

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Liberty vs Oregon

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Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Oregon Ducks

Dana Altman

Media Conference



guys that we brought in as transfers have not played in the tournament. But they are very experienced and they have shown that experience throughout the year.

There are no magic wands as a coach. You just hope that the experiences that we've had throughout the year have prepared our guys for this. We've played on neutral floors six or seven games. We've been on the road a lot.

So I think our guys are prepared and it's a little bit of a different feeling just because of the media and all the build-up that the media gives these games before the games. I think our guys are ready for it, the experience that we do have playing in the Tournament. We had three starters back, Bam, K.J. and Jackson all played quite a bit last year in the tournament, so we do have some experience coming back. Nate was hurt, Kee was hurt, we had some guys that were injured, but they were there and along for the ride.

Q. What makes preparing for an NCAA tournament game different than any other game?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, that's the thing, you try to make it, make the preparation the same as you do throughout the year. Our build-up for the game has been the same as it was for the conference tournament a week ago or the tournament we played in November in Vegas. We try to be consistent with our prep, same amount of film, depending upon how many days you have, obviously, to get ready for a game. But go over the scouting report the same way. Try to keep the routine as simple and as consistent as possible.

So that's our philosophy, that's the way we try to do it, and again, media, the hype, the TV shows changes that a little bit, but we try to keep it the same as we do throughout the year.

Q. Your first NCAA DI tournament experience was '93 with Kansas State and you've been through everything. You've won as a top seed, you've had a buzzer beater go your way. You've gone to the Final Four. How much in terms of the preparation going into the NCAA Tournament has changed from 1993 and how much hasn't in terms of getting teams ready for the NCAA Tournament, just taking through your first at

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

DANA ALTMAN: Really looks like an outstanding facility, first time we've been here. Our guys are excited and motivated to play. It's the first opportunity for a number of our players to be in the NCAA Tournament. So they're very excited to get this opportunity.

Looking forward to the challenge that Liberty presents. Very good offensive team, great shooting and passing team. So we're going to have to play very well defensively.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. There's already been a 12-5 upset today, just curious, do you use that as motivation or as maybe pointing to it and being like, hey, anything can happen here, just to keep the guys focused and motivated?

DANA ALTMAN: Our guys know it, we've been the 12 a number of times. So, no, I don't have to do that. Our guys know the challenge ahead of 'em. They have watched enough film now on Liberty to know that they're a very good basketball team as I mentioned. You don't win 28, 29 games by accident. They're a good basketball team, they're well coached, they know what they want out of offensive possessions. Defensively they're connected. They play six or seven guys and those six or seven guys really play well together.

Q. This is a super experienced team but not all of them have experience in March. Why is the experience they have an advantage and how do you bring them into this tournament with the experience you have here?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, you're right, a lot of our guys, the



Kansas State to now?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I was fortunate, '87, '88, '89 tournament I worked for Coach Kruger and we were fortunate enough to go to an Elite 8 in '88. So I learned a lot from him. I was a junior college player, sat on the bench at a Division II school, and I was a junior college coach. So had never been in any Division I settings until I went to Kansas State as assistant.

So those three years with Lon Kruger really helped me get a feel for the Tournament. And then Kansas State in '93 and Creighton for a number of years, we followed the same pattern. We tried to keep things consistent. The guys will get excited enough on their own. You don't need any motivational speeches this time of the years. The guys are ready to go.

So what I've learned from those experiences, try to keep things consistent, try to get the guys focused on the game and not worry about tickets for their parents and everybody coming in for the games, because they have more people coming in for this game, these games, than usually during the maybe other than Senior Night, most tickets that are requested and everything. So you try to get all that stuff out of the way and really focus on the opponent, just like you would in a regular season game.

But again, I was fortunate to work for Coach Kruger for those three years and followed his advice and we've just kind of stayed with it.

Q. Sunday you said this team was, they needed a lot of work after Indiana and you were happy that it was a Friday game. How has that preparation gone?

DANA ALTMAN: We had two really good practices Monday and Tuesday. I thought our guys were active and really focused. Yesterday before we flew over we didn't do that much. But they have been very attentive in the film sessions, going over the scouting report. So I think they're focused in and ready to go. We won't know until tomorrow night, but they seem like it's business as usual and they're getting ready to go.

Q. With the chance of benefit of prep a little bit these past couple days, what do you see from their three-point offense and with their assist/turnover ratio, how much your size can play a factor in defending the three and disrupting their ball security, which is also very good?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I hope it produces a lot. I hope we can get some deflections. They're a rhythm offense, and they do pass the ball really well. Their ball movement, and

they got a lot of guys that can pass and catch, skills that are really underestimated in basketball and they really do a good job of moving the ball. Their guys are ready to shoot the three. They take 900 and some threes and you know, 27, 28 a game, they're ready to shoot them. So we'll have to disrupt that rhythm hopefully with some deflections, hopefully with our size inside that they can't get to the rim as consistently as they have in their conference.

But, no, their offensive efficiency, they get the ball to the basket and finish there, and then almost 40 percent from three, which is in the top whatever in the country. Really a good offensive team and then their defense, like I said is, they're connected, they don't make many mistakes, they don't give you a lot of easy baskets or easy opportunities because of communication mistakes or scouting report mistakes. What I've seen from film, they make you earn your baskets.

Q. So much has been made about their guards and their three-point shooting but what can you say about Zach Johnson, number 25, their forward that seems like he has the ball and can do a lot of different things for them?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, he's between five and six assists a game, I'm not sure exactly, 5.6 or whatever it is, per game assists. So very good passer. 2 to 1 assist to turnover ratio. Yeah, he makes a lot of plays. When they go with four shooters and spread the floor, he becomes even more efficient offensively. So, no, he's a good basketball player, plays with a lot of confidence. He knows when guys are moving and cutting. He's not afraid to make a play.

So it will be important that we cut down some of his vision. Don't let him see the floor quite as easily as he has in the past, because if he does and he gets six, seven assists like he's used to getting, he puts a tremendous amount of pressure on your defense.

Q. How different a player is K.J. entering this tournament than the player who exited last March where you're kicking yourself I think unfairly for turning to him for that late inbound when you just didn't have a lot of other options but you point to yourself for that moment? How different a player is he and your confidence in him and his confidence in himself of being in any moment in a game for you?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, the last 10, 12 games, K.J.'s been really, really good for us. Those rebounding numbers that he's got for us have really got him involved in the game, both offensively and defensively. He didn't play as well the first half against Michigan State but then came back the second half and played really well.

So, no, he's, I'm not sure exactly, 10, 12, whatever games it's been since he started getting to the boards and really getting involved with the game, he's completely changed his game and it's really, really helped us.

Our winning stretch there, he was as big a part of it as anybody. So it's important that he gets to the boards tomorrow and his activity defensively can help us and he can finish plays inside. So he will be a big factor tomorrow.

Q. You talked about how much you want to force turnovers, how important is it when you're the higher seed in a game like this and an early game to just play clean and early and be confident?

DANA ALTMAN: I think that's important in any game, getting off to a good start. Playing from behind, we've done that quite a bit this year, which puts a lot of stress on your team. But, no, when we turn the ball over, and we have turned it over here more recently than I would like, trying to do too much and trying to score maybe too quickly at times.

But it's important for us to move the ball offensively, for us to get the looks we want to get. We're going to have to shoot the ball a little bit. It shows the difference, I think, against Indiana we went 9 for 20 from three and the next night we go 4 for 19 against Michigan State. We had some really good looks, and we just didn't hit 'em.

So the three ball's a big part of the game, it is for Liberty, it is for us, we don't take nearly as many, but we still have to hit some to keep some pressure off of Nate, keep some pressure off of TJ trying to get to the rim, and ball movement's a big, big part of that.

Q. You mentioned Lon Kruger, how did you, how did Lon first reach out to you after your Division II days, how did that relationship start? And in '88 you mentioned the Elite 8 I think KU was the team who won that game. How did you and Lon get together and was maybe Danny Manning maybe the best player had you to coach against in the NCAA Tournament?

DANA ALTMAN: He definitely was that year. No, I was a junior college coach. I had the No. 1 ranked junior college team. Coach Kruger had just taken the Kansas State. I had a guy by the name of Mitch Richmond who turned out to be a pretty good player. He everybody wanted Mitch, so I got to go along for the ride.

No, in fact, it took three players off that team, off my team, and we went to Kansas State together. So coach had recruited a player of mine in my first junior college job at

Fairbury, Nebraska, he took my point guard when he was still at Pan-American University, which is now Rio Grande University but it was Pan-American back then. So I had met him three or four years before I went to work for him and but, no, he had watched our teams play. But he needed Mitch, he needed Charlie Bledsoe, Freddie McCoy, three guys that -- and then we took another junior college player that was from our rival, State Fair, Will Scott.

So those four guys were a big, big part of that Elite 8 team and that was a heartbreaking loss. We had beaten them in the conference tournament in the semis and Oklahoma and Kansas played that year. So they were three really good teams in the old big 8, three of us in the Elite 8 that year and then those two played in the final.

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