

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - SIU Edwardsville vs Houston

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

## SIU Edwardsville Cougars

## Brian Barone

## Ray'Sean Taylor

## Brian Taylor II

## Desmond Polk

### Media Conference

Houston 78, SIUE 40

THE MODERATOR: The Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville Cougars are with us. They represent the Ohio Valley conference. Head Coach Brian Barone is in the center, Desmond Polk, Ray'Sean Taylor, Brian Taylor II represent the student body. Opening statement from Coach.

BRIAN BARONE: Unfortunately, we didn't show what we have shown all year in terms of what we really are about. In terms of our making shots, competing from a defensive aspect, take that out, all right? These guys right here went out there with that -- I mean, you saw our fans, our community there. Talk about inspiring anybody who is watching this tournament in the way that they impacted our program, our conference, our community.

I'm very proud of this team. You know, I apologized to them in the locker room. I could have done better to put them in a better position to have more success today because they are a successful, special team.

Houston is really good. I'm not going to act like that wasn't part of the problem tonight. They were physical, made some shots early when we had a couple breakdowns, and then they had some really tough shots as well. Unfortunately, I think they had eight threes at halftime, eight or nine offensive rebounds at halftime, and that was ultimately what really hurt us to take us into the second half, and we weren't able to dig out of that hole.



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Ray'Sean, I know the result wasn't at all what you wanted, but when you look back on this just getting here and this experience, Coach Sampson gave you guys a big compliment I thought by saying, I really watched you guys the last four or five minutes to get a sense of what it was like my first time here and everything. Are you going to remember this fondly, or is this going to be a tough memory for you?

RAY'SEAN TAYLOR: Definitely a gut punch because I feel like we had more to give for sure, but that's a compliment from Coach, like you said. He's one of the greats, so you give him that respect, and he built that program.

But, I mean, when I look back on it, I'm definitely going to be mad about the game. I don't like to lose, but I'm never going to hold my head down ever. I never let nobody see me with my head down.

Yeah, they played better than us today, and good luck to them. They got a team to win it all, so...

Q. Can you reflect on this season and just talk about what it means to you and to the Edwardsville community about just all that you've been able to accomplish this year? Then maybe a second part of that, Ray, if you could talk about the legacy that you leave behind as you leave Edwardsville?

BRIAN BARONE: Yeah, you're going to reflect on it. It's hard right now because we're a competitive group that expects and wants to win, and we didn't do that just now. You reflect on it. OVC is a really good conference, a really good conference, extremely competitive. Every night you have to be prepared.

For us to do what we did in the OVC Conference this year, it's a testament to our team. Yeah, I'll reflect on that. I'm very proud of the historic things that we did in terms of most wins, most conference wins. Winning a championship in the Ohio Valley Conference is special because it's a really good league.

You're going to reflect on -- we never lost two games in a row all year. I don't know how many teams in this



tournament didn't. Maybe a lot. I know we didn't. I think it's a testament to these guys on how hard they work and how resilient they are, and Ray just said he keeps his head up. These guys are a very positive group of guys.

I'm going to reflect on it a lot, and it's going to make me sad because I don't want to stop coaching these guys. That's what stinks. I don't get to coach this team right now tonight and tomorrow, unless you guys want to practice tomorrow? A little Knockout or something?

No, that's hard right now, and maybe I don't want to reflect on it yet because that will be the gut punch, like Ray just said.

RAY'SEAN TAYLOR: Like you said about leaving a legacy, to start off, we won a championship at the end of the day, so I think that's going to cement everything I worked for and everything I went through. Obviously I had the three knee surgeries. He stuck with me, so my legacy is more than just win or lose. It's about bouncing back.

BRIAN TAYLOR II: It's about bouncing back and having the attitude to fight adversity. When you hit a wall -- there's a lot of people that hit walls in their careers and don't know exactly what to do, but this dude right here has been through a lot. I'm sure there's a lot of people out there that have been through it to. It's a testament to his character, his work ethic, and to the support and to the community at SIUE we have to the people sitting up here to the people that's back there taking pictures, to the ones in the locker room to the people you can't see, and the people that are sitting on your phone at SIUE on Instagram. There's one team, and it really is one family.

**Q. I hope this isn't a dumb question, but did the not playing in Dayton Tuesday night at all throw you guys off mentally a little bit by not having that First Four and maybe coming here with a little momentum with a win?**

BRIAN BARONE: Not a dumb question, okay? I don't know you well enough to say it was a dumb question. So if I have a dumb answer, don't get me -- you get my back on that.

We won a championship. It's nice to say, but we won a championship two Saturdays ago or whatever. Ten, 11, 12 days ago. We earned the right to be seeded where we were seeded. That's how it works. So it was tough not having a game because the preparation was different when you are in a rhythm of a 20-game season already, conference season. So we had to kind of figure out how to navigate that a little bit.

I wouldn't change it for the world. I would not change it for

the world because that's what we did. That's what we earned, but it was unique. It was unique, yeah.

**Q. Brian, what was your conversation like with Coach Sampson after the game?**

BRIAN BARONE: After the game I told him to go win it all. He just said he really liked and respected our team. Kind of numb right there. I know before the game he hit me in the gut with a conversation about how proud my mom and dad would be. He knew them, so...

He's a heck of a coach. He has an identity, and he's been doing it a long time. That's hard to do in this business. He's probably onto the next game right now, as he should be.

**Q. Brian Taylor kind of talked about seeing how well y'all traveled. Can you kind of just talk about walking into the arena and seeing your fans in your corner behind you?**

BRIAN BARONE: Oh, yeah, it's special. I don't know how -- I wish I had a cooler word. I keep saying "special."

They all rolled into Evansville a few weeks ago. I thought we were phenomenal in Evansville, phenomenal. OVC does a tremendous job, and we showed up to experience it.

They've just been doing it, and it's -- I wouldn't have expected anything less, but you also don't take -- you didn't expect it, right? You walk out, and every time you go out there and you see that sea of red and they're saying "SIUE," and they're coming out of the -- we're walking out of the lobby. It wasn't like that. It's never been like that ever. Like what these guys have accomplished to give --

We had people sending video messages with a group of grade schoolers. There were kids that were watching at -- I don't know -- at 1:00 they just bagged the day of school and were watching it at 1:00 in several schools in town right there.

That's what these guys did, and it's fun to be part of community. A few years ago we didn't have any community, right? We were playing games over and over in front of nobody, and you crave that. Some people have not gotten back to that necessarily, but what these guys did, they showed a community what it's like to be together. I'm one sitting on the couch by myself sometimes, but they just -- everybody is together, and that's just special. It's awesome. I don't know if that answers your question, but...

Was that a dumb answer?



**Q. Not at all.**

BRIAN BARONE: Thank you.

**Q. Ray'Sean, Desmond, what's your message in the locker room to guys like Brian and some of the other underclassmen about what's up ahead and looking ahead to next season?**

DESMOND POLK: I mean, for one, I definitely thanked them for the opportunity that they gave me and definitely helping the team put us in this position, definitely holding onto this experience.

I mean, it sucks. Obviously you want to be on the other end of it, but definitely hold onto this experience and lead guys on the next year for the incoming freshmen that they have coming in.

RAY'SEAN TAYLOR: For me I just thank them for being a good group of guys to be around every day. You don't always get that on every team, so just having them every day, they made things a lot easier. They let us lead every day.

And then let them know it's more than just basketball. We build real relationships with this team. Obviously basketball brought us together, but that's just what God wanted us to do. He wanted us to be together, so...

BRIAN TAYLOR II: Just to piggyback off that, it really is just an experience to come out here and just to be able to compete and just to have fun in general just with this group of guys. It's a level of gratitude that we have just to be out there, you know what I'm saying? It didn't go the way we wanted it to, but I think I seen a lot of smiles on our faces in just being out there on the court just playing the game that we love because this is what we all said we want to do.

So we just see it, soak it in, like he said, bottle it up, and let this be an experience to where we can come back to.

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