

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Duquesne vs Illinois

Friday, March 22, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

**Duquesne Dukes**

**Head Coach Keith Dambrot**

**David Dixon**

**Kareem Rozier**

**Fousseyni Drame**

Media Conference



**team that likes to play in the 80s. They averaged 81 points per game. This team averages 84. How do they like to get there? How is it at all similar? How are they different from what you just played against BYU?**

KAREEM ROZIER: I would say the similarities are they want to get it by shooting a lot of threes. The difference between these two teams, Illinois likes to run. They like to get in transition.

We have prepared ourselves for that transition offense. I think if we can stop them in transition, we'll be in pretty good shape. Keeping the game in the low 60s, that's what we do.

DAVID DIXON: Kareem said it best. We've got to put our dukes up and guard. Keep them below 60.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us are David Dixon, Kareem Rozier, Fousseyni Drame from Duquesne University. We are ready for questions.

**Q. This is for all three of you. Just how do you process the emotion from a win like yesterday, and what were these last, I guess, 12 or so hours like for you in preparing for a team like Illinois?**

DAVID DIXON: It's unbelievable. I ain't going to lie to you. It's unbelievable that we're in this tournament. It's unbelievable that we've made history.

As we prepare for Illinois, we know they're a really good team. We're going to try to slow them down and play the game that we know how to play and not change anything like that.

KAREEM ROZIER: It's been great, man. Coach said it best. We have two hours to enjoy it, and then we're back to work, and that's what it was.

I'm very excited, and I think we have a good chance of beating them as long as we play our game.

FOUSSEYNI DRAME: It's March Madness, so every victory is enjoyable. Like Kareem said, after two hours after the game, that's it. We're just getting prepared for the next one.

**Q. Kareem, I'll start with you on this one. Let's start with the back court perspective. You just played a**

**Q. There was a lot of news about BYU's center observing Ramadan. You are one of three players, including your twin brother, that are doing that and doing the fasting. I'm just curious if you could go through your process throughout this whole month and what it's been like for you to prepare for games while doing that?**

FOUSSEYNI DRAME: Ramadan itself is the holiest month in Islam. Fasting is just feels different. It activates this type of energy within yourself. People that are fasting can witness it themselves. It is just a unique energy that you just feel different.

**Q. At the end of the regular season Dae Dae Grant gifted you guys custom Duquesne (indiscernible). What does that mean to you guys, and how does that gift reflect on who Dae Dae is as a person overall?**

FOUSSEYNI DRAME: It is funny. Me and my brother was talking about we've been in three different locker rooms starting with St. Peters University, going to La Salle. What Dae Dae did as one of the team -- like the team leading scorer, like, he had success. He didn't forget about his brothers. That says a lot about him individually, and that is just unique, something that you would never be able to see at that age.

He didn't think about himself. He think about everybody,



including even the manager, the coaches, everybody in the locker room.

KAREEM ROZIER: Just piggybacking off what he said, it just shows how good of character he is making sure everybody in the staff and managers, everyone got one. It just shows how bright and big his heart is because all the attention he is getting because he is so good, he still is making sure we're a part of that. I really appreciate him for that, and the whole team does as well.

**Q. I want to ask all of you about Illinois. It's a question about Illinois's offense, but specifically there's been a point in each of the last several Illinois games when they've been down, and they've just blitzed the other team and kind of overwhelmed them with a sustained run and then the game completely changed. Given their streaky nature, I guess, and how good they are when they're good, what makes you think you can stop it?**

DAVID DIXON: I would say we have significant experience in that type of thing. Teams are going to throw their best punches when they're down, and in order to be successful, you have to take those punches and dish them back as well.

It's happened to us plenty of times this season. In the A-10 Tournament we've taken punches. We've been down in games after being up by a lot. It's all about staying the course, keeping steady, don't let anything get you out of whack. If we do that and play the game we know how to play, we'll be fine.

KAREEM ROZIER: Agree with Dave. We've been doing a good job of not getting too high and not getting too low, just staying steady pace. In the tournament, like he said before, it's March, and we know we're going to get everybody's best shot.

We have come so far so now we're able to take shots, take blows from teams and recover. With all of the great leadership from the older guys and myself, I think we'll be able to recover from any shot that they throw at us.

**Q. This is for Kareem. Shannon, one of the more prolific scorers in all of basketball, he talked about the key to stopping Illinois is getting out in transition and being able to run the floor. What does Shannon do so well, not just in transition, but also on and off the ball once they get into the half court set?**

KAREEM ROZIER: He's a great one-on-one scorer. He can score at all three levels, but mainly him getting downhill in transition, he's very dangerous. I think that

getting him in the half court will help us because we're such a great half court defensive team.

**Q. I'm sure you've been asked this many times, but when you guys went through that five-game losing streak, how did you rally out of it? How low did it get in the locker room when you're losing those five after the calendar turns to January, and how did you get out of that rut?**

FOUSSEYNI DRAME: As they always say, you rather go through your tough time in the beginning than March. There are a lot of people that had very good success in the beginning of the season.

It's just that shows how good of coaching staff we have and then how strong they believe in the player and the player believe in themselves during those tough times.

DAVID DIXON: During the five-game losing streak it was -- me personally it was very low. It was a very low point for me. I was worried about if we're even going to succeed, even make it far into the tournament, but piggybacking off of what Fousseyni said, we have a great coaching staff that helped lift everybody's spirits.

We're all really good. We love each other. We're a brotherhood. This whole team is a brotherhood. Whatever we got going on, the coaches know about it. They're here to support us, and we supported each other.

Thank God we got out of that rut. We started winning games that next time. Look where it's brought us. We're in the tournament.

**Q. For Fousseyni, I wanted to ask about somebody who is 40 years older than you or so, so I don't know how much you know about him, but a lot of us learned about Ramadan and basketball and how it intersects from Hakeem Olajuwon a long time ago. Did he set sort of a standard for doing that, for honoring that, for the importance of it and all that that you are aware of? Is that something that you've learned about?**

FOUSSEYNI DRAME: Yeah, definitely. People like him that setting a bar to show kids like us that you can still practice your faith and still be at the biggest stage. Not only him. Like current player like Kyrie Irving practicing, it's something we look up to right now, and we are always telling ourselves it is possible.

**Q. This is for Dave. What are your thoughts on the potential matchup with Dain Dainja tomorrow?**

DAVID DIXON: I'm looking Ford it. He's a really good



player. I was watching the game against Morehead State. He is really strong. That's a big challenge for me, and I know I'm ready for it. I've practiced so long. I've been through a lot, and I fear no man.

**Q. Since we've got you, I want to ask about repping the A-10. We've got an A-10 team, Chicago Loyola. How good is the league, and when you -- I think it's something like, let's say, eighth or ninth in RPI. It might not even be that high. When you hear about how the A-10 is sort of perceived compared with the so-called "big boy leagues" and all that, how do you interpret it?**

KAREEM ROZIER: I'm going to be honest. I think the A-10 is up there with every other league. Are it's stacked with great players, great coaching staff, great coaches. I feel that we can compete with any team. If you had to choose any team out of the A-10, it's always competitive. It's a very competitive league, and it feels good to be able to represent the A-10 right now and actually win games like we're doing. & hopefully keep making them proud because that's our goal, to continue to put the A-10 on the map and Duquesne on the map.

DAVID DIXON: In my opinion the A-10 is one of the best leagues. I really think it's up there, maybe even better than some of the "big boy leagues" out there. It's a very competitive league.

Anybody can win it. We weren't even up there in the league. We was, like, maybe, what, sixth?

KAREEM ROZIER: Lower.

DAVID DIXON: Lower than that. Anybody can win in our league. We have great players, great coaches. I'm proud to be a part of this. I'm proud to be able to show that I can -- that we can show that we can play ball with the big boys.

**Q. David, when you look at Domask for Illinois, No. 3, triple-double in his last game. He's had at least eight assists in the last three games. What makes him so versatile? What's the key to stopping him defensively in your eyes?**

DAVID DIXON: I think he is a do-it-all type of guy. He is a glue on the team. He is what holds the team together.

I think in order to win the game tonight -- not tonight, Saturday -- we have to make life difficult for him. We have to be all over the place, cause chaos. If we do that, the game will be in our favor.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much for

your time today.

We have the Head Coach. We're going to ask Keith to start off with a statement on his team and then we'll go to questions.

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, we're excited for the opportunity to play Illinois, which is a great program in the Big Ten. Obviously very familiar with the Big Ten being a Midwest guy growing up in Akron, Ohio.

Great coach. Strong ties with him. Good friends with Bob Huggins, who he obviously worked for. We're looking forward to the opportunity.

**Q. What are the challenges that Illinois provides you compared to the team you played yesterday?**

KEITH DAMBROT: A little different team than the team we played. We went to the tenth best offensive team in the country to the second best offensive team in the country. We're appreciative of that.

Terrence Shannon is a big challenge. Reminds me of LeBron in the open court. Thankfully not quite as good as LeBron, but pretty good.

Back down point guard, which is a little different nowadays. More isolation plays. Big guys are playing well. Pretty good shooting team. Obviously a high-scoring team.

Similar type of game plan for us. We just can't allow the game to get up into the 90s and 80s. We just have to grind it out.

**Q. When it comes to your propensity and desire to sort of play mudball as you talked about before, how do you avoid Illinois speeding you up, and are they more prone to do so than what you saw from BYU?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, I don't think it's a typical Brad Underwood type of defensive team. I think they're very good defensively, but they're not a team that gets kind of pressures you like the old Bob Huggins and the Frank Martin teams that he's had before.

They're more of a position defensive team, and they're big around the rim, and they make good plays around the rim, but they're a good defensive team, but they're not a team that takes you out of the things that you are trying to do.

**Q. You've been around a little bit. You probably agree. You've seen a lot of really good college teams. This Illinois team with its sort of positionlessness and length and these explosive runs they've had in a bunch**



**of games in a row, does it remind you of a team you have either played against or just observed this time of year?**

KEITH DAMBROT: You know what, first off, I have been around a long time. You had to remind me of that, huh? Thanks. I look that old? Really?

This time of year I really don't concentrate on who they remind me of or things like that. I just try to get prepared for the game. Clearly they have a good team. They in a great league. They have a great coach. They have great players.

With that being said, we're certainly good enough to compete with them, and we're good enough to win the game if we do the things that we need to do to win. You know, I think we surprised BYU a little bit with our toughness. I think we surprised them with our defensive intensity.

I don't think they played a game that low-scoring most of the year, and so hopefully we can surprise Illinois a little bit as well.

**Q. Hassan Drame has taken more of a back seat role this season, stepping into a leadership mentor role, not playing as many minutes. How has Hassan's guidance contributed to how the overall team is playing and the chemistry to the team?**

KEITH DAMBROT: In fairness to Hassan, he had a bad knee most of the year. He's been in a lot of big games. Made it all the way to the Elite Eight from St. Peters, which is one of the most remarkable fetes probably in college basketball history in a lot of ways.

Both those Drames are complete competitors. Tough, hard-nosed guys. Very bright, good brains, very intelligent, and well respected amongst our team. He's done an unbelievable job adapting and almost becoming a student coach for us.

**Q. You had a five-game losing streak to start the year, the calendar year. How did you get them out of that rut? What did you have to do anything or did you rely on the team? What techniques did you use to get them out of that spot?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, I didn't think that we played all that poorly during that five-game stretch, although it may appear so. We started the season at U Mass, and they were better than what people expected. They have a coach who has been to the Final Four. Tough guy.

We went to Loyola Chicago, and people didn't think they were very good, but they ended up winning our league or tying. We played Dayton at home, who is in the top 25. Then we played Richmond, who ended up tying for the league who people didn't think were very good. Then we had to go to St. Joe's, who played in the NIT, and we lost at the buzzer.

The biggest thing is straight character, and I think the reason we've done so well as of late is because we lost those games in early January, and I think a lot of people quit on us and really all we had was ourselves.

We had good enough talent that if we got it right and found the right things for our guys that we were capable of winning, and we've shown that. I think we've won nine games in a row. Maybe 10 out of 11. In the Atlantic 10 that's hard to do. Whether you are in the Big Ten, the Pac-12, or the ACC, if you win nine games in a row in your league, relatively speak approximating you're playing good basketball.

**Q. I have two questions. First, I want to know why now as far as retiring? And about your emotions, I've heard you sort of joke about how the guys don't want to let you go, but you must be experiencing conflicting emotions right now that you're trying to keep in order because you're trying to win. What are you feeling, and how hard is it?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I'm going to answer your first question. Why now? It just felt like it was the right time. It's been a hard seven years. I lost my dad during the time. We were out of the arena for two years. COVID. Wife has got breast cancer.

I just wanted to leave when I loved it still, and I made the decision before the season. That's really the reason why now.

What was the second question? The emotions?

**Q. What's going on inside?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I've been through this before. I lost my dad during the season, right before the season. My first State Championship at St. V, St. Vincent-St. Mary in Akron, I lost my mom during the regional semifinals and had to coach the Finals and semifinals and then the championship game.

I've been able to compartmentalize and really just focus on my job and my family. I have some emotional times, but I also have some good relaxed times. I feel like it's the most relaxed I've ever coached. I think once you get to this point





and you know you're not going to coach anymore, you just go out there and prepare them and know that you have done a good job with the guys, and you care about winning, and just play.

So I haven't let much bother me. I think it's helped me.

**Q. The other question is about Underwood. You mentioned your ties. What are they?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, again, I followed Bob Huggins at Akron, and Bob helped me get almost every job that I have ever gotten throughout my career, and Brad is really a disciple of Bob Huggins. We've known each other because of that. Andy Kennedy and Frank Martin and all of us are pretty much disciples.

Even though I never coached with Bob, a lot of the things we do are related to Bob. A lot of respect for him as a coach and as a human being. A little misunderstood. That's why I have great respect for Coach Underwood. I know that they're very close.

**Q. I know we've already talked a little bit about Terrence Shannon Jr., but can you walk us through your defensive assessment of him and Marcus Domask for us?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Do you want me to give away my whole game plan? It's pretty clear if you watch them. Shannon is a definite pro. Maybe a first round draft pick. I don't know. I don't know where he is on the board. I really don't look at stuff like that.

Explosive athlete. Unbelievable going to the rim in the open court. Good three ball shooter. Good toughness, good motor.

Domask we played at Bradley when he was at Bradley. Fairly familiar. A little surprising to me that he went from a three, four-man to a point guard, but he has done an unbelievable job with that.

I think the biggest thing is Coach Underwood has put the pieces together and made a really good basketball team, and I feel like the whole is even better than the parts. I got to give him a lot of credit for that because that's really what coaching is trying to take a bunch of individual guys and make them into a good team.

He may have had better talent with some other teams. I don't know for sure. You guys would know better than me. I don't follow him that closely. Certainly they're playing as a team probably better than any team he's had. That's my assessment.

**Q. Since you touched down in Brooklyn last Tuesday, you've basically spent the last week and a half alternating between hotels and arenas. It must imagine that you are down in a bubble. I'm curious what's that been like for you for someone that's experienced it before, and then for your team who are sort of just stuck together for the last week and a half?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, not only that, but we also played at George Mason and VCU where we were out Friday to Tuesday. So we had a long stretch then as well.

I mean, in a lot of ways it's really good because you have nobody else but each other so, you are pretty isolated, and you're pretty concentrated on basketball.

Two tough games on the road at George Mason and VCU and then right into the A-10 Tournament. We played well with it, so maybe we ought to stay out more often.

**Q. LeBron obviously supporting you guys on social media, and I guess he sent you guys some shoes as well. Have you heard from him personally? What's it like to have the King having your back here in the tournament?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, it would be better if he was on our team. Then we might have a little bit of an advantage, right? He would be hard to deal with.

Listen, LeBron is a great human being. He's done more for our city, Akron, for his community, education in the inner city. He cares about people that have been committed to him, and he'll never forget people that have helped him.

He likes me, but he loves Dru Joyce, who is our associate head coach. They've been best friends for forever, and he cares about us. It's nice to have him as a part of our program.

I wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for him.

**Q. Your players have talked the other day about wanting to win this tournament game for you since you had never won an NCAA Tournament game. Given the nature of your business, were you looking ahead to that second round matchup, or did you have a chance to appreciate getting that first tournament win?**

KEITH DAMBROT: You know, I don't want this to sound the wrong way or arrogant because I'm certainly not arrogant, but I only played in three of them, and we were the lower seed every single one of them. Even Bob Huggins didn't win his tournament game at Akron, so it's



not so easy when you are the lower seed.

I really don't care about any of that. My only thing is, hey, get your team ready to play and play a good basketball game. None of that ever goes through my head. I think if you think about those things as a coach, you're headed for disaster. Like, where is your next job? What's the next -- you just have to stay in the moment and make sure you're relaxed and that you convey what your team has to do to win be.

**Q. My question was Jimmy Clark seemed like he has kind of been in a rut shooting-wise. He did shoot 2 of 17 in that game against VCU, and really only 4 of 12 and 0 of 3 from the three-point line against BYU. Have you given him any advice or just have you let him go and let him gain that confidence back himself?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, did you see the four or five previous games? You have to be foolish to talk about -- I mean, guys go through that all the time. We're at Creighton's arena. Even Kyle Korver probably went through that, one of the greatest shooters of all time. I'm not worried about Jimmy Clark. He's the least of my worries.

He'll show up, and regardless of what he shot, his team won, and so I'm not worried. He made two big plays at the end of last night's game. That's all you can ask of a guy.

He tries hard every single play. He'll put the ball in the basket.

**Q. You mentioned Illinois playing as a whole better than their parts. The parts are a couple of all-league guys. What is it about the whole that you have observed as connecting so well for them right now?**

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, they share the ball. I think that's the first thing that jumps out at you. They've got a lot of complementary parts that fit well together. Then they have the one great, great player.

I think they have a lot of guys that are more talented than probably they get credit for, like Hawkins, for instance. You don't hear a lot about him, but he does a lot of good things. They have a deep bench that you probably don't hear too much about because the main guys get most of the -- but I do think the biggest thing that has made them better is that the big guys played better, and he's played more, which gives them a legitimate chance to win the national championship. I think without him, they would have very little chance to win the national championship.

You have to have somebody dominating that can score the

ball inside at times. Otherwise, you're relying on just slashing to the rim and jump-shooting. He gives them an opportunity to be better.

You can see Coach playing him more and more and more and more.

**Q. Kareem talked about how last night after the win you guys took a couple of hours to enjoy it before moving on and focusing on Illinois. From a coaching standpoint, how do you shift the players' focus when emotions are so high, and you have to kind of get them back on track to get ready for another opportunity like this?**

KEITH DAMBROT: I mean, you have to be ignorant if you can't get focused, right? That game is over. You've got to get to the next one, and these guys are bright guys. We have some competitive guys in the room. I'm not worried about it at all. I just -- more than being focused I just want them to be relaxed. I think that's more important.

The focus will be there. You're playing on the biggest stage in college basketball, so they're not going to have any trouble with focus. It's going to be, hey, can I relax enough to play a good game?

**Q. I'm not sure this is completely fair because I asked you why you're leaving and you didn't mention this as part of it, but what's your disposition towards the changes in the game and the sport and how fast it's moving? You know what I'm referring to, NIL, and all that, portal. And are you glad to not be swimming in it anymore after this?**

KEITH DAMBROT: That's a fair question. It's really a question that we need to answer. I don't love everything about what I see in college basketball, but there are some things I like. I mean, I think the players deserve to be paid. I don't know if there's a better system than this. I'm sure there is.

The thing I don't like, I try to treat my players like I would my own son, who is a professional athlete. I don't like the fact that guys can just quit so quickly. I don't think that really teaches them much.

I think it teaches them to quit. Some guys should leave, but other guys shouldn't. I think that's the part I don't really like, and I think the problem with being able to do it multiple times... two, three, four, and really right now unlimited... I don't think that's great. It's not good for anybody. It's not good for college basketball. It's not good for fans. It's not good for the student-athlete, and it certainly isn't good for coaches.



I like the fact that they make money. I wish there was a way to -- I'm a former financial advisor, so I wish there was a way to put it in a trust, so they understand that this is money that needs to be used in the future to help their lives and not spend it all. As we all know, adults don't do a very good job with money. Young people certainly aren't going to do a very good job with money.

So I wish the system was a little bit better for them in that regard. So, yeah, I don't love everything about it, and I think it's -- first and foremost, it's not great for the student-athlete in all regards.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

