

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Robert Morris vs Alabama

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

**Robert Morris Colonials**

**Andrew Toole**

**Amarion Dickerson**

**Alvaro Folgueiras**

**Kam Woods**

Media Conference



**here, what does that mean to you? And knowing, hey, if a 15 beats a 2, that's obviously a huge, huge story in the tournament, do you think you guys have what it takes to make a run here?**

AMARION DICKERSON: Absolutely. I think we have what it takes to take a run and compete with all the high competition, high-level teams that's in this tournament. I feel like we have a great group of guys that really established a brotherhood over the course of the months we've been together. I feel like we definitely have a huge chance to go on a great run in this great tournament.

**Q. What are the emotions? I know you guys haven't really hit the floor yet, but what are the emotions today as you're 24 hours away now from tip-off?**

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: The emotions, you can feel the excitement. Three years ago, personally, I didn't know what March Madness was. For sure, it's a big thing now. Now I'm discovering that in first person.

For example, I brought my brother, and he doesn't even think that this is real. He's taking photos even with the security men (laughter), so you can guess. You can guess.

KAM WOODS: I'd say just staying consistent. Even though we're here doing the things that got us to win the Horizon League tournament, taking care of our body, get rest knowing that it's an early game. That's usually the time we practice, so I feel like we'll be well prepared for that time, and just clearing out all distractions.

**Q. For either of you guys, defense has been key for your season. What has made you guys a good defensive team, and what kind of level are you going to have to play at tomorrow?**

AMARION DICKERSON: Just keying in on the details. Defense is just not a one person thing. All five guys on the court have to be locked in. Not just locked in on themselves, but locked in on each other. You've got to rely on your brother when you're out there playing defense. So just keying in on the details, having the will and want to do it. I feel like defense is something you have to want to do. You can't just go out there and be like, I want to play

**Q. Amarion, you graduated from Cleveland Rhodes. How excited are you to be back home, and what have you told the guys about what they can expect here in Cleveland?**

AMARION DICKERSON: In Cleveland, you can expect some diehard fans. Obviously growing up not too far from Rocket Mortgage Field House, probably five minutes away, you can expect the type of fans that we need, high energy, throughout the arena.

It's an away game, neutral game, but it'll feel like a home game for us with all the fans travelling from Pittsburgh and all the fans we have here in Cleveland.

**Q. Kam, I know you played with Mark Sears AAU ball. I'm curious what you remember from those experiences, and what's it been like watching him throughout his college career, if you have?**

KAM WOODS: He's a great player. We all know that. But it's just like us, he's human. Growing up with him, pretty good player. Went to Ohio. He played great and then transferred to Bama and he's been doing his thing.

We're just looking forward to the matchup. It's a matchup that a lot of mid-majors in the country want, so we're just taking it as a regular game, no matter the impact on the names.

**Q. Amarion, another Cleveland question for you. Getting the chance to open a potential tournament run**



defense. It's something you actually have to do.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: We trust in each other. It's something that we do every day, every night. He said that good; we trust in each other, and we take responsibilities defensively. If my man, if I cannot guard my man, he's back there pulling blocks. That's it.

So I feel safe.

**Q. Amarion, what stands out to you about your time playing high school hoops at Rhodes, and did you ever imagine an NCAA Tournament appearance in your college career, let alone getting to play in Cleveland?**

AMARION DICKERSON: What stands out to me about my time at Rhodes is just like the culture and the environment at the school. When I first got there my freshman year, it wasn't as good as a basketball team, and then we had a key grad with one of my best friends Jamal Sumlin. He ended up coming to play basketball with me. I just established a culture over at Rhodes.

And then just having an opportunity to play in front of your hometown crowd, in front of a lot of fans, a lot of people you know. It's all just an unbelievable blessing. I just thank God for it all.

**Q. Fellas, this is a question for all of you. Representing Western Pennsylvania is one of the lone schools to make this tournament. Has that weight really hit you all, and how are you all taking that with all eyes, not only on Robert Morris, but the township and representing Western Pennsylvania?**

KAM WOODS: Just being in Morris Township, a small city, I feel like us being here brings back that recognition that they had. With Coach Toole recruiting, that's the first thing he wanted, bringing the culture back, starting the era back because he's a winner. Went through a tough couple years the last couple years, so people thought that he wasn't great, but this year, I feel like we got back on that track this year. So just keep running and go from there.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: Yeah, I think we represent one township. I think we did all season long. You have to remember where we come from. Last year, it wasn't a great season for us, and we just won 10 games. So we've got to value the moment and enjoy the experience. But the job is not finished. We have a great chance tomorrow to keep making history, and we're on that.

AMARION DICKERSON: Yeah, basically the same thing that they said, just bringing back the fire and the competitiveness that Robert Morris has been missing over

the last couple years, and just establishing ourself within the college basketball community, just an unbelievable feeling. Now knowing that it's a whole community behind us and not just a community, like you said, Western Pennsylvania, they're behind us, too. It's just an unbelievable feeling to know you've got so many people rooting for you from a small city. That's it.

**Q. Going off of that, you guys are having such a historic season. You mentioned the 10 wins last year, 20-loss season. Andy Toole hit the portal and brought in six, seven new guys on this roster. How incredible is it that you guys were able to bond as quickly as you have been and got everybody to buy in as quickly as you have in this day and age where transfer portal is affecting all of college sports right now?**

KAM WOODS: I'd say with your career, a lot of people not expecting to come to Robert Morris and the Horizon League. I think of the SEC schools and the ACC schools. Us being here, we've got a lot of guys from JUCO, D-II. What made us click is this could be your last stop ever for basketball. Just rewriting your story the right way, and Coach Toole believing in you, having that confidence, you feel like you can build your career for the pro or right now, we've got the transfer portal and that's going -- people don't talk about it, but that's a major thing. So, just being here winning, we're just rewriting our story because basketball could end any day.

**Q. This question is for Amarion and Alvaro. Grant Nelson obviously dealing with the knee injury, the uncertainty about his status for the game. What does he mean for that Alabama team, and how much of a loss would it be from your own scouting of them to not have Grant on Friday?**

AMARION DICKERSON: Just diving into the film, obviously he's an unbelievable player, a great talent for Alabama. But we've still got to focus on -- we're planning on if he's playing, but we're also planning on if he's not playing we still have to focus on what we need to do as far as the details and figuring out how to win a game.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: Obviously Alabama is a great team, so if we're back at forward, he's going to come with more energy and try to play his role and try to increase his role on the team. We've got to be focused on what we do, and personally if they're saving Nelson for the second round, we've got to make sure that they suffer without him, and that's our job.

**Q. Alvaro, what's it like being named Horizon League Player of the Year and how has that changed things for you going forward?**

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: It's way less important than being Horizon League champion. You're not a real MVP if you're not a champion. If I'm the Horizon Player of the Year, it's because of all of us. It's because I'm on a winning team and that's because all the team.

Sometimes of course on winning teams we point at the guys that are on the court and do the job that you watch on the court, but we have a great group of guys and a great group of people that is committed every day, every day. I want to talk especially two guys. One is Chris Ford. Sometimes he don't even touch the court being a senior, but he's practicing extra hours, shooting extra times, never put a bad face when he's not playing. On his paper, he knows what his role is, and we all know.

Another one is Isaac. Isaac is our head manager. He's the one that pick up everyone, and it doesn't matter if someone tell him that he's doing a good job or not, he just does it for us. On a winning team of course we have good players, and we have it, but you also have to have people that know his role and try to give everything to the team without waiting anything back.

Those guys are a great example of it.

ANDREW TOOLE: Obviously, excited to be here. Short drive from Pittsburgh, so we're excited about the opportunity to have some fans come out and support us tomorrow. Proud of our team. This has been a great group for us to coach. They're ultra competitive. They love to play the game, love to compete, and I think that's what's allowed us to be where we are today.

**Q. Andrew, I wanted to ask you about Mark Sears for Alabama and what he means -- he's obviously kind of the spark plug for that team. How difficult is a guy like that to defend, and how much of an intention you have to put on him to slow that offense down?**

ANDREW TOOLE: Yeah, it's a hard question because there's so many skilled and capable players that they have, right, and they play so aggressively, play so confidently, and obviously, Sears leads that charge. We actually scrimmaged him his freshman year when he was at Ohio U, and we were like, man, this guy is pretty good. Next year, obviously, he's at Alabama.

He's just so capable at any time of making a deep perimeter three. He puts so much pressure on your defense with his ability to get to the rim and get fouled.

Everybody has tried to keep him away from his left hand, but he keeps getting back to his left hand. He's as

experienced as you can be. He's played in Final Fours. He's played in SEC Championship games. He's been through the gauntlet as a player.

So at any time the ball is in his hands as an opposing coach, it just leaves a pit in your stomach.

As cognizant as you have to be of him as a shooter and a play maker, he can really just put two on the ball and move it quickly on time with the decisions that he makes. Yeah, you've got to just constantly be aware of him. And in talking to some SEC coaches, one of the things they said, which I thought was amazing, is they have some people when shots go up, when they shoot a shot not by him, they will have guys go and find him because he gets so many kick-out threes.

Just every layer of your defense is going to be stressed by him at all times.

**Q. I think what's so impressive about this run is you've been able to flip the script in one year, but you've done so after going to the transfer portal and getting six or seven new guys in here, basically rebuilding your roster, and then going on this run. I think in today's age with transfer portal affecting all of college sports right now, that's just so impressive. How were you able to do that? I know in the past, you've given a lot of credit to the guys, but also you and your leadership, I think it speaks to that.**

ANDREW TOOLE: And I'm going to keep giving credit to the guys because they're the ones that make a choice whether they want to buy in or not.

I think alongside of the transfer portal debate, which you could talk about ad nauseam, one of the things that I think has been lost is the value of being on a team and the value of buying into a team.

Previously, I think when you were offered a scholarship and the excitement level of yourself, your friends, your family, you were automatically bought in, and now it's like, we'll come to your school and then when we get there, you're going to have to convince us why we're here and what this is going to do for us.

These guys, starting from the summertime, bought in. They allowed us to coach them. They created a connection with each other. Talking to some of the guys that returned from the previous season, as I'm doing temperature checks in the summertime, hey, how are guys getting along? What's going on back at the dorms or the apartments? They're like, this is a little different. We spend time in the locker room post-practice and guys are

laughing and joking about practice and spending time and going to eat.

Those are all positive signs that you hope those connections are starting to be created, and then adversity will hit, and you'll truly get an idea of who they are.

I think all year long, every time there's been an adverse situation or a tough performance, they've always responded properly because, along with the connections they've created with each other, trust has been built in there, and then also the desire to win. Guys have really sacrificed all year long, and it's a credit to them. It's not anything that we've done. We've coached teams where guys haven't sacrificed and guys haven't bought into winning as the No. 1 priority, and it makes it a lot harder for your team to continue to grow and improve, and these guys have grown and improved all year.

**Q. Talk to me a little bit about the preparations, especially with the questions on Grant Nelson. Does that change anything involving the game plan at all, or how are you kind of coaching up the guys in preparation if or if not he will play?**

ANDREW TOOLE: We're preparing as if he's going to play. I'd be surprised if he doesn't at least give it a go.

Obviously, we know how good a player he is. As much as Sears is probably the overall play maker, Grant Nelson, as a front court guy, is such a dynamic play maker, as well, whether it's scoring, drawing the defense, making tough shots from the perimeter, timely shots from the perimeter. When he's out there with Sears, there's a lot of options they have to be able to create an advantage for their team.

We've prepared as if he's going to be playing tomorrow. If he's not, we know that there's capable players that will also be on the floor, so our preparation has got to be tight, whether he's playing or he's not.

**Q. What has keyed your defense or the way you guys have played defense this year, and what kind of effort is that going to take tomorrow afternoon?**

ANDREW TOOLE: It's going to take an incredible effort tomorrow afternoon. You're playing against a 91-point scoring team, the No. 1 pace in the country. It's going to take a monumental defensive effort. It's going to take a connected defensive effort where guys are constantly willing to make the next effort, make the next run, communicate the next screening action, rotate properly, contest everything.

Obviously, we've got to be able to try to, from 35 feet and

in, be everywhere at all times. The hard part, too, is being able to get back and set before they get to 35 feet.

That's going to be a huge part of it. But one of the things that we tried to do when we built this roster was improve our defensive ability by having some guys that can guard in space, by having some guys that can protect the rim. I'm not sure that we thought we'd have to be doing that against an SEC-level team, but we are, and we're fortunate to be able to do that.

I've told the guys that what we need to do is everything we've worked on all year long, but we've got to do it at by far the highest level that we've done it all year. That's going to be the challenge tomorrow.

**Q. Two completely different questions here. From a local standpoint, Amarion and Ryan, what do they bring to the team? How do they help this team advance, number one. Then number two, curious on your opinion of a possible expansion in the NCAA Tournament. Does it help the smaller mid-major schools or is this going to be more for the power fours?**

ANDREW TOOLE: Well, first off, Amarion and Ryan have been just incredible additions to our program this year. Both of them bring a winning mentality and a winning DNA in complete opposite ways. Mar is loud, personable, brash. Ryan is so quiet, zero to no maintenance at all times. But both of them have had immeasurable impacts on the program. Mar, obviously, his defensive ability, his athleticism, the edge he brings, the intensity he brings to the court, even before some of the offensive plays that he's made or the basketball plays he's made.

And then Ryan is as consistent a guy as we have on our team. He is a guy who day in and day out is coming in to do his routine. He's getting his shots up with an assistant coach. He's doing his deal in practice. He's taking care of his body.

I think he's just so thankful to be a part of our rotation. Obviously, with Justice Williams going down for us prior to the season and missing the year, Ryan, as well as DJ Smith, their roles grew. Those guys have been able to accept that and handle that in a really important way. Ryan has hit some huge shots for us this year. He's had some huge moments on the defensive side for us.

Early in the year when we were kind of sitting with guys doing individual meetings at the beginning of the year, I said, do you have anything for me? And he just said, hey, thanks for coaching me. Those kind of mindsets are rare these days. So to have him as a part of our locker room

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®



has dramatically changed the way that we approach our day-to-day.

In terms of the expansion, my fear is that most things that are getting decided are what's best for Power Four. Meanwhile, one of the reasons that people watch this tournament is because of the mid-majors and the low majors. Hopefully, we don't lose sight of that. So however expansion occurs, if and when it occurs, and usually when there's a small groundswell of expansion talk, that usually means it's coming down the pipe.

So we've got to get ready for it. I just hope that they keep the opportunity for mid-majors and low majors to be a part of this because I don't care what anybody says; as much as it means to be in the NCAA Tournament across the board, when you win your regular season, you win your conference tournament championship, it's different than when you come in sixth place.

If college athletics was all about the high majors and the power fours being what drives this, sure, when the Final Four comes, that's what drives it, but the ratings for a FOX, ESPN, CBS Sports Network Monday night game that has Wake Forest/Florida State would be way higher if everyone just cared about the power four schools. For some reason, these games today and tomorrow, the 15-2s, 14-3s, the 12-5s, those draw the eyeballs of people that don't watch basketball the other 363 days a year, and that's a real unique thing that we can't lose.

**Q. Another Amarion question for you. How cool is it after the year he's had to see him get this chance to play in his hometown as you guys get on this stage? Then looking at the year he's had defensively, what makes him so special? Is it just that sort of edge that you were talking about earlier?**

ANDREW TOOLE: Well, first of all, when Mar's career is over, there's a good chance, or if he hasn't discussed it, he should work for the Cleveland City of tourism, the Visitors' Bureau. There is no more prideful Clevelander, if that's even a word, than MAR. He will argue with you about the Browns until death. When we come here to play Cleveland State, he'll go through his list of favorite restaurants and all the attractions that make Cleveland what it is. So he has such great pride. So for him to be able to play a game here in the NCAA Tournament is awesome.

When we came to Cleveland State he had a huge turnout of fans, and it showed who he is and what he is because it was high school teachers, it was youth coaches, it was people that, like, just wanted to be there to support him and to see what he's doing as a student-athlete.

As soon as we heard Cleveland, of course we knew what was coming next, right. We were going to get the long version of all the attractions of Cleveland.

Then defensively, obviously one of the things that makes him so good defensively is his athleticism, but there's a lot of good athletes that aren't good defenders. There's some really good athletes that are terrible defenders, actually. His timing is unreal. I mean, there's practices and games where you're watching a guy go to the basket and you go, okay, there's two points, and then I'm watching this film post-practice or postgame, and out of my TV screen comes this dude flying in to get a hand on a ball.

His timing is incredible. He defends with such pride. He takes the defensive side personal, and that's not only for him, but for others. Like, he's a guy who comes in time-outs and he's saying, yo, you got to get back in front after that ball screen, or you didn't rotate down and get a hand on so and so, or, yo, you've got to get your box-out.

So he takes all of that on such a personal level that I think it just drives him on the defensive side of the floor.

**Q. A lot is made of the Kams and the Amarions and the stars of the team, but what's it like to see some of your bench guys and role players get the NCAA Tournament experience, the gear, the trip to Cleveland, all the little things that come into this beyond just basketball?**

ANDREW TOOLE: It's a lifetime memory. It's something that you'll never forget. A couple things. One of the things that I was really happy about was, when we were at the Horizon League tournament, that DJ and Josh were named all-tournament team. I thought that was a great recognition of the years that they had.

Obviously, they had great tournaments, but they had great years for us, and so with Varo, with Mar, with Kam getting postseason accolades from the Horizon League, and then seeing DJ and Josh get that all-tournament team in the Horizon League, I thought it was really fitting. Again, all year long, we've had a group of guys that have been about winning and wanting to win.

Not speaking out of turn here, but our director of basketball operations, Matt Sweet, a couple years ago had had a bout with cancer at 28 years old. Before the championship game against Youngstown, on the bottom of our scouting report, it said highlight of your life, and as we were going through our pregame stuff, when we got to that point, Coach Sweet spoke up and basically said, when you have an incredible death situation like I did with cancer you're going to reflect on the highlights of your life, and going to

the NCAA Tournament is a highlight of your life. He urged the guys, go make a highlight of your life.

So whether you play 40 minutes tomorrow or play zero minutes tomorrow, to be a part of this is a highlight of your life. I'm just happy as a coach and a coaching staff that we've been able to provide these guys this opportunity.

**Q. In your transition from the NEC to the Horizon League, what's made your partnership with Chris King work so well?**

ANDREW TOOLE: Our arguments. I know he's in the back of the room, so I think we'll just start with that.

I think it's twofold. I know both of us are very, very competitive. We want to be successful. We want to be on this stage of the NCAA Tournament. I think we've worked to help each other with what we've needed, whether it's resources for the program, NIL. He has great experience as long as he's been an athletic director. He always wants me to tell everyone about his wit and his charm. But he has great experience, and he has great expertise in what it takes to kind of continue to move the program forward.

It hasn't always been easy. We made this move in the middle of a pandemic, so I'm not sure that that was always the most appropriate timing. But we did it, and we've tried to figure out how to make the best of it.

Obviously, last year was disappointing for us. I felt two years ago when we went 10-10 in the league that we kind of had found a little bit of a foothold after those two pandemic years, and then last year we slid in the wrong direction.

To have this kind of year I know is -- I take great pride in it and I know he does as well, because there was a lot of days last spring where he's in his office, I'm in my office and I'm not sure how many other people were in the hallway trying to figure out how we could get to this place, and so being here, I think, is great satisfaction from that experience.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.