

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

**Liberty Flames**

**Ritchie McKay**

**Kaden Metheny**

**Zach Cleveland**

Media Conference



Oregon - 81, Liberty - 52

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

RITCHIE McKAY: Congratulations to Oregon. They were really good. That was as worthy of an opponent as we have played in a long time. They did a terrific job taking away some of the things that we do well and they were dominant tonight.

But I'm proud of our group. I know every coach who loses a game comes up and talks about how proud they are. But we have an unbelievable group of young people. We're not going to let one bad night ruin the journey that we got to experience together. They were fabulous. We got beat tonight by more points than we had in our six combined losses, so this one is a tough one. You don't want to end your season like this.

But we've always said that we won't base our identity on the outcome of a game, and we were really privileged to be a part of the NCAA Tournament, to represent our university, our conference, and we'll root for Oregon for the next game.

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

**Q. Kaden, not knowing if you're coming back next season, what will you remember most about this team specifically?**

KADEN METHENY: Yeah, this was one of the most special groups I've ever been a part of, just the unselfishness and just the togetherness. We enjoyed ourselves on the court, but, man, the times we had off the court is the moments I'm going to remember for life. Yeah, just a special, special group. In this climate of college basketball, with the transfer portal, you never know what you're going to get when you get guys coming into your program, and me being one of 'em last year. And, man, we hit it out of the park with the guys that we brought in. They bought in immediately, and we accepted them immediately, and that's all you can ask for. So just one of the most special groups I've ever been a part of.

**Q. Kaden, it was your team's worst shooting night of the season. How much of that is just from what Oregon did from their length and their ability to kind of challenge shots?**

KADEN METHENY: Yeah, they did a great job, obviously. I think it kind of took us a couple minutes just to settle in. We were getting great looks there for a minute, but once they got up big, then obviously we started trying to rush a little bit and trying to get it back sometimes in one possession. Obviously, that doesn't work.

But we got some looks that we wanted, but their two big guys down in the paint clogged up some looks at the paint, which gave us some struggles. And obviously, shooting the way we did. We got up 37 threes or whatever it was. Usually when we get up that many, we're pretty happy, but obviously not tonight.

**Q. Zach, I know this team doesn't define itself on wins and losses. How important is it to lean on your faith and not just look at this as a loss in this one night, looking at it as the entire journey. And, Kaden, if you can answer after.**

ZACH CLEVELAND: Yeah, a hundred percent. I think we're grateful that our God doesn't care about what just happened on the court. It was a great chance to glorify God, and I think we did that by caring more about each other than ourselves.

So getting to do that on a national stage was special, and we're grateful that our God loves us just as much as he did



before the game.

KADEN METHENY: I'm not saying anything else besides that. It's perfect.

**Q. Obviously tonight didn't go the way you wanted it to, but just this experience the last week from what you went through in Huntsville to what you got to experience this week, just with the team and the travel and this experience, first time for both of you, just how special was that? Take us through your thoughts on that.**

ZACH CLEVELAND: Huntsville was special being able to win the conference championship. With the brothers, like he said, it's cool to do it when you're doing it with the people you love. And then this was a surreal feeling and a surreal place to play. I've never played in front of that many people.

So being able to have some family come here -- come down, and just the whole environment was special. So it was a great to be a part of it.

KADEN METHENY: Yeah, obviously growing up, these are moments that you dream of being a part of the NCAA Tournament. It's one of those where you want to enjoy the moment but not let the moment be too big. But I think we did a great job as a group, knowing how special of a moment this was and how fortunate and blessed we were to be able to be here and wish we could have gone a little further. But yeah, these last two weeks obviously in Huntsville was phenomenal and being able to, like Zach said, glorify God on a national stage, you can't beat that.

But, yeah, just a special group that we really cherish the moments when we could.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the players and we'll take questions for Coach.

**Q. What do you want the nation to learn about Liberty on this national stage and just about the team overall what they're defined as?**

RITCHIE McKAY: Yeah, I don't know if tonight was the best representation of how good our basketball team is, but we've told our guys from day one, like, we should never get our identity from what we do, what we have, or what other people think about us. I think if you have that perspective, it allows you to operate in a freedom and a peace that you can live your life way more other-centric than you can me-centric.

And I think what I'm most proud of our group is just the way

they represent themselves and our program. They have got a humility that's contagious and infectious, and they have got a representation that, like, as a parent, you would be incredibly proud of or -- obviously as a coach, you would want your young men to appropriate their daily lives the way our guys do. I was really proud of them.

**Q. Your team is one of the best shooting teams in the country. Just tough night to have a poor shooting night and how much did Oregon affect that?**

RITCHIE McKAY: Oregon had a ton to do with it. You can look at the numbers and get a little ill. But part of it was our defense. They had too easy of looks, and I think they did a great job in denying Colin the ball, and he usually initiates our offense, and we've got built-in counters to that.

But man, their length at the rim with Bittle and Angel and Cook and Evans, it's a hard equation for us. So having that much depth and, like, tonight was one of the few nights that we have had in February and March where, man, you need Isaiah, you need Josh Smith to get a little bit more depth on the bench.

But again, I give them the credit. They did a terrific job of game planning for us and their scheme was difficult.

**Q. I know you're probably very disappointed right now, but where is your head and mindset going into the off-season?**

RITCHIE McKAY: I love what I get to do where I get to do it. It's a privilege to be a coach. I think especially at our university because of the commitment that our campus has to the pursuit of excellence to being a part of something bigger than yourself. So, yeah I'm disappointed, I'm overly competitive at times and I did not see this coming. But, again, there's a word in it's an old Jewish hymn, the word is dayenu, D A Y E N U. And it just -- they used to sing the song in worship, and the context of it is, if all of this would have happened and what we wanted next didn't, what we had already have had happen would have been enough. So I'm going to -- like, what we got a chance to do and even though we don't get a chance to advance, the journey and the shared experience that our guys got to have, like dayenu, it would have been enough.

**Q. You put together a phenomenal team this season, not only skill-wise, but especially when it comes to the chemistry of these guys on and off the court, and I honestly think that's a lot of what got you to where you are today. Talk to me about that, how do you feel about your guys chemistry this season?**

RITCHIE McKAY: Yeah, I think it was a super power. Our



connection was unique. As our guys alluded to, in the era of the transfer portal you have to be really selective. Like we really want to get five-star people, and hopefully they're really good basketball players. I think we were able to do that. But our university attracts that kind of student-athlete that has a selflessness about 'em. And, yeah, but it's rare, honestly, it's a very good question, thank you, it's really unique to have guys give up what they would want for themselves in order for their teammate to prosper and like I alluded to earlier, it's inspiring, inspiring to be around.

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