

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Utah State Aggies

Danny Sprinkle

Darius Brown II

Ian Martinez

Media Conference

Purdue 106, Utah State 67

DANNY SPRINKLE: Firstly, super proud of my team. I mean, the season we had, it was historic for Utah State to win 28 games and outright Mountain West championship. To win a game in the NCAA Tournament against a tough Big 12 team, couldn't be more proud of our guys.

Darius obviously a senior leader, our other senior Landon Brenchley, for what they did from a leadership standpoint, bringing 13 brand new players together was absolutely incredible. Shows what kind of character our team has.

Tonight just ran into a buzz saw. We knew they were really good. I think there's elite teams and there's special teams, and they can be special. When you have a player like Zach Edey, he's special. There hasn't been many guys like that in college basketball history. That's why I think they can just take it to another level.

We told our guys even before, yeah, Zach Edey is obviously a National Player of the Year. They've got other really, really good players, and they can't go unnoticed. It seemed like they made every three-pointer and every even mid-range jump shot tonight, which you have to make them make some of those, and if they do, you've just got to pat them on the butt and say congrats.

But couldn't be more proud of our team. It was just one of those games we ran into a buzz saw, but it doesn't take away what we accomplished this year.

Q. Danny, talk a little bit about your team and what



you think you guys accomplished this year, and especially Darius because he scored some baskets late but he's an elite guard.

DANNY SPRINKLE: He is. What our team did this year was historic. I don't know if it'll be done again at the Power Five, Power Six level. When you're playing Mountain West, Big Ten, it's hard to do with a completely brand new roster. Was there some luck involved? No question. But when you have a leader like Darius who literally just put guys on his shoulders and showed them the way, and as a point guard he was an extension of our coaching staff, and from the summer on. He deserves more credit than anybody because what he did with this pretty young group, and to build confidence in those guys by being a true point guard and like getting those guys shots, it made our whole team better. It made everybody more confident.

Like I said, there are some tremendous point guards in the Mountain West. Guys that will play in the NBA. Don't be surprised if this kid does. He has intangibles, and he has elite skills that not many players do nowadays. That's being more for a point guard, being there for a teammate, getting guys shots. He would rather do that than shoot, and he's made so many of our guys so much better and more confident throughout the year.

He's elite. For him to do that in our league, like I said, with the point guards in our league, there was only one that led their team to an outright championship, and that's him, and that's an unbelievable accomplishment.

Q. What are your thoughts on those four quick fouls at the beginning of the game on Sahko and Johnson?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, it's hard. He's hard to guard without fouling. They've shot almost 400 more free throws than their opponents this year for a reason. Like I say, he's a special player. You have to guard completely different than you have all year. Like there's post guys that you play against that you have to double-team and do all this, but it's impossible when he keeps it high and he's got great touch and he's finding guys and they've got elite shooters around him. It's kind of pick your poison and you have to hope they miss shots and then you have to be able to



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rebound it.

I thought that's kind of when the game started breaking open was when they started getting some second-chance points.

The refs were great. Yeah, we probably fouled them.

Q. Coach, did you think about calling a time-out during that run -- I know you like to let the guys play it out, but when they started getting momentum and the crowd got into it, did you think about a time-out at all?

DANNY SPRINKLE: We did. We did at one point in the first half, and it got -- when they kind of -- it was that one four-minute span that outscored us by 11 and it was bad offense on our part. We were pretty good the first 12 minutes maybe of offense. It was a pretty close game. Then we kind of got a little selfish and we started going one-on-one, a couple turnovers, a couple driving into multiple bodies and missing lay-ups, then if you fall down, they're transitioning, and that's where the game got out of hand there.

Q. How much did those fouls impact maybe even your offense, just your rotation in general where a lot of guys had to take a seat on the bench and it threw you guys off and obviously Purdue went on a run late in the second half as you guys were picking up more fouls?

DANNY SPRINKLE: It does, it throws off your rotations, and it's hard. We don't have enough big bodies to keep throwing at Edey. Karson and Great, those are the two really that have some meat on their bones. It's not like you're going to move him, but at least you can hold your ground a little bit. But they got -- obviously when Kalifa got in they scored six straight points on offensive put-backs and not boxing out and things like that which affected us early.

Like I said, you can game plan all you want, but then you've got to go play the game, and it comes down to I thought they had great pace. They were aggressive. Even off their DHOs their guards were really pushing the ball downhill, and now you have Edey rolling and we've got a 6'2", 180 pound guy tagging on the roll. It's different.

Q. Darius, what did it mean to you to make this transition from Montana State to Utah State with Coach Sprinkle, make back to back NCAA tournaments with two different schools and get your first NCAA Tournament win this year?

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, it was special. These past two

years with Coach Sprinkle have been special and very essential to my future. I can't thank him and the staff enough for what they've done for me.

The transition from Montana State to Utah State was definitely a transition, more just because of the whole new roster and everything. But I felt my whole career that I could play at a high level and play in a really good conference, and it took some time for me to move up due to opportunities and all different types of things, but I've always felt I could play at this level, and I'm glad for my last year I got an opportunity to play in a very high level conference like the Mountain West Conference and show what I can do.

Q. Ian, can you talk about that first half when it seemed like you really got going, those back-to-back threes, and I think you scored 11 straight points for the team?

IAN MARTINEZ: Yeah, throughout the season I felt like at times where I saw just one basket go in and just would kind of get going. I told my teammates or coaches, I kind of just need one shot to go in to start moving, to get hot. That's basically what happened.

It happened a couple times before in the season, New Mexico, UNLV, 12 points, 10 points in a row.

Q. Coach talked about how remarkable the season was. Can you talk about what it means for you guys to be part of this team, how unique it was to have the success you had?

IAN MARTINEZ: For me it's really special, just in my personal journey. It's been really tough. I've been in a lot of different places, and as an international a lot of times I just look for a place to call home, and these guys, just the coaching staff, the players, they just made it really special for me. They took me. They were there for me the whole time. They believed in me. I've never had people who actually believed in me, and it meant a lot for me.

DARIUS BROWN II: Yeah, to me everything just feels kind of like a storybook ending, starting from two years ago when I broke my knee at Cal State Northridge and had to set out the whole year and then making that grad transfer to Montana State and kind of going into it like a completely different situation as far as the whole team was kind of already there, and I was just -- me and two other guys were the transfers.

So dealing with a team that's already been there and then dealing with that, and then the next year it's the complete opposite where I'm the one that has the most familiarity

with the coaching staff, and it's a brand new team and still able to do great things and win an outright title and win a tournament game, and all the ups and down of the year. It seems to me in my college career just a storybook ending.

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Obviously we would have liked to keep going as long as we could, but when you run into a team like Purdue and they have a guy like Zach Edey and when the guys around him are making shots, there's only so much you can do.

Q. I don't know if you want to share, Darius, but it seemed like you and Coach had a really long talk when he pulled you out of the game. Can you share anything Coach said to you in that moment?

DARIUS BROWN II: Just that he's proud of me. It's been a long great year. It's been a long great year. Short version of the story.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Super thankful. The reason this team is here and won an outright championship is because he made a decision to come to Utah State. Like I can't speak more highly of the person he is and how much he means to me personally, but this team, our staff, and I know, like I said, he's a legend now in Utah State basketball with the way he played this year and some of the shots he hit.

Q. Coach, you mentioned how special and historic this season was for your team. Looking off the court, what do you think made this season possible for you guys?

DANNY SPRINKLE: The way our guys came together. You could see in the summer some of the local guys, Mason and Isaac and Landon, bringing the team to their house or even their parents' houses and having barbecues and them showing them around Cache Valley, going up to Bear Lake, and the camaraderie that that built in the summer, it translated to the court.

Then we coached them pretty hard. Like we put them through some hard stuff in the summer and in the fall. Even trying to break a couple guys, just to kind of see what they were made of, and made them rely on their teammates to be there for each other.

The first time I really saw it was in the Cayman Islands when I saw how close this team was and the way they -- just by their interaction, whether it was walking in the hotel or at pregame meals and you could see there was something special there.

Now, I never would have told you we'd win an outright championship in the Mountain West, but you could see that this group had something and they cared about each other.

