

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Duquesne vs BYU

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CHI Health Center

## Duquesne Dukes Coach Keith Dambrot - Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Head Coach of the Dukes, we're going to ask him to make a statement, and then we'll go to questions.

KEITH DAMBROT: We're really excited to be here, obviously. It's been a long time coming for Duquesne basketball. Pretty personal for me obviously when my dad played from 1950 to '54.

Ironically, our pinch-hit SID, Dave Saba, showed me a box score. The last time Duquesne played Brigham Young was in 1952 in the Holiday Tournament in New York, and my dad was in the box score. He missed two free-throws. He made two. But I'm going to have to get on him about that in my prayers.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

### Q. Coach, what's this week been like for you?

KEITH DAMBROT: Like any other week for me. You know, pretty high-strung guy to begin with. Just go to work every single day, try to be the best I can be, get our team ready to play, try to get enough sleep at my age to make sure that I'm on my A-game.

Kind of ironic that Creighton is in Pittsburgh and we're in Omaha. Two small Catholic schools. Hopefully our fans will get behind them and your fans will get behind us.

**Q. I asked this of the players. I'll ask it of you too. You endured in the last three games of the A-10 tournament in each game at least one extended scoring lull that you had to fight through. How did you manage to do that? How did you manage to survive those lulls that you had during the trip to Brooklyn? How do you avoid such a lull against a team like BYU that can really score?**



KEITH DAMBROT: Well, it's a good and a bad thing. We've pretty much done it all season long. We've had our offensive inefficiencies at times, but it's made us better defensively, and we've known that we can win despite playing poor offense at times.

I think the last game in particular I think we just got a little bit tired, and we expend so much energy defensively, and we're in the hunt to really just make little plays and energy-generating behaviors, that we're trying to win games that way.

As ironic as it sounds, I didn't even know we only made 1 out of 19 shots. I just looked at the scoreboard and saw that we were ahead, and that's kind of my mindset as well.

### Q. How would you describe what BYU does so well offensively, and what's going to be the major key for your team as a defense?

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, the closest thing that I have seen to BYU is BCU in our league. Very similar. Three-point oriented, very fluid, challenging because they can stretch you out, but they can also score inside with the big guy. Then the other big guy is a pick-and-pop guy, which puts pressure on you as well. Solid point guard, big and strong.

Obviously an older team. I think their average age is 22.7 or something like that.

The hardest thing about them is they're mentally tough and physically tough. And everybody talks about their offense, but they're one of the best defensive teams in the country.

You can tell that Coach Pope has been around Coach Pitino because they play like an Eastern-type team, a tough, hard-nosed basketball team. It's going to be a challenge, but very similar to some of the teams that we've played throughout the year, including like a Richmond, who uses a lot of that dribble-handoff type thing.

We've seen a lot of the things that they've done. It's just a matter now of making sure that we're the tougher team in the game. Because I think that's probably an underrated thing with Brigham Young is they're tough and hard-nose and throw forearms into your chest and test your



toughness. And I think that's something people don't talk a lot about with them.

**Q. Jimmy gets dismissed from VCU, and he thinks he's never going to play basketball again. You decided to give him a second chance. You've spoken about that, but I'm curious as to why you decided to give him a second chance.**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, Mike Rhoades, who was a former coach of VCU, and I are good friends. I did my due diligence and homework with Jimmy, and Mike swore by him as a human being.

Then, look, one of the reasons Jimmy came to Duquesne was because I went through a similar situation. Obviously different circumstances, but we kind of seeked redemption together. We hit it off immediately because of my issues and his issues.

I haven't had any issues with Jimmy Clark. He's been a great guy to be around on a daily basis, and I'm happy that people are willing to give young people an opportunity when they make mistakes because I certainly made some.

**Q. You told me on Monday that during the games in the Atlantic 10 tournament it was some of the least nervous you've been. Do you anticipate that remaining the same this weekend?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I've had a whirlwind of emotions, but I looked around the arena many, many times, which I hardly ever do or have ever done. I think when you go through some hard times, you start to change your perspective as to what's important and what isn't important.

We put in our hard work on a daily basis, and now it's time to enjoy the moment, which I haven't done a very good job of throughout my career. I know I've talked to Shaka Smart about this because he was with me at Akron. A lot of times in this business the lows outweigh the highs. All I've tried to do now is try to enjoy the highs and not worry about the lows.

**Q. With two major developments within the basketball program -- one, making the tournament and, two, your announcement -- how concerned were you, if at all, that there would be more attention on you since your announcement than the team?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I've never wanted it to be about me. By the same token, I wanted those guys to be 100 percent sure what they were dealing with in the future.

So there's never any great time to announce something

like that. I thought about doing it after the Davidson game earlier in the year, and then I just didn't. Dave Harper, our athletic director, thought this was a good time to do it.

But this isn't about me. It's about a bunch of guys that withstood an 0-5 start in the league, showed enough resilience to power their way back. And that's what it's about.

**Q. You guys have become known for your defense. It's your guys' calling card. How much of a hand has Jimmy Clark had in creating that defensive identity for you guys?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Talking about the Pittsburgh stealer. He steals the ball at the highest rate of anybody that I have ever had, which sometimes drives me bananas because he will take some risks.

But the one thing that I know as a coach is when people have ability, you have to let them loose. You don't want them to play tentatively. You have to live with the good and the bad sometimes.

That's one thing LeBron taught me when I coached him, was you got to let guys like that loose, and that's what I have done with Jimmy.

**Q. When you look back at the send-off you guys received yesterday from the city, the alumni, the fans, how much did that mean to you? How gratifying was that to see given all you've been through with this program?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Again, I have a little different perspective. I'm just happy for the city, for Duquesne and their donors and the alumni and the school and the board of trustees, and especially the president and the athletic director because Duquesne has been investing in basketball for a while now and hasn't had any results.

At some point that gets old and discouraging and self-fulfilling. You want to quit or drop basketball or you want to get out of the A-10 or the A-10 doesn't want you. Thank God Bernadette wasn't like that. It's just nice to know that when they invested in the gutting the arena and all the money they put into the program that they got some results out of it.

I didn't really view it as much for me or even for the players, although it's an unbelievable deal for both of us, but just for all the ghosts of not being able to play in the NCAA Tournament for 5,000 years.

**Q. What did you see in Dae Dae that made you want to**



## **bring him into the program?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I'm going to come back to that.

I have to also mention this young man in the front row, Ray Goss, he has been our radio announcer for 57 years. He is 87 years old, and his brain is way better than my brain right now.

For him to be able to -- and he wasn't there when my dad was there. I don't know why. He should have been doing it when he was 13 years old or whatever. But for him to be able to call an NCAA Tournament game to me is a great thing. I'm happy for him.

To answer your question now about Dae Dae Grant, why I decided to bring him in. I'm from Northeast Ohio, Akron, Ohio. Dae Dae is from Lorain, Ohio. Very similar type communities. The rubber companies moved out of Akron. The automobile industry moved out of Lorain. We've made our living with Northeast Ohio guys throughout the years, all the years I've coached.

We recruited him out of high school and didn't get him. He went to Miami of Ohio. Look, most of those guys have played well in the MAC, and leagues like that play well in our league. So we knew we had a good player in him.

**Q. Speaking of the ghosts, your guys are playing for a campus that hasn't seen an NCAA game in 47 years. A lot of them are playing for you, playing for the staff that may replace you. How are they about playing for themselves, and how does that kind of help them through a lot of this?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I think the biggest thing with this group that I've noticed is just their togetherness, their brotherhood. I got Dr. Joe Carr in front who is a sports psychologist that's been with me since I was at St. Vincent-St. Mary. That's a long time. He's helped build our brotherhood.

This group is particularly tight through good, bad, ugly, great. They've stuck together. Like every family, we have our issues, but they've done an unbelievable job of just rallying around each other.

Really in this business the teams that are player-driven win, and the teams that are coach-driven don't. That's the biggest thing with this group.

**Q. How close is Tre to being able to give it a go, and will he be able to play Thursday?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Tre Williams, you mean? If it was up

to him, he would play, but we're definitely not going to play him. It's a threat to his professional career. So we're going to keep him out. But he wants to play. That will not happen.

**Q. Going back to August, Keith, did you feel that there was something special about this team going back all the way to the start of the season?**

KEITH DAMBROT: So you never know really how teams develop, what's going to happen throughout the year, how it all plays out. I think it took us a while to figure out what the proper niche was for our team.

We tried to play a little faster early in the year, and now we kind of pick and choose. We've always been -- I've always been a defensive-oriented coach first, but I've been an inside-out coach most of my career. This team is not an inside-out team, so it took a while for us to figure out how it all pieced together.

To answer the question, look, we thought we were going to be competitive. We thought we could play with everybody in our league, which is people don't understand how good the Atlantic 10 is. I have been in college basketball most of my life, and I didn't even know.

The one thing that people don't understand is the coaching at our level, you're talking about guys like Frank Martin and Archie Miller. We had Bob McKillop, and now his son Matt McKillop. You're talking about Fran Dunphy. You're talking about Hall of Fame coaches. This is a league that is basketball-centric and spends a lot of money on basketball and has a commissioner that cares about basketball. It's a tough league.

So you can be very good and not be very good in the league, so it's a difficult -- we beat George Washington, I think who finished last in our league, and we had to squeak by in the last regular season game of the year.

That's how good of league it is. They have good players and good coaches. It's an unbelievable league. To say, well, we knew we were going to be here, nobody in that league knows they're going to be here because it's such a difficult league.

I'll say it, it's the most undervalued league in college basketball. People don't know about it, but nobody really wants to play teams in the Atlantic 10. You have Chris Mooney, who he is an unbelievable coach. You talk about the Princeton offense. He is the Princeton offense. He played for Coach. And St. Louis, and you can go right down -- Rhode Island. You can go right down the line. It's an unbelievable league.



To answer your question, no, I didn't know exactly where we would be, but I knew we could compete.

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