

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Akron vs Arizona

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Akron Zips

Shammah Scott

Tavari Johnson

Isaiah Gray

Seth Wilson

Nate Johnson

Media Conference



this year. What's different is we have a different play style, we play faster, shoot more threes, it's kind of hard to guard.

So I mean that's really the only difference.

Q. Seth, you've been in a bigger program out of everybody that's been there in the Power 4 I guess I should say, but how about this experience going through a mid-major situation and getting this far compared to what you've done in the past?

SETH WILSON: I just want to say like this is probably the best situation I've been in. I'm grateful to be here with these guys, this staff. The difference is that we just shoot more threes and we win more games, that's it. And that's what we're going to try to continue to do.

Q. Tavari, how much have you guys come down to earth after that great win against Miami there's been a lot of excitement back in Akron, got the trip out here. You guys back down now getting ready to play and how has that been?

TAVARI JOHNSON: Yeah it was definitely a great time celebrating, definitely something we're going to remember for the rest of our lives. Definitely focused on Arizona, definitely moved on and ready to compete tomorrow.

Q. Shammah, Coach Groce, when he was with another MAC program at Ohio won NCAA Tournament games as a 13 and a 14 seed and went to a Sweet 16. Has he drawn on any of those experiences in any kind of conversations with you guys or have you talked about that among yourselves to maybe look to emulate something like that?

SHAMMAH SCOTT: Coach Groce, he doesn't really focus on the past. We're more so focused on this team and the present. But definitely with him winning those type of games, being in that environment gives the team a lot of confidence that we can definitely replicate and do the same things that he's done in the past, for sure.

Q. Going up against a guy like Caleb Love, who's been in the Tournament before, who you know can get hot an at any moment, what's the key to stopping a guy like that?

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Curious, since Selection Sunday what have you guys learned about Arizona, what encourages you most about the matchup and what's the biggest area of concern?

ISAIAH GRAY: I would say we've definitely been doing a lot of time, watching film, kind of going about our process that we do all season. So we've been evaluating this matchup, trying to see how our offense compares against theirs.

So I think we're encouraged by a lot of things. I think probably the most identifiably concern would be maybe some size. We've been one team this year to play a lot of guards, but there's advantages and disadvantages to that. So we've been doing, our coaches have been doing a great job preparing and putting us in a position to where we feel confident in getting the win.

Q. Nate, you're kind of the leader on this team, you were on the team last year that loss in the first round. What do you think is the difference this year that gives you guys a chance to maybe get past that hurdle and get past the first round?

NATE JOHNSON: I mean, that's last year's team. We had great team chemistry. We have the same team chemistry

SETH WILSON: I think the main key is there's definitely a level of respect we have for him, because we know who he is, but we're going to go in there with no fear and that's the whole thing. We feel like we can compete with anybody, but like I said, we're going to give him his due. He's a great player, but, yeah, we don't fear nothing.

Q. Nate and Seth, Coach Groce has talked about you guys being like a really fun loose group. Seth obviously got the famous Ric Flair thing to get everybody fired up. Teams have different personalities, do you think that can help you in this setting with the bright lights and national stage, do you think that can help you from getting tight?

SETH WILSON: Definitely. That's one of the things that just gets us going. And I feel like it fits our team. Like that's something that we do and I feel like it can't be replicated, if it's us, and, yeah, I think it definitely will help us as far as staying loose and not tightening up in the moment.

NATE JOHNSON: Basically what he said, I mean it just separates us from the other teams. Every other team has different rituals that they do before games. Us celebrating with Seth before the game doing the Ric Flair, you know, that's one of our ways to get us going and get us started and to let us know that we're ready to play.

Q. For you guys that were in Pittsburgh last year to play against Creighton how does this experience differ from that and how do you take confidence from that experience and take it here to Seattle?

NATE JOHNSON: I would say with that situation last year, we have a different guys who are on the leadership for this team, we just take that experience it from last year and try to carry it to this year's team and just to talk to the guys on how to approach March Madness and what to expect.

Q. Nate, in terms of that Euro step that you used to win the MAC championship game, as you're coming down the floor how did you make the decision to go to that move and had you ever used that particular move like that in a game before?

NATE JOHNSON: I kind of just, you know, just played the flow of the game and just read basically what the defender was going to do. That was a move that we worked on during the summer a lot, and just happened to be that particular move that I did at the end of the game. I mean, I've done it before, but not in that particular moment.

Q. For the rest of the guys, just what did you think when he made that move, what was your initial

reaction if you saw it live or if you saw it later on the video?

SETH WILSON: I think the initial reaction is joy (laughing). Everybody's just happy, like you know, we made it, it was still three seconds that we had to get a stop. Once we got the stop we knew the game was ours, we knew the championship was ours, and I think the greatest thing you can feel in that moment is gratitude and joy.

Q. Isaiah and Seth, with competing with different programs, what can you tell us separates John Groce from your perspective, what makes him a coach you think has you prepared for this moment?

ISAIAH GRAY: Yeah, I would say it's a lot of things that separate Coach John Groce and our coaching staff from the programs throughout the country, but from my experience I would say definitely one of the most systematic, tightly wound ships that we run in this program. Result is a product of our what we do in the process and Coach is very process oriented. So win or loss kind of is I don't want to say irrelevant, obviously we expect the best, but if we kind of go about things that we develop as a team and that we all trust in, we feel that it was a win for us.

I think Coach does a really good job of staying level headed throughout the media, throughout all the things that come through out the season and it allows us to have a stability that's really important, especially from a leadership position on the team. So I would say that's probably what stands out for me the most.

SETH WILSON: Like he said, the preparation part of it. There hasn't been a game this year where I haven't felt like the staff and Coach Groce hasn't put us in a position to succeed and know our opponent the best way that we could. So that's definitely a big difference. I definitely feel extremely prepared going into every single game and confident in our game plan and what we got going on.

Q. You guys like to get out in transition and shoot threes, is that something that came naturally or is that something that the head Coach Groce saw and said, okay, this is how we're playing this year?

NATE JOHNSON: It's definitely something that Coach Groce emphasized last spring. He was walking around the gym yelling out how we want to shoot 30 threes next year, and I mean a couple of us guys definitely was not believing that for the way that we just played. I mean, we were looking at him crazy, like 30 threes, Coach, we was just throwing it in the post every time.

But his playing style, his style changed us and look where

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

we're at now.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you. We'll have Coach up shortly.

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