, no, we're not leaving Montana State. We're staying. But then after the initial anger calmed down, it was really about assessing our best options. I spoke to my parents, I spoke to other people around me. It took a lot for me to leave Montana State because it's a great program, great place. But obviously, like, I had to find the right fit and after evaluating everything, seeing the love that Logan has for the Utah State Aggies, seeing how the HURD, the Spectrum, hearing about it and doing our homework, I was like, I need to play there. Like, not many people get to put that Utah State jersey on. It's been a blessing for me to be here and I appreciate the love they've shown me so far.

Q. Isaac, you referenced it last night. You redshirted last year it sounded like for mental health reasons and really kind of got things back together. Talk a little bit about that process, what that was like, and what you learned and just talk to us a little bit about that whole experience and what you gained from it.

ISAAC JOHNSON: Sure. I haven't been shy to share kind of what's been going on when people have asked. So I think coming home off my mission -- I was a missionary for two years in Ohio for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and coming back into the world of basketball, let alone college basketball, was a completely different change, especially at the University of the Oregon. I think the transfer, for me, I wanted to come back to Utah. It's just a community with a lot of people that I relate more to. I think through COVID and through a very difficult freshman year for me, I just was down in the dumps a little bit. So I was struggling with some depression and I

wanted to love basketball again, but I didn't.

So I took a step back from it to learn how to love the game again without the pressure around it. I think it was probably one of the best things that I ever did. I was able to talk to counselors and get help with mental health and, along with Coach Odom and his staff, figure out how to love basketball again, and then with Coach Sprinkle and this staff and this team, we've been able to see success through it and I'm very grateful that I did.

Q. With the game being so late last night, have you guys had much time to maybe enjoy -- and then you have to hurry and get ready for Purdue, but have you had much time to enjoy doing something that no team at Utah State has done in such a long time?

DARIUS BROWN II: Like, last night, I didn't get to sleep much, just the adrenaline. The game ended at 1:00 a.m., so got back to the hotel, showered, everything, still couldn't like go to sleep. I didn't really sleep until like 4 a.m. I think there was enough time to enjoy it for the moment, for the time being in the morning, and then obviously, you have to turn the page a little bit earlier, going through all the film on Purdue. But I think we had enough time to enjoy it. And it's really fun because obviously nobody, not one person on this team, has advanced in the tournament, let alone only a couple people have played in it. So it was great to celebrate it all together.

Q. Darius, Braden Smith is basically your counterpart for Purdue. He got about 10 assists in yesterday's game. What is your's and Danny's strategy for stopping him from being a facilitator on the offensive side, and then for you on defense, to, like -- or, for you on offense to also be a facilitator on your end?

DARIUS BROWN II: Oh, yeah, it's funny because, looking at it, we do a lot of things similar, and coaches said we're actually very similar in like play styles and things like that, so that is kind of interesting. I guess be aggressive. He's a really good player, so I guess switch up my styles, whether it's be aggressive, a little fall back, go over, go under, blue, green, like a lot of different coverages, and just kind of go with the flow of the game. If he's hitting shots, have to be a little more aggressive. If he's not, then maybe go under, have to play, read his eyes and watch how he's deciding to pass. It will really be -- the coaches give me a lot of freedom to kind of decide how I want to play people, so I guess within the flow of the game it will reveal itself on what I decide to do to make him uncomfortable.

Q. We talked a lot about you guys defending Purdue, but what are some chinks in Purdue's armor that you



see that you could potentially exploit?

DARIUS BROWN II: Hmm, do I talk about that right now? (Laughing). We shall be aggressive. We'll just go with that. Don't want to have them looking at this. We'll just say we'll just be aggressive and do what we have done all year, and that's nobody has to be anything special, just be the team that we've been and everybody do their job and we'll be fine.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Obviously, a tremendous win last night, but it's over. We survived and advanced, and so now it's on to Purdue. We know how good Purdue is. Obviously, they have a National Player of the Year. They don't just have Zach Edey. That's the problem. They have so many guys, so many talented players that shoot it, drive it. They're probably one of the best-coached teams in the country. Everybody around here knows that. Everybody around the country knows Painter's teams. The more film you watch, the more impressed you get with their spacing. Like, everything they do is with intent, and they do it to perfection.

So we got our hands full tomorrow. We know we're going to have to play well and shoot the ball well, but our guys have been up for the challenge pretty much this entire season and I expect the same tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. You mentioned several things that you've noticed on film already. Is there one thing that really stands out about this Purdue squad that you would say, okay, this is why they're such a great basketball team?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, I mean, the big fella in the middle, him. But, like, their pace. They play with tremendous pace and spacing. They're a tremendous offensive team. Nobody's really stopped them year. They've seen everything. They've seen every type of defense. So we're going to have to hope they miss some shots and like last night we have to come up with those rebounds when they do. They're too talented of a team and too well shooting to give them second-chance points.

Q. The Mountain West, as a whole, it's a six-bid league this year for -- which is rare for the league. But now for the first time ever three teams have won in the

tournament. Curious what it means for you to be a part of that as you guys are still alive and how much playing in the conference this year prepared you for games that you played last night and games that you're going to play tomorrow night in the tournament.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, it means a lot. I thought the Mountain West conference was terrific this year, the coaches, the players. Like, we all knew how good it was because when you have to go through that gauntlet, similar to the Big Ten and Big-12, like, I felt like we were on par with all those conferences this year. It showed in the non-conference with some of the wins that our teams had. We all take a tremendous amount of pride. Like now we're actually rooting for San Diego State. We're rooting for everybody that's still in the tournament. So it was a fun league to play in, the coaches are great, and we're all kind of on a text thread rooting for each other.

Q. You said yesterday that you guys play a similar offense, both teams. How are you going to use that knowledge for your defense?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, hopefully a little bit helps because our post guys we've been kind of guarded probably how -- maybe not to the extent of Edey, but Great's been double- and triple-teamed and swarmed all year. A lot of the offensive sets, like, we steal a lot of sets from Painter and his staff. We did at Montana State too.

But it's going to be hopefully just like our style of play and the way we try to -- we try to feed the post top down too, just like they do 90 percent of the time, and hopefully some of that helps in the scouting preparation.

Q. Not a new question for you, I understand, but the process of starting from scratch, you brought two guys with you from Montana State, but what were the most important things in making it work with this new lineup, new roster?

DANNY SPRINKLE: I think recruiting high-character guys that bought into what we were trying to teach. If you have two or three guys in the locker room that aren't completely all in, it doesn't work. We've been very fortunate and we got lucky. Some of the guys that we took, we didn't know 'em, you know? And we're recruiting -- it's like speed dating now in the portal. You're recruiting a kid for a week or two and now you're coaching 'em.

We were very fortunate that these kids are -- they're about the right stuff. They have been raised right by great people and mentors, and it's contributed to our success, because we had transfers that played really well at other schools, and they have kind of -- their roles either diminished a little

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

or they're not getting as many shots as they did at the last school, but for them to continue to cheer for their teammates and be selfless, that's why we've had the season we've had.

Q. You talk about defending Edey, but I want to ask about when you guys are on offense going against this Purdue defense, what are the keys? And obviously Edey at 7'4" makes for a good shot blocker as well?

DANNY SPRINKLE: He does. We got to try and pull him out a little bit, whether it's ball screen or getting our bigs out there shooting because, like you said, if he's 10 feet from the rim, that's a big old dude you got to shoot over. So hopefully, we can get him pulled out a little bit, but we also got to go at him too. Even Grambling, they were aggressive. You're not going to make all of 'em, but even if you can get him to contest it and you get over the top of him, you might be able to offensive rebound on that back side if you do miss.

So we got to continue -- we got to be us. It's too late in the season to try and put in a new offense or do something other than be us. We're at our best, as you know, when we're getting stops and turnovers and getting that thing going in transition.

Q. Is there an advantage to having Johnny Hill on your staff in this matchup, somebody who maybe has some sort of insider knowledge on Coach Painter and what they're trying to do?

DANNY SPRINKLE: No, we tease Johnny all the time. Coach Painter's probably glad he's on our staff because we always tease Johnny about he can't shoot, so he doesn't even fit Purdue's style nowadays. He actually can shoot. We just tease him and tell him that.

I don't think so. They're still a little different than probably when they played with him. He's been away for so long. Yeah, I don't think -- it doesn't help us. It doesn't help us guard Zach Edey having Johnny on the bench.

Q. You always give your players until midnight to celebrate a win. Last night you couldn't really do that. How much celebration were you allowed to have and just the rent is due, can you kind of express where that came from, that saying that you use?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, obviously, I wanted the guys to enjoy it. That's a heck of an accomplishment that they got last night. The fans were there in the lobby when they got back, which was great, but when we woke up for breakfast, the players were talking about Purdue. Like, what do we have to do. We have such a short turnaround. It's

probably 24 hours from right now.

And so that's been the one thing for -- kind of as young as our team is, they get to the next play, they get to the next game, and with the success especially that we had early, I was worried about that because they were getting a lot of love in town and on social media. But they have humbled themselves and they just get to the next day, and they have taken on that rent is due every day. I think it was J.J. Watt had the quote, success is leased and rent is due every day. The second that you think that you've made it, you're going to get knocked off. And in this tournament, if you don't continue to get better and stay sharp, your season's over.

So it's kind of -- that's obviously been our motto all year and our guys know we have to do what we have to do preparation-wise today to give us a chance to be successful tomorrow.

Q. I want to ask about Kalifa and Ramadan. Last night he was able to eat before the game. Tomorrow is going to be a whole different situation. How have you been managing or how has he been managing that?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, we've tried to provide the resources for Kalifa, getting him -- whether it's shakes or just even food, you know, to-go stuff that he can kind of keep in his room in the refrigerator. That way he can set his alarm clock and wake up and make sure he's getting something in his stomach because he's -- I don't even know what the word is. He's a heavy sweater. Like, in warmups, he'll be just drenched. Obviously, he can't drink water or anything. So we had to -- it's actually good with the NCAA tournament where you can only warm up for 27 minutes or whatever it is, to where it's -- you're not getting the full hour. But even in, I think it was in Vegas the one time, we told him not even to go out until like 30 minutes on the clock because even that extra 30 minutes could zap some of your energy.

Q. We were talking to Isaac earlier and he explained the whole redshirt process. What kind of information did you glean about how that went for him and what has it been like coaching him this year and what kind of maturity has he shown since coming back from all of that?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, I don't know. I didn't even ask him about his redshirt year. I just kind of told him like, hey, from today forward that's all we got. Hopefully, you grew in the weight room and developed mentally and physically during that year off. But I don't care what happened. All I knew was we took him over on June and started practice and we're moving forward with him. He was uncomfortable

with a lot of the physicality and things that we were doing in practice and conditioning. They hadn't -- it's not a slight, but, like, we coach a lot of defense in the summer. Like, there's a lot of times we're not picking up a basketball. Like, it's physical like it's football. Like, I wanted to find out how tough our team was. And I knew to compete in the Mountain West, we had a long way to go. It was hard at first, but he just kept getting a little better, a little better, a little better, and then he finally bought in and his game just keeps going to another level.

But really proud of just where he's -- how far he's come mentally because as good of a basketball player he is, he's a 150 times better person. Like, he's great to be around every day, he cares, he's got a great heart, he's always worried about his teammates, his coaches. He's a lot of fun to be around.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports