

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Colorado State vs Maryland

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Colorado State Rams

Niko Medved

Kyan Evans

Jaylen Crocker-Johnson

Jalen Lake

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes. Raise your hand and we'll get started.

Q. For any of you, really, a quick turnaround for a team you haven't faced. What are the challenges that come with that and kind of how do you balance trying to prep as much as you can without sort of overwhelming yourself with information?

JALEN LAKE: Yeah, like you said, it's a quick turnaround, so I think we just got to prepare how we do for any team. Obviously, they're a really well-coached team, they're really good, and have a lot of really good big guys, so we got to be locked in on that side of the ball, on defensive end, and rebounding. So like you said, quick turnaround, but Coach will do a good job of preparing us so we'll be ready.

Q. Kyan?

KYAN EVAN: Yeah, no, just a lot of what he said. I think everybody is -- everybody's got one day to prepare. So they have to prepare for us the same way we prepare for them. So it's a quick turnaround, but it's a quick turnaround for everybody.

Q. You guys have never played Maryland in the history of the program. When it comes to approaching a team like this, how important is scouting for you guys?

JAYLEN CROCKER-JOHNSON: I mean, they got really good bigs, so just knowing the details and what they're



really good at. They want to force-feed the bigs, so just on the defensive end rebounding and just containing their bigs. Their guards are really good too. They're a well-coached team, so just containing their bigs.

Q. Looking at Maryland, you guys talked about Maryland's big men, but when you look at their scoring, 1 through 5, when you look at that balance, do you kind of approach Maryland defensively to try and maybe cut off one guy or how do you try and maybe contain that or limit their efficiency?

JALEN LAKE: Yeah, I mean, obviously, like you said, they have a really good bigs, like we talked about, but they can also really hurt you from the three as well with their shooters around. So just continuing to be locked in on that side of the defensive side of the ball and containing the bigs.

Q. You guys are the 12 seed, yet you were the favorites against Memphis. Do you guys feel like underdogs here at the tournament?

JALEN LAKE: I mean, I feel like we just don't really look too much into the underdogs or look into seeding. We're just here to play, and we just try to take one game at a time and have the same mindset that we have had in the conference tournament, whether it's March Madness. We just try to have the same mindset going into it.

Q. What's this NCAA Tournament experience like? What was it like being out on the floor for that yesterday and going through being part of this whole process?

JAYLEN CROCKER-JOHNSON: It's definitely a blessing. It's very exciting as well because not many players get to be on that court and experiencing that feeling. So it was definitely exciting out there.

Q. Jalen, is it different for you going through this now compared to your first one as a freshman?

JALEN LAKE: Yeah, for sure. I mean, it's still the same stage. It doesn't really get old being able to come back to play in March Madness. But, yeah, I have a completely different role from what I did as a freshman. But just take it

how it goes. It's an awesome feeling. It's a blessing to be able to play in this.

Q. Kyan, I'm assuming during the recruiting process there's kind of a vision laid out of reaching this type of moment and these type of games. What's it been like going through that process of learning last year and then getting to play it, experience it, and have these big-stage opportunities?

KYAN EVAN: Yeah, it's just a blessing. I knew what it was coming here. I knew who I was behind, and I knew I was just going to learn last year and get better throughout this year. I think just everything has just accumulated up to where I'm at now. So I'm just blessed to be here and just excited to get out there once again.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We'll have Coach up for questions in a few minutes.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: If you have an opening statement we can open it up to questions if not...

NIKO MEDVED: What more could you want being here right now in this moment in the round of 32 and in March Madness. It doesn't get any better than that. It's what you work for all year. I'm really excited for the opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take some questions.

Q. How did yesterday feel different than a year ago when you guys had a first four win and maybe appreciated this win more or celebrated it more?

NIKO MEDVED: You know, listen, I mean, any opportunity to play in this tournament, it's one of the hardest things to do in our sport, is a blessing. Going to Dayton in the first four is a whole other challenge. You find out on Sunday night and you're literally on a plane the next day and it happens so fast, and then game's over, you get to Charlotte at 3:00 in the morning, and then you're playing again. It's just such a blur.

All of this happens fast, too. It kind of feels like you're more a part of it, right? You're here, we play on Friday, we get the win, and our fan turnout is great. So the experience feels different. They're all special, but this one was a little extra special.

Q. You guys are one of the few double-digit seeds to have advanced to this point. You guys are wearing the shirts that say "doubt us," the pre-game warmup shirts. Have you guys embraced the Cinderella aspect

or do you feel the way you've played the last month and a half now you guys are better than your typical Cinderella?

NIKO MEDVED: Well, for the record, I think all the Under Armour teams have the "doubt us" on 'em, so we're not unique. That wasn't anything that we did.

But, honestly, we haven't really gotten into whatever, people doubting us or where we are. We just have a strong level of belief in what we're doing. We have a really competitive group who cares and really believes they can win, that loves to put it all out there. I just think more than worrying about whatever people think of us, it's just more we just really try to double down on the belief in ourselves. I think that's really what carried us.

Q. You guys obviously did a lot of things well, but do you feel a little bit like it wasn't the best performance that you've had and that there's kind of another level you can get to from where you were yesterday?

NIKO MEDVED: Well, I don't know. I mean, no matter what you always feel like maybe we can play better. But your opponent has a vote in this too. We knew going into the game, I thought Memphis did a really good job of -- they do a lot of different things defensively of kind of switching, disrupting, that maybe took us a little while to get a feel for it.

Yeah, I agree, I just didn't think our rebounding edge and tenacity was nearly good enough in the first half. But I thought other than the first play of the second half when we just threw the side out away, which I still am kind of in disbelief, I thought we played pretty dang good in the second half. I thought our guys really, really rallied. And again, when you're playing a great team with a great coach and great players, all the stuff like that, it's going to be hard, and to win was just phenomenal.

Q. On that note, an opponent has a say as well, sort of what jumps out about Maryland, and especially, obviously, they have a pretty great starting 5.

NIKO MEDVED: I mean, you start right there. Their starting 5 is as good as any in the country. They're really, really connected. They really don't have weaknesses. Obviously Derik Queen, you can see why a lot of people have him as a lottery. He's got unbelievable hands, balance, dexterity, play in tight spaces. Both of their bigs, him and Reese, they can pass to each other. Their guards are terrific. They make shots, they're aggressive, they're really connected on the defensive end.

I mean, I think I looked where they're 10 in KenPom, they

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

could have won the Big Ten, they're just a terrific team. So it's going to be a challenge, but again, if you're in the round of 32 in the NCAA Tournament here, that's what it's going to look like. You're playing the best teams in the country and they're here for a reason. Kevin Willard's an exceptional coach and just has his team firing on all cylinders.

But then we know all that, but like I told our guys, so are we. And I think when you get to that point, it's -- your opponent is really, really good, as good as any we've played all year, but we also have to rally behind us playing well, right? And hopefully we can do some things or have to do some things that causes them some problems as well.

Q. We've talked so much throughout college basketball this year about how good the SEC is. We always fall in love with certain conferences. But you guys sent four teams from the Mountain West and two of you won first round games. How much do you think that has prepped you for this? Like, there's not really an easy night in your conference.

NIKO MEDVED: I couldn't agree more. I know our league has taken a little bit of a beating nationally with not having as much success in the tournament. But I just think a lot of people -- I'm going to be really candid. Being as far west as we are, I think a lot of people don't stay up to watch all the games. They don't really understand on the quality of players and coaches and programs in our league.

So absolutely, you get tested night-in and night-out, and you're playing in front of the packed arenas, so you come in here battle-tested, and so I agree with that. It was great to see New Mexico win yesterday too for the league. But, yeah, we take pride in that, and I think both us and New Mexico winning yesterday was really, really good for the Mountain West.

Q. As a West Coast resident, I would agree with you that a lot of people don't stay up, but also, let's cut down on the 8:00 p.m. tips.

NIKO MEDVED: That's above my pay grade, yeah (laughing).

Q. My follow-up for you is, in a couple years when we get a new PAC-12, and some of the Mountain West teams are going to go over there, and they're going to add Gonzaga, there's all this realignment again, how good could this new PAC-12 be -- like, how much of a premier West Coast basketball conference could it be?

NIKO MEDVED: I think it will be the premier West Coast

basketball conference. I think that part's exciting. You've got, again, some really good brands and programs that are going to compete, and so I think that part for basketball perspective is exciting.

The one thing constant in college athletics is change right now, and so, obviously, a year from now -- not next year, but the year after, we'll be in the new PAC-12. But there's a little bit more work to do, but it's definitely shaping up to be a great basketball league.

Q. I was talking to Tim Shelton for a little bit. He's got a Seattle connection here with his dad winning a title here. Curious what you saw in him that made you want to bring him onto your staff?

NIKO MEDVED: The one thing about Shel, man, is what you see is what you get. He's got an unbelievable infectious, positive personality. It doesn't matter who it is, like, with our players, coaches. He shows up the same every day. He's got a smile on his face, he's positive, he's got great energy and enthusiasm about us. And it's not fake. It's really who he is.

But he does an unbelievable job of balancing that, but when you get him out there on the court in practice, I mean, he is -- he's going to get after you now in the right way. He brings a ton of energy and juice to our guys.

He was obviously a tremendous player. I was familiar with him at San Diego State. I thought he was the best charge-taker in the country. When you used to be able to take off-ball charges, I said they were flops, but he was either the best flopper or charge-taker. I remember games, heck, we would play against him and he would have four or five -- take four or five charges. But he was just such a great team guy. Not only that, he's kind of got some musical talent. If you remember back in the day, like, they had this song, this rap song or whatever. Ask him about Tesnation next time when you see him. So he's a multitalented dude.

Q. When Nique transferred, what did you think you were getting and why has he developed into such a complete efficient player?

NIKO MEDVED: We recruited him really hard out of high school, so we had a great relationship with him and his family. He decided to go to CU instead of us. When he decided to go in the portal, he was a young person we had a lot of belief in. We knew he was our type of guy as far as the character. And we thought he had a lot of talent, maybe, that had been untapped.

The thing with him is that, like I keep saying, there's like-it,



love-it, and then there's live-it guys. I mean, he lives this game. He can't get enough of it. He loves to be in the gym, loves to be coached, loves to watch basketball, talk about basketball. And so he just soaks it up. And he's got this really uncanny belief in himself. He's always believed that this is the kind of player he's supposed to be, and he doesn't listen to anyone else tell him otherwise. So he just really put his head down and he's gotten stronger, his foot work's improved, his balance has improved, he's learning to score the ball in different areas. Obviously he's got the ball in his hands even more than ever now and his passing and play making is really shown up. He's a special rebounder. But most of all, man, anyone who knows him, he is just a special guy, man. He's just an incredible human to be around. So he's the whole package. I just couldn't be happier for him having the success that he's had here at CSU, because nobody deserves it more than him.

Q. Nique obviously didn't shoot great yesterday, but he did a lot of other things. But offensively he doesn't seem to force a lot. Sometimes you see guys who aren't shooting well and decide the solution is to take 20 more shots. How do you help him navigate not forcing things versus when you say to him, like, Hey, you need to take this game over right now, because he is talented enough to do that?

NIKO MEDVED: You know, again, he plays for the team and so he doesn't think about that, he just thinks about what he has to do to help our team win. We need him to be aggressive, but I just think he's -- that takes time when you become the top of the scouting report. He wasn't the top of the scouting report last year, now he is. I think he's done a great job of just finding that balance. And, yeah, I thought he played really well yesterday. He missed some open shots he's been making, but everything else was great. I mean, what eight rebounds, six assists, didn't turn the ball over, played really good defense. Two more of those threes go in everyone's talking about another monster game. But I thought he played really, really well. Again, sometimes I always tell guys, the ball is in your hands, not always to take the shot, it's just to make the right play. And he makes a lot of the right plays for us.

Q. I don't know if you had a chance to see all the people that were at the pre-game partying there were over 400 there and then obviously in the stands yesterday it was pretty spectacular. From your perspective and I talked to Nique about this too, what does that mean when the fans travel so well and when you look up I mean that whole horseshoe practically was filled with CSU fans?

NIKO MEDVED: It's just awesome. I mean, to see that,

and even more I heard more are traveling in today just to be there tomorrow. I thought it was absolutely phenomenal. Now obviously I wasn't at the pre-game party, right, but I've heard the stories of how packed it was and people going -- that's just, it's awesome. It makes a difference for us. But I'm just really, really happy, you know this place, I'm just really, really happy for the fans and I know how much this means to the school and to our fans and just to see how excited everyone is and coming out here to support it, it means the world to us, but I'm just really happy, really happy for them, too.

Q. I don't know how much you're paying attention to this because you're so locked in, but Kevin Willard has been the last few days very frank in his press conferences about how much Maryland needs to commit to their men's basketball program. Basically he makes it sound like he wants more money for NIL, that type of stuff. Curious, when you guys are here, when you're running into other coaches at the tournament, on the road, do you guys talk about that, are you ever revealing numbers, or are you all trying to keep everything close to your chest so that you don't accidentally help someone sign someone great out of the portal?

NIKO MEDVED: Death, taxes and coaches talking about NIL, right. I mean that's, that, happens all the time. That's kind of the deal right now, obviously. Coach Willard, whatever, you know, perceived or whatever he's got going on there, I understand we're all -- listen, we're all trying to figure this out, right. What that looks like at our own schools and how much is enough. We always feel like you need more, because you want to compete, we're all competitive we want to compete, everybody invests so much in this deal to try to win at the highest level, and that's kind of the name of the game. So of course we're all talking about it and this stuff just continues to evolve, but I'm happy for the players that they get an opportunity to participate in this, and hopefully we're moving in a direction that we're going to have a little bit more transparency and a little bit better rules of engagement so we can all kind of know what this is moving forward. I think we're moving in a good direction, we got a little ways to go here to completely figure it out, but I feel better about it maybe than did I two years ago.

Q. In this new weird world that we're all in and trying to navigate, how much does it matter for a coach to be a great recruiter, to be able to build a relationship, versus just kids and parents want to go to the highest bidder?

NIKO MEDVED: Well, I can only speak for myself. I value it. I think, listen, we're not perfect, but I think we've got a

great culture here, we've got great people, we've had three guys in a row in our program who were all in the combine and chose not to go in the transfer portal here. So I value relationships personally, so that's how I'm going to recruit. I want to do it the way that I want to do it. I still think those things matter. Obviously there's a financial aspect that matters and I get that, it should. But I think that players also, you know, you got to look past that, too. What's my experience, or am I going to get better, how do I fit in, what's my relationship with the coach, am I happy here, all those things. I think there's things that are bigger than just that. So I think those things still matter, I don't buy into this that it's completely transactional, I don't buy into that. Of course there's a -- this is big business, huge business, and that's part of it. So that part exists and I'm not naive to that at all, I completely understand it. But I also think the other things matter, too, I really do. To the right kinds of people, the people that we want here to coach, those things have to matter and I think you can do both.

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