

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Gonzaga vs Houston

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

## Gonzaga Bulldogs

## Mark Few

## Ryan Nembhard

## Graham Ike

## Khalif Battle

### Media Conference

Houston 81, Gonzaga 76

THE MODERATOR: The Bulldogs are here. Mark Few brings Ryan Nembhard, Graham Ike, and Khalif Battle with him. We'll begin with a statement from Coach and then go to questions.

MARK FEW: Hey, it ended up being just a great, great basketball game, especially the way our guys fought their way back into it. I'm so proud of how they hung with it, hung with it, hung with it, and gave ourselves a chance right there at the end. That's not easy. I mean, I'm telling you, Houston was everything and more that we thought they were going to be. Especially the opening ten minutes and then start of the second half.

Just extremely proud of the guys. Man, they hung in there. They hung in there. We made enough plays. Our offense kind of kept us in it. We were just trying to find something that could get us some consecutive stops there just to give us a chance. You know, we just came one possession short there at the end.

I'm telling you, man, Houston, until you experience them live and in person, they're something. Kelvin has got them not only playing just exceptional defense, it's harder than heck to run anything and consistently get any good looks, but also offensively. I mean, we made a couple mistakes on our coverages, but for the most part they hit a lot of tough shots and shots we wanted them to take, especially with their bigs on the runners and floaters and all that.



Our hats off to them, and we were worthy tonight for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Khalif, I know that last sequence was hard, but what did Coach Sampson say to you in that handshake line? He was speaking very highly of you in the press conference.**

KHALIF BATTLE: I played Coach Sampson probably about ten times in my career. I mean, I kind of know what to expect from Houston. It's never easy against them. He just told me that I have a lot of basketball left in my career, he loved me, and he wishes me the best of luck in my endeavors. That's about it.

**Q. Coach, this was obviously a game that tested your depth. I wanted to ask Emmanuel, he gave you 20 really good minutes offensively, defensively. What he did as well as Michael give you the last five minutes to claw back into this one?**

MARK FEW: He was great. He was great. He's a rugged, physical defender. I knew in a game like this you need Emmanuel to play a lot of minutes. When he stroked that first three, I mean, that was a bonus in my mind because we at times gave a little bit offensively when we put him in there and sub one of our really, really good offensive players out.

I mean, he was plus-14 while he was out there on the floor, which is exceptional in a game like this, but I thought he made play after play and, again, was just doing a great job like he always does on the defensive end of things. Obviously you fight like crazy to try to keep them off the glass, and he's a guy I kind of trust to do that.

Mike was spectacular, especially when we got down under that three minute mark. We wanted to go to our 1-3-1 trap. He was great with that. He's been great at that all year. Obviously that helped us claw back into it right there at the end.

**Q. Graham, you kind of took over there a little bit in that second half, kind of helping your guys get back in the game. Was that the offensive mindset to go through you, or is that just how the game kind of fell to**



you?

GRAHAM IKE: Yeah, I feel like that was the offensive mindset definitely going into the game, just to settle in. We know they play with great intensity and great energy on the defensive end, and the first four minutes we had to settle in a little bit, but after that we kind of got going.

I wish we could have just boarded it away.

MARK FEW: Seven and eight on Houston with the bigs that they have, I mean, are you kidding me? No one has done that to them. Nobody. You're facing double-teams every time. I'm telling you, there's double teams, and then there's Houston double teams, and it's a whole 'nother neighborhood. For him to do that is unbelievable. Unbelievable.

**Q. Coach, despite the fact that this isn't ten in a row for the Sweet 16, just what can you say to the caliber of this season's team and the pride that you have of how they fought, including in this game all the way to the end?**

MARK FEW: I told them afterwards, I mean, they just showed their winning character. You know, where we fought back from where we were maybe in mid-January to now or even after we took some tough losses in the nonconference portion of our schedule. I mean, they never had a bad practice. They kept their heads high, and they just kept -- they stayed together and kept battling and learning. We got so much better.

I just ran into Kelvin out there, and it's a shame we had to meet in the second round. You know, like he said, if they're a 1, we're a 1B. That's the way it goes. We had our opportunities. We didn't take advantage of them, so we had to do the hard way.

I think they showed their true colors tonight, and that's the blessing that I've had all year, the two years with this group, just how high character they are, winners they are and how easy they are to coach, and what a blessing to have that as a head coach.

**Q. Khalif, can you describe what look you had at the end? It looked like you were trapped in the corner there.**

KHALIF BATTLE: I was coming off like a pindown, to a hand off. They kind of hard-hedged it. I was trying to get a shot up at the rim at that point.

Yeah, tough shot, tough play. They guarded it pretty well. So I wish I could have had that one back.

MARK FEW: Our initial look was to pitch it to Ryan. We had really good success with that as an in-game play. They did a good job blowing that up. Then the next look was KB coming off. They did a great job of playing that physical and blowing that up. I think it was kind of a loose ball fumble, and he did his best to get it off.

It's probably on me. We should have ran something in the middle of the floor, but that play has been really, really good for us in game.

**Q. Coach, there's been a lot of great Gonzaga guards over the past few years. You've developed a lot of great ones. I want to ask you about the guy to your left, Ryan Nembhard? He gave you 40 minutes, double-double tonight. What has he meant to this program?**

MARK FEW: Incredible. Incredible. He's as good a guard as I've ever coached ever. I mean, he has the heart of a champion, and he goes and goes and goes. I mean, B-Mike is asking me if we need to get him out of the game. I was, like, hell, no, we just had a two-minute timeout because I'm scared as hell if I don't have him in there.

Just delivers, delivers, delivers. Every time they made a big run, I mean, he knocks down a big three, several of them. I thought he played great defense tonight. Again, we talked about Graham's numbers. You get 11 assists against that kind of pressure against, again, every ball screen being doubled that he's in, I mean, that's a great night.

It's a shame we couldn't string together enough stops because it was our defense that really kind of didn't allow us to win this game. Not just our defense. It was how good Houston was on offense tonight. They were really, really, really good on offense tonight, guys. They hit shots.

For the most part some of them were shots that we directed, but you tip your hat to them. Yeah, incredible. Incredible two years with him, and I wish I didn't think I needed to do this with where our program is at and where he was, but I probably should have got on the stump and just knocked everybody in the head. For the Cousy Award as the point guard for this dude not only to win it, but he sure as heck better be in the top 5 or else we have to get some different guys voting on that. That is crazy, okay?

I mean, I think he's the best point guard in college basketball, and I've had some great ones. I think the coaches that go against him would share that same thing. At least we got it out there now. Maybe we don't need awards especially if we have knuckleheads that are voting



on stuff like that.

**Q. Ryan, just curious, Coach talked about great players he's coached in his career. To hear him talk like that about you, what's that mean?**

RYAN NEMBHARD: That means everything. I think more than anything, just mine and his relationship since I got here, you know. He always talked about that in the recruiting process, our relationship. I feel like he delivered on everything he promised.

So I love this guy. I love his family. I love everything about him. He's been great to me. He's been great to my family. It's definitely going to be a life-long relationship.

So I'm super happy and privileged that I was able to put the Gonzaga jersey on and be a Zag. I'm grateful for that, and yeah.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned Ryan is one of the best point guards in the country. Another great guard was**

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MARK FEW: The best. I'm fairly certain. There you go. Let's all get it right, shall we?

**Q. Yes. Another great guard was L.J. Cryer tonight. How tough is he to stop? Ryan, if you could also comment on L.J., just how tough was he to guard tonight?**

MARK FEW: He was spectacular. We set out to limit his threes and to really make him take tough twos. I got upset on one, we went under in that first half late in the first half, and he stung us when we went under. Then we overhelped on one when we were on him. Just got in the gaps and tried to help, and we weren't supposed to do that.

Other than that, we defended him the way we wanted to defend him, and he still hit those shots. The thing that Houston does so, so well, Kelvin has those guys so dialed in and so well-coached. I mean, they're just unbelievable on the offensive boards, but when they get that offensive board, they find Cryer. It's a scramble on an offensive board, and you can kind of coach that and try to prepare for it. We tried this week in practice, but he hit two of those dagger threes off offensive rebounds where they just catch and look for him and find him in a scramble situation.

Then he hit one big-time three when we were making a run where he came sprinting out to away from the basket from about 25 feet. Man, if he is hitting those, that's a tough guard.

RYAN NEMBHARD: Tough guard. I played him a couple of years ago. Similar when he gets that thing going, he's pretty tough to guard. He made some tough shots. Like Coach said, we guarded him how we kind of wanted to other than a few tip-outs and that one under, but good player. Credit to him. He had a night tonight, so yeah.

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