

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Drake vs Missouri

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Missouri Tigers

Tamar Bates

Mark Mitchell

Caleb Grill

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: University of Missouri Tigers are with us. We have on the dais Tamar Bates, Mark Mitchell, Caleb Grill. Questions, please.

Q. Mark, two questions: Number one, are you 100%? Number two, what's the difference in playing a team that their biggest guy is 6'8" verse playing some of the bigger front courts you've seen this year?

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, I'll be ready to go tomorrow. Yeah, it will definitely be a little different. Obviously just playing in the SEC, you know, probably the most athletic league in the country for the last few months. It's probably going to be a little different. Probably going to see different types of defenses and things like that.

We know they're a really good team, really good defensive team. So we're just ready for the different schemes, different defenses that they might throw at us even though they might be a little smaller in stature.

Q. We've kind of talked about playing close to home, but now that you're here, what's it like to play closer to home? Obviously for you, Caleb, playing in your hometown.

CALEB GRILL: It's a true blessing to be able to come back home. It's something I have not been able to do is come back here in my college career, so for all the miles that my family has traveled going to games, I'm just happy that it's real close to them and right in their backyard.

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, I think it's just kind of crazy. My mom has been talking about how much AAU basketball we



played in Wichita growing up. It's crazy that we're back in Wichita. It's a full-circle moment. Three Kansas kids playing in Kansas. So I think it's pretty cool.

TAMAR BATES: Yeah, for me I'm just grateful for the opportunity obviously to be part of a tournament, but it's a whole other thing just to be closer to home.

All I've ever done my whole life in Wichita is play basketball, so it's just great to be in college and still doing the same thing in Wichita at the highest level and on the biggest stage. It's definitely a great opportunity for ourselves and our families to be able to come and watch us play.

Q. Everybody knows the difference in pace of these teams. Drake's guys were saying they can't get sped up. What goes into attempting to speed a team up? How do you kind of force the tempo in your favor?

TAMAR BATES: For us we're more so just going to be more so focused on just being solid on the defensive end. I mean, obviously there will be points in the game and opportunities for us to speed them up and disrupt the pace that they try to play with and obviously dragging their offense out and to shoot it at the end of the shot clock.

I mean, we're not going to try to do anything outside of what we've done all year to speed teams up. We'll be solid defensively and take away what we can. Obviously they have some things that they're really good at on the offensive end that they've stuck to.

So, I mean, for us it's just about doing what we do.

CALEB GRILL: Yeah, like he said right there, do what we do. That's what we're going to do. We've been playing fast all we're. We turn people over. That's what we're going to do tomorrow.

We have to be able to stay solid on the defensive end throughout deep shot clock situations and then finish them up with rebounding.

Q. Coach McCollum, Drake's coach, talked about kind of their lack of depth. They only play eight, nine players, where you guys can go 18 strong, like you



say. How much does that depth kind of give you an advantage in a game like this and a tournament like this?

TAMAR BATES: Like you said, we've talked about being 18 strong, and I mean, we just see our depth as something that equips us for tournament play. We're a team that's built for any kind of tournament and obviously March Madness.

It's an advantage and something that we are grateful to have and obviously to have everybody be healthy and available to play. I mean, we'll just try to use our depth and obviously just wear them down and do what we can to just keep the pace of the game and do what we do on a defensive side of the ball and offensive side and just having fresh bodies in the game at all times.

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, I think our depth is something we use to our advantage, and obviously with the contrast and playing styles of the two teams, obviously at time we're going to probably try to speed the game up, and they're going to try to slow it down. I think having fresh bodies in there, like Tamar said, is going to be something that we can use to our advantage.

CALEB GRILL: I think that's what makes it a difficult matchup for us is because we can play so many guys. I think it's helped us throughout the year. You see games where guys may not play as much and then they come in and they have a really big impact. I think Marquez Warrick and Jacob Crews can come in and spark energy for us. Then we have other guys like Marcus Allen and T.O. Barrett who has come in in key situations throughout the season.

We have multiple guys that we can rely on on the bench. I think that's one of our strengths, and it makes us who we are.

Q. Tamar, is there any different mindset for you going into the SEC tournament? Do you feel like you played any more aggressively or any differently than you have all season long?

TAMAR BATES: I wouldn't necessarily say it was a different mindset. I was able to be a lot more aggressive just from listening to what the coaches and the team need me to do just as a leader and just as somebody that plays a good amount of minutes in the game, but I mean, going into it, I just wanted to get some good momentum from myself and for the team going into this tournament, and some shots were able to fall, but I definitely was a little bit more aggressive.

In terms of my specific mentality, nothing really changed. It was just about trying to win the basketball game.

Q. Tamar and Caleb, we kind of talked to Drake about their fairy tale a little bit going from D2 guys to D1. You guys obviously were on that O-18 SEC team last year. What's this year been like getting Missouri back to the place that you guys have talked it belongs and being in the NCAA Tournament?

CALEB GRILL: I think when you look at last year, you look at if we really paid attention to you are our team last year, you saw all the injuries, starting with John Tonje who just got released the other day, was a Second Team All-American.

Unfortunately I got hurt with my wrist injury, and we had multiple other injuries that happened throughout the course of the season. So last year didn't define who we were as a team. Last year this is kind of how I expected our last year team to be this year.

We're healthy this year, and it's shown that Mizzou has always been in a good place. I think with Coach Gates no matter the circumstances, he's the leader for the university, he's the leader for the state. We're grateful to be a part of a coach like that. We're just glad that we're able to have a piece of history in Mizzou basketball, and we're glad that we could do that and create excitement for the fans again.

TAMAR BATES: Yeah, man, whenever a question like this is asked, I speak to the poise and the mentality that Coach Gates was able to have throughout a time like that last year because myself, my teammates, the entire coaching staff, nobody had ever really been through something remotely close to that.

So just the poise and just how he handled that entire situation and carried that kind of just mentality of what we wanted to do coming into this year and into the summer and obviously into the fall and into the entire regular season and now postseason is what kind of powered us to be able to respond from last year.

Obviously we're healthy, and we have just a really good culture and an extremely good coaching staff and obviously good players, but I give a lot of that credit to Coach Gates and just how he was able to just keep everybody's minds right and just letting us know that one season doesn't really define exactly who we are as a program and as players.

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