

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Vanderbilt

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Vanderbilt Commodores Coach Mark Byington Duke Miles Chandler Bing Jalen Washington

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by our Vanderbilt student-athletes. Duke Miles, Chandler Bing and Jalen Washington. We will open it up for questions.

Q. This is for the group. It seems to be a common theme in recent games that you guys have -- not necessarily you guys, but opponents have gotten out to a hot start or are hitting a lot of their shots, more than average, and then slowly regressing to the mean. A lot of the time that can result in you guys falling into deficits early on. I wanted to know how you guys keep your composure and keep your confidence in these sometimes slow starts?

DUKE MILES: Yeah, obviously you know, like you said, in the last few games we've gotten off to a slow start, and our opponent has been on a good start. We weather the storm and stay the course.

Obviously teams make tough shots or they make a couple of open shots or we miss a couple of assignments. You can't get mad, because it's a game of runs.

So, you know, we knew that their runs were going to start, and ours eventually were going to start, too. So win the game and weathering the storm, we'll be okay and we'll be all right.

CHANDLER BING: I have to say relying on the work that we put in throughout the season and playing together. We know teams will go on runs, might have hot starts, but that's when you know we really got to rely on each other,



stay connected, and just be ready to punch back and play aggressive.

JALEN WASHINGTON: Yeah, just piggybacking off what the guys were saying. Staying together, staying connected, weathering the storm, and just knowing that it's a long game. We try to think about the game in four-minute increments, so we just try to stay together and win those little segments of the game.

Q. I'll ask this to Duke. I know you guys are probably getting ready for your game as the Nebraska game was going on. I'm sure you probably heard the Nebraska game with the crowd yesterday. They'll probably have a similar crowd tomorrow. What's it like playing in a supposedly neutral -- supposed to be a neutral environment and the other team has 10,000 fans?

DUKE MILES: Like Coach said, we're going to treat it like a road game. You know, obviously like you said, it's a neutral site, but they have more fans. You know, who all is going to be here for us is going to be here for us, and that's all that matters. We aren't going to pay attention to who is out in the crowd. We got to play a ballgame. We're here to win and advance to the next round.

Q. Duke, I know you were committed to A&M there for a little bit. What attracted you to kind of Bucky Ball in that time and what got you to Vanderbilt? Are you surprised they've been able to make it this far?

DUKE MILES: Yeah, obviously I committed to a few teams in the summer. Obviously what drew me to Bucky Ball is I have a long history with Bucky. I played against him in the championship in high school. Just being an Alabama kid, just kind of understand the connection there.

I kind of looked at the roster construction, and I didn't want that style of play, and I felt like Vanderbilt was a better fit for me. Being in Tennessee, you know, it was closer to home. Obviously I lost my grandmother. There was a lot of tragedy going on. The support system being there and the way the Coaches approach it. I felt like Vanderbilt was a better option for me.

When I saw the guys coming in, freshmen like Chandler Bing and J Wash and AK Okereke and other guys, and



watching Tanner step up and Tyler Nickel. Just shout out to the whole team. Just watching I just knew that we was going to make a deep run. The job is not done yet. We still have more to go.

Q. Since you've known Bucky Ball for so long, how much is that built for -- that style of play built for tournament play?

DUKE MILES: You know, it's different. He call it controlled chaos. Either way, you can be up 20 or down 20, but he always can keep you in the game. It's very different just to see Bucky Ball, because it's a different style of play.

I salute to A&M. That's a hard-working team, and I just want to salute my hat to them. Thank you.

Q. Going down the line against Jalen, Chandler, and Duke, it's been referenced the Florida game, Nebraska, Fred Hoiberg just mentioned it. Last week's victory over the Gators, what went so well for Vanderbilt that sort of shows you guys at your best?

JALEN WASHINGTON: I feel like we were locked in on both sides of the court. Defensively we had guys that were being incredibly disruptive. Duke was a head of that. TT was also a head of that. Chandler Bing was a head of that. Offensively we all got going. Me, Dev were going, making a lot of shots.

I feel like when that's going on, that's when Vanderbilt is at its best.

CHANDLER BING: Yeah, I would definitely say big thing for us, obviously is quick turnaround, but I feel like we had a very good prep for them, and we knew how the game went earlier in the season, so we were playing with a chip on your shoulder and wanted to come out and really put the nation on notice.

But kind of like J-Wash said, I felt like we were locked in on both sides of the ball especially defensively. We just stuck to the game plan and what we knew could do to kind of hold them, because they have a very great team over there.

Just playing together and being aggressive and having like an edge to us.

DUKE MILES: Yeah. You know, like you said, piggyback on what the guys said. Arguably Florida had the best front court in the nation, so you know, playing those guys, I tip my hat to my big man. We're not the biggest out there, but we got the heart.

You know, they go in there, they bang against Tennessee, they bang against Florida. Those big, tough guys who screen and seal all night. When the guys come out there and be aggressive on the offensive end, like I tell J-Wash, Dev, AK, man, y'all shoot ya'll's shots. Of course, me, TT, Bing, try to get our shots, but when you guys are aggressive, it make our team look totally different.

Q. You are a great free-throw shooting team. How much do you pride yourselves on it? Is there any extra emphasis? What's led to it?

DUKE MILES: Yeah, I think it's an emphasis that started in the practice in the summer. Obviously, you know, teams shoot free-throws in practice, but I think we shoot the most free-throws during practice. During water breaks, guys don't even get water sometimes. We're shooting free-throws even in the drills. When drills in, Coach is, like, shoot free-throws. We try to make five out of six every time. So that's one thing we like to run, because free-throws are very important.

Q. If you guys have had the chance to watch Nebraska film in the last 24 hours, I don't know if you have, but what do you think they do well, and how are you preparing for this match-up tomorrow?

JALEN WASHINGTON: Of course, yeah, we've definitely got to watch some film on Nebraska. They shoot the ball incredibly well. They move well off the ball, and I feel like those are things that we're going to have to be locked in for for the action and just be tied in defensively.

CHANDLER BING: I definitely say, like, we've had quick turnarounds as well, so we kind of know how to deal with those when prepping for a team.

They like to be physical on defense and hit, so that's something we kind of try to pride ourselves in playing hard and hitting first. That's definitely going to be a big focus for the game for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all very much. We are now joined by Vanderbilt Head Coach Mark Byington. Let's open up with a statement from Coach and then get to questions.

MARK BYINGTON: Obviously, you're always excited when you get a chance to advance. We had a test in the first round against McNeese. I didn't think we played our best. I think coming into the game I thought we were playing at a high level, but the fact that we're going to hang on to right now is we showed resiliency in that game to be able to pull that out and really played well probably the last 25 minutes.

Getting ready for Nebraska, I spent the entire night last night and even most of the morning this morning studying them. A terrific basketball team. Defensively they're elite. They just don't make any mistakes. They cover for each other. Their scheme is good. They take away actions.

Scoring against them is extremely difficult. On the offensive end I think they have a true identity. They know exactly what they're looking for, who they're looking for. They find good shots. You know, it's a quick study, but at the same time, I'm very impressed with them.

I know it's going to be a hard-fought game, hard environment. We're anticipating that, but we are excited. We're excited about the challenge and excited to go against them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Obviously neutral -- you guys had a great year in Atlantis and get to the SEC Final. How would you evaluate the way your team handled true road, because of course, as you told me yesterday, you think this will be a road game?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I think it's neutral by name only. This is going to be a road game. I heard reports. They said it was even better than the home games in Nebraska, the noise, the environment.

I've got an experienced team and we're going to lean on that. You have to be very connected. When you are playing in a hostile crowd or a great crowd or an enthusiastic crowd, we have to be really connected as a team.

The great thing about being in our league is you have to do that multiple times in a year. Playing at Arkansas, we did not handle that well. Tough environment. But you go to these other places, Auburn, we did well; Tennessee, we did well; Kentucky wasn't as good.

I think we can lean on the experience of us playing in a crowd like this and the style of game we have to do to be successful. It won't be new to our guys, but if you told me a week ago we would be in the NCAA Tournament and we're going to have probably 98% of the other team's fans there, I would have said, where are we going and who are we playing against?

Nebraska, it's impressive that they're following their team like that.

Q. Kind of playing off that a little bit, how aware were

you? You were getting ready for your game as all of that was happening, but how aware were you of that crowd, and how can a crowd like that at a neutral site affect a game?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, the neutral part of it we just take out. It's a road game against a team with a dominant crowd. I really did not know. Actually Andy Katz walked in and told me it was one of the best opening round environments he's ever seen with a team. My question is him was, I said is there any black and gold in there? He smiled at me, and that was not the answer I wanted.

I knew it was predominant red color in there. My assistants, we talked about it. There's a couple of things you have to do different. There are some signals and calls and handling runs and things like that you have to do a little bit different. At the same time it's game No. 36 for us, and we know who we are. We know what we got to do. It adds on to the challenge, but our main focus is trying to do good against the team and not worry about the crowd.

Q. You guys have faced a lot of really good shooters in the SEC this year. How do you contain a guy like Pryce Sandfort tomorrow?

MARK BYINGTON: He's impressive. Troy got off to a good start yesterday, and Sandfort broke the game open. Making five threes and some of them felt like they were four-point shots, I think they really not just changed the momentum, but gave other guys confidence.

We've gone against some other good ones, but he's at the top of the list. He's as good as there is. He gets it off quick. They do schemes for him. They find him. There is ways that the guys on the team know where he is on the court. Transition, he usually finds a couple in there.

When somebody is that good, you could tell it's a well-coached team because the Coach finds him shots, and the guys on the team find him shots. You get him shots, he's making them.

Sandfort, he's really impressive.

Q. You touched on Nebraska's defense a little bit earlier, but obviously they run a no middle scheme where they force a lot of contested three-pointers. Over half of their opponent's shots are from beyond the arc. You guys tend to be pretty familiar with that. You shoot a lot of threes as well, about a 44% clip, and pretty efficiently so. I was just curious how well-prepared you guys feel to face this defensive scheme considering your offensive style of play?

MARK BYINGTON: That's impressive. I've never had somebody ask me -- knows what a no middle scheme is. Did you play basketball? All right. That's still impressive.

They do multiple things on defense. Their ball screen coverage, it kind of starts there. They put two on the ball, and they're just not letting you do anything on the ball screen.

We call them tags. Some people call them middle guy. They're so good covering behind the ball screen, and then they rotate out. They communicate well. This is what you're talking about. You go baseline, you get swallowed up. They do takeaway middle. They do multiple things.

The scheme is great. Sometimes as a coach you can have a great scheme, but your guys can't execute it, and then they got everything going. We've played against some really good defensive teams this year. Florida and Tennessee, they jump out. But this is as good as anybody we've seen.

Scoring against them is going to be tough. Like I said, last night I tried to figure out some weaknesses. Couldn't find any. This morning I tried to figure out some weaknesses. So hopefully we score.

Q. I'll ask about your defense. How would you rate your own team defensively over the course of the season, and what you came into this year wanting to see, have you seen it?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I think people always want to talk about differences in teams from year one to year two. The difference -- the main difference on our team on the offensive end is the way we pass the ball. So we're different from last year, because I think we find other guys.

But the bigger difference in that is our defense improvement. Last year we were ranked last in the SEC in defense. We were 16. This year a number, whatever stats you want to look at, four, five, six, seven, our defense can be a strength of ours and not something we have to hide.

There's a couple guys. When you see the steal guys, you see Duke Miles getting his steals, you see Tyler Tanner getting his steals. They do a great job getting to the ball. There's other guys like AK Okereke, he is tremendous for us on defense, his communication, his versatility, and what he can do.

Then Jalen Washington has been really good for us on defense too. I think it's been a huge benefit for ours of fixing mistakes, of blocking shots, of covering guys, doing things like that.

Sometimes when you're playing another really good defensive team, your focus and kind of attention, some are as good as your defense. I know when I coached against Tony Bennett, you are sitting there sometimes praying he can get 45 points, and then sometimes the best way to do it is you're not going to score anyway what you focus on, try to keep them from scoring.

Hopefully our defense is up to their defense tomorrow.

Q. Coach, you guys have been in hostile environments before. I would imagine it takes a sense of mental fortitude to succeed in environments like that. How have you seen this team grow mentally throughout the season and up to this point?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, you learn along the way. I think one thing we try to do as a team is we learn from mistakes and keep growing. The season is so long, and we've had situations this year, whether it was an approach, a scheme, a scout, a whatever we did wrong, and there's times where on the road we learned.

When we played at Arkansas this year, we were not connected. So you have to be. That's our communication, and that's what everybody is going to be on the same page. You learn from that.

We came back in film session, and I opened it up to the guys. We talked about how we didn't handle the team, we didn't handle the environment. Then we went into different approaches, we played other teams on the road that had those types of environments, and we had better outings. Sometimes you have really successful ones and won the games.

I think we've learned along the way of what we've got to be like.

Q. I wanted to ask you, Nebraska, double-digit offensive rebounds yesterday. They forced 20-17 turnovers. What's the instruction to your players to limit the number of turnovers and close off defensive possessions against a team that really showed their muscle against Troy yesterday?

MARK BYINGTON: What was the first part you said? Nebraska doubled --

Q. Double-digit offensive rebounds.

MARK BYINGTON: Oh, double-digit. You get to these tournament games. Everybody wants to make it real complicated, and really there's going to be three things that

are going to dictate almost every single game. You mentioned two of them. It's turnovers.

We've been one of the best in the country at taking care of the ball. We weren't yesterday, but we'll be better than that.

The other thing is the rebounds, and offensive rebounds are huge and keeping the other team off to get (indiscernible) opportunities are huge. Then the other thing is defense. Your offense might come and go, and I wouldn't be surprised if the game tomorrow is in the 60s or low 70s. We got to be able to play either way, but you don't overcomplicate the game. It's going to be to be defense, rebounding, and turnovers, whatever games are on today. Probably the same whatever games are playing tomorrow, probably the same.

Q. When you have a one-day prep like this, I would imagine -- or how much percentage would you say is getting your guys to their best level? Because I imagine when they're at their best, you have them against anyone, versus preparing for this specific opponent?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, you learn along the way in coaching, and sometimes you want to overcomplicate things and try to be in the perfect game plan, but really, you want to bring your guys in mentally and physically at their best.

So the mental part of it, you know, if you overcomplicate it, they're overthinking and not playing on instincts. The physical part of it is we had a hard-fought game. We had a hard-fought weekend last weekend. We're still -- I don't know what this is going to be tomorrow. This might be five games and -- what's the math, Jacob? Five games, eight days? No, that's not right. Five and nine? Five games in nine days.

We haven't practiced a lot here lately, but we've been more film work. One-day prep to get ready for a hard team, we want to make sure that our guys understand the main important things and be able to go that way and play hard and take it as it comes.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about the size discrepancy. Obviously Nebraska isn't necessarily one of the better offensive rebounding teams in the country according to statistics, but yesterday looked really strong, like the other reporter mentioned. They are pretty big on the interior. Do you foresee maybe having to get some Jayden Leverett minutes considering that there could be some foul trouble from the usual go-to guys?

MARK BYINGTON: Well, don't jinx us with foul trouble. But, you know, one thing that we can do is we can go big with size. We can match it. One of the benefits of -- this has probably helped us out in the long run, but not at the time. When Duke Miles got hurt, we had six games, and we had to go to big lineup. We had Tyler Nickel at the two and AK Okereke at the three and Jalen Washington and Devin together, and Leverett got some experience. Now we're comfortable with that.

We'll see how the game goes, whether we need to adjust to them or they need to adjust to us. Sometimes there's things you don't predict that you can't really guess for now, but we're ready for the moment. Leverett is ready to play. Jalen Washington didn't play a whole lot yesterday. I know he's excited about playing tomorrow. The big fellows will be banging on the inside. I mean, it's college basketball now. The size, the way things are going, Big Ten is a physical league. SEC is a physical league.

We're anticipating that tomorrow.

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