

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Oregon vs Arizona

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Oregon Ducks

Dana Altman

Keeshawn Barthelemy

Kwame Evans Jr.

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. KJ, Arizona is obviously a really strong rebounding team, and that seems to ignite them on offense. What are the keys when you go into a game against a team like that that is so strong rebounding?

KWAME EVANS JR.: We just got to match their intensity on the boards, really. Just be the tougher team, go for every loose ball, try to get every rebound with two hands, and just be fundamentally sound.

Q. Talk about the joy of participating in the game last night, but then also facing Arizona, given how your season ended last year, are you one when the bracket came out that said, Hey, I would like to have a different ending against that team, at least personally, walking off the court?

KEESHAWN BARTHELEMY: Definitely. It was definitely in the back of my mind. And Arizona's a good opponent, and I'm ready, you know, not for revenge necessarily, but just to stand back up on my feet. That's the motive I have.

Q. (No Microphone.)

KEESHAWN BARTHELEMY: My emotions are just I try to stay levelheaded at all times. I try to stay, like, a senior leader for the team, just levelheaded all the time. Whether things are going good or bad, just always even-keel.

Q. Outside of here and outside the Space Needle and stuff everybody is wearing your gear. It's a short trip



over state line to be here. It is really, really close. What's the energy in the building? Are you feeling that? You've seen the spirit in the streets. Does that change things for you, that energy you get from your fans?

KEESHAWN BARTHELEMY: Definitely. I feel like our fans are a big part of what we do. They have been cheering us on the whole season. Just to play in Seattle, get that opportunity, it's an opportunity to play in Seattle for March Madness, and our fans are pretty excited about it. You can definitely feel the energy from the players and the families that are here.

Q. KJ, could you speak to how Kee handled things after the injury last year and maintaining a leadership role that -- but then just also just the value he provides to you guys as a group this year. How would you sum that up?

KWAME EVANS JR.: Obviously, you know what happened to Kee last year against Arizona, what he went through. His leadership, just being there even when he was at his lowest, I think just really being there for us every game still, his leadership was important still, and then -- could you repeat the question again?

Q. The impact on this team and what he means to you guys as a group.

KWAME EVANS JR.: Yeah, his impact is really well. You've seen it, obviously, when he's played -- when he got to play the beginning of the year. He really came up big in a lot of games against a lot of teams, really scoring. His shooting really gives us another punch and it is just really great to see him on the court.

Q. Going back on the question about Oregon fans showing up to this game, Arizona is renown for packing the building. They did it at the PAC-12 tournament as well last year, took away that neutral court advantage. What do you anticipate this environment's going to be like tomorrow night?

KWAME EVANS JR.: Hopefully we have good enough fans because last year it was basically like away game at the PAC-12. Hopefully, this year we come a lot more



deep, and -- I hope that we will and just -- like, everybody just the energy, you know, just being there. Like, it won't feel too much like an away game being a neutral court.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much. We'll have Coach Altman up here in a few minutes.

If you have an opening statement feel free or we can just go to questions.

DANA ALTMAN: Let's just go to questions.

Q. Can you talk about what you have to do to try to win the rebounding battle or at least go even with them in the rebounding battle?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I think the rebounding is going to be very important. They're a plus seven on the season and really got Akron on the boards last night. But their size, their athleticism, we're just going to have to compete. It really hurt us against Michigan State in the tournament. So we know they're going to go. We have to put a body on 'em, we're going to have to be physical, and we're going to have to do a good job, all five guys staying in the fight and trying to get the ball.

Q. It was Arizona you guys were playing last year when Kee got hurt. Could you reflect on the role he still was able to play as a leader for you the rest of last season, but then what he's meant to you guys throughout the course of this season.

DANA ALTMAN: Yeah, that was a tough injury, I believe, in January that he suffered, and we lost him for the rest of the season. But he did a tremendous job still talking with the fellas, being part of the team. We had a lot of guys out last year that just kind of hung around, he and Nate and Mookie was out. So that was pretty tough on all those guys, missing a lot of the season.

But Kee's done a tremendous job this year. His efficiency offensively has helped us. He and Jackson have done a good job of handling the ball. I thought defensively he tried to compete on that end and used his quickness to create some opportunities for us. So, no, he's had a really good year and he bounced back from that injury and really did a nice job.

Q. Normally in years past, this would have been the third or fourth time you might see Arizona in a season. Is it strange here the round of 32 that you're playing Arizona in the NAAs and you haven't seen 'em at all up to this point of the year on the court?

DANA ALTMAN: A little bit. I looked it up. In the last 14

years, we played 27 times. So it was always a game that we looked forward to. A lot of years we were battling for position in the league for the NCAA Tournament and so forth. Sean did a good job and now Tom's doing a good job. It was always a big game. Yeah, it is unusual, especially given the last 14 years that we've been associated with the program.

But we are looking forward to the challenge again. Their system is their system. Their transition is always good, they push the ball, make or miss. We know we got to get back, try to get our defense put together. Mentioned the rebounding. And then Caleb Love, when he gets it going, he's a handful. Tough opponent for us. We're going to have to play awfully, awfully well to give ourself an opportunity.

Q. How much does it help, that familiarity with Arizona, when you only have this one day between games to prep for 'em?

DANA ALTMAN: It helps a little bit, just, you know, we know their guards. KJ Lewis was back and Caleb Love. So we have some familiarity there with their personnel and the system is a lot.

But they have the same advantage. We haven't changed a lot. We got quite a few new faces because a few of our guys were out. But KJ's back and Jackson, and Bam. Those three guys played a lot for us last year. The rest of the guys were out with injuries. So I think both teams have a little bit of an advantage with the one-day prep of getting ready.

Q. In light of what you said, you guys, Arizona, UCLA, and maybe Gonzaga kind of define some of the West Coast basketball. I didn't know if you feel like with the changes in conferences if you feel like it's more national now or is there sort of an identity out here or anything like that?

DANA ALTMAN: That's an interesting question. We looked at those programs when we came in 15 years ago and said we know we got to compete with Arizona and we know we got to compete with UCLA. So those were kind of the programs we looked at. Can we recruit at that level? Those are the programs we got to beat.

But I think it has become much more national with Washington and USC, UCLA and us heading east so much. It really hasn't changed the way everybody says, Well, it's going to change the way you play. It really hasn't. Maybe more legal picks than we had in the PAC-12, more pushing, but other than that, I don't think it's changed too much.

But the whole game for a Stanford, Cal, they're going cross country to play, so it's kind of changed for all of us, Arizona, Arizona State, Utah, Colorado going to Central Florida to play. So I think it has changed for all of us and a lot more travel and a lot of different opponents, a lot of new scouts. So it was a unique year, I think, for all the programs.

Q. You mentioned Keeshawn earlier and the injury he overcame from last year. It's kind of been the story of his career, overcoming injuries. How much pride do you take in a veteran guy like that who is getting to have this moment now after being three years at Colorado, three years with you guys, just kind of all he's overcome and building to this moment?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, you know, as a coach, you always appreciate guys that fight through adversity. We always talked to our players about it. If it was easy, everybody would do it. And the adversity that comes with the season, the adversity that comes maybe with an injury, the adversity of not playing as much as you want and to fight through that. So to see Kee battle back from that injury and see him become a big part of this year's team, it's a story we'll talk about. No different than Dante overcoming a couple surgeries a year ago to have a tremendous year for us.

But as a coach, you preach that. You tell 'em, it's not going to be easy, there's going to be a lot of ups and downs, and you just got to fight through the downs. So when somebody fights through adversity, fights through the challenges of an injury, that's just something that you keep talking about. You talk to future guys that go through injuries. We've had guys with knees, we had guys with ankles. You just got to battle back. So he's set a good example in that regard.

Q. Tommy talked about needing more physicality going into the Big-12. Curious your thoughts on Trey Townsend and Tobe, the two forwards that they have added through the portal and the impacts that they have brought and the matchup that they will present for you guys.

DANA ALTMAN: Yeah, no, they're big bodies. Ballo was a big body also. They have had big guys. So we didn't any get bigger. With the exception of a few games, I don't think it bothered us that much.

No, those guys are physical down there. They got good size. As I mentioned, they're a plus seven on the boards, so they're really getting after boards. Their guards are bigger than ours, which is of concern. But we're just going

to have to battle it. We're going to have to be physical, we're going to have to get on the boards, we're going to have to play awfully well.

Q. We were talking to Tommy about the identity of West Coast basketball and what this series has meant in the history of that particularly. What has this series meant to you as a coach and the rivalry that has been with Arizona? And then in terms of future scheduling, you had Stanford and Oregon State this year. They had UCLA. What would the conversations be like to potentially reignite the series in the future?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I would like to play. I don't know what their schedule looks like in future years, but we would definitely like to play. Like I said, 27 times we've played in the last 14 years. We would like to keep it going. We've got all kinds of openings on our schedule. We would like to stay West as much as possible. They have probably the same feeling since they travel a lot now with their new league.

So hopefully, we can play some time, but it has been a great series. As I mentioned, Sean did a heck of a job for a long time and now Tommy's doing a great job. So it's been a good series and we would sure like to continue it.

Q. Across college basketball we're seeing more teams follow the football footprint of adding a GM to help with revenue share and NIL and recruiting. Do you envision expanding your staff to that kind of a position or who does it right now for you guys with that coming up?

DANA ALTMAN: Oh, our staff's big enough. We have a couple guys that work that. But we've got plenty of staff. We just need to get better at what we do. Like, every staff wants to improve, I don't think you ever sit there and go, Man, we're doing everything we need to do. You're always looking to improve the way you approach things, the way you do things.

This year our challenges were scouting and logistics of getting everywhere. I thought our staff did a great job. Revenue sharing and the things that are coming down the road are going to create some new things. But we've got a lot of experience on our staff and we've delegated some of those responsibilities to guys and they're just going to have to do a good job with it.

Q. When the national conversation being about the sport and the tournament is about expansion, possibly to 76, and where exactly those additional teams will go on either the 16 or the 11 and 12 lines, I think how you and Arizona performed yesterday in throttling small conference teams is going to be an example for



commissioners who want to change the ratio of AQ's to at-larges from the big leagues, do you feel like the Power 6 are playing just at a different level right now?

DANA ALTMAN: I don't know. I don't think you can make that assumption on one year. Right now some of the smaller schools have a little bit of a problem with some of their better players trying to move up, which creates some of that imbalance. But the expansion question, I think everybody will talk about it, I don't know if there is a right or a wrong answer. There are a lot of teams that can get on a roll late and it makes it really interesting. You see that in conference tournaments. So, if they expand, I think there will be a lot of coaches that are happy because it gives guys more opportunities to play in the tournament. And if you look at it, some of the rational is we've got 365 schools playing Division-I basketball and only 68 qualify. And if you look at some of the other sports, the percentages are much different in those teams get to go to bowls or whatever. So, no, we'll see how the expansion goes. I don't really have a strong opinion one way or another.

Q. It's not every day that one of your proteges gets a head coaching job inside the conference. Just wanted your reaction to Darian getting the job in Bloomington and what your thoughts are now of facing him here in the future?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, first of all, I'm really happy for he and his family. D-Rock came to work for me, he was just getting married to Ashley and they started their family, he was with me for 12 years at Creighton. So he's a really good basketball coach, really energetic, great basketball mind. He'll do a tremendous job for Indiana. Our league just got a little better, because he's really good. And Mike was really good, I don't mean it in that regard. I just, I know that Darian's really good. And when somebody works with you for 12 years, you really get a good feel for how they pick things up, how they relate to people, how they relate to the players. And in my opinion, for whatever that's worth, I just think he's really good. I think he's really talented. I think he works really hard. He's got a wonderful family. I think he'll represent Indiana and the Big Ten really well.

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