

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - New Mexico vs Marquette

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## New Mexico Lobos

## Richard Pitino

## Donovan Dent

## Nelly Junior Joseph

## CJ Noland

Media Conference

**Q. the basic stuff, what's different about this time? What's did you guys take from last year that you learned from?**

DONOVAN DENT: We're not here just to be here. We know we're a good team. Last year, we were more excited to be here and we got blown out in the first round. So that's not how we want this year for sure.

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I feel like this year, what we learned from last year was the physicality of the game, so we've just got to be ready for that this year.

**Q. CJ, your first time. Can you just talk about what it's been like so far?**

CJ NOLAND: I'm just excited to be here for sure. Like Donny was saying, last year they didn't do so well, but this year we're looking to make more of an impact for sure.

**Q. CJ, you could have the assignment of guarding cam tomorrow at some point. Just talk about the scouting report for trying to stop a player like that?**

CJ NOLAND: Yeah, obviously, he's a really good player. Really good team, as well. They do a lot of dribble drive stuff and can shoot the three really well. Emphasis on guarding the three-point line and the drive for sure.

**Q. Donny, similar kind of matchup question. Steve Mitchell is probably going to be guarding you. What do you see in him as a defender, and does he remind**



**you of anyone who's defended you so far this season?  
?**

DONOVAN DENT: Not someone who has defended me this season, but he reminds me a lot of a former teammate, House. He's really a pest on the ball, just hustling around the court. I've got a good image of fit playing with House in practice so I'm excited for the matchup.

**Q. CJ, when you look at this matchup, when you talked about the defensive end, what do you have to do to impact the game both offensively and defensively to make sure that it comes out the way you want it?**

CJ NOLAND: We just want to slow them down. They're a pretty fast paced team as we are, too. Offensively, we would like to play fast like we've been doing all year for sure. Keep up the pace in the game for sure.

**Q. Donovan talked about wanting to be here this year. You guys get a chance to not only showcase New Mexico, but the Mountain West going in prime time Friday night. What does it feel this opportunity to show what you guys are capable of?**

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I feel like we just got to bring our games, like play physical and just, like, a match up their energy and stuff and we'll be good.

DONOVAN DENT: Yeah, we just want to show them the Mountain West can compete at this level. A lot of teams think we struggle in the tournament. A lot of people we struggle in the tournament so we just want to show that we can compete and we can play at this level any time.

**Q. A lot of what's been made about this tournament is the time schedule for you guys isn't normal. Instead of going on a normal road trip you have practice and alone time. A lot of it is squeezed and condensed into stuff like this. How different is it? How hard is it to focus when you're in the NCAA Tournament as opposed to a game in Laramie or Boise or any other road trip?**

CJ NOLAND: I mean, I think that everything is the same. The approach is the same. Of course we have things like

this that's combined and squeezed into the time. But the focus is still the same. I'm sure everybody here on the team has wanted to be in March Madness since they were a little kid, so I feel like everybody is pretty much locked in.

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I feel like they're the same because we play in the tournament last year and we understand that every team that goes, so we're ready for it. Player player same amount of film same amount of shoot around so I don't think thinking changes for us really (Donovan).

**Q. Has the coaching staff prepared you any differently this year than last year, and what is the song that best describes Coach Pitino?**

DONOVAN DENT: I think basically they've changed our mindset. Last year we were just excited to be here. This year we want to win here. We don't want to just be here and say we made it. We want to go on a run here. We want to do the deep runs. I think that's the biggest thing they changed in the coaching, just the mindset.

**Q. Nelly, I know Coach said he really want going to take the scouting report from St. John's, but St. John's did play them three times and Zubly had a lot of success inside. I'm curious if you've watched that St. John's film and if you've seen anything that exposes them inside that you might be able to find some success with?**

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I feel like it's up to us to be able to like -- talking, whenever I have to pass the ball to me, I've just got to finish every time and play hard because they're going to be physical. I've got to be ready for that.

**Q. When you look at them, do they remind you of anybody that you've already played this season?**

DONOVAN DENT: We think on the defense side, they remind us a lot of San Diego State. They run a lot of 1 through 5. And we have to attack one-on-one to really -- we're going to get the matchup we want, the mismatch. So in my mind, San Diego State, stay on the defensive side of the ball.

**Q. Is there anything that Coach Pitino relates stories about, his dad or you ever notice anything that he might be similar to his dad?**

DONOVAN DENT: He tries to stay away dad a lot more on the yelling side, the crazy side. Coach P is more relaxed. He'll get on you, but he's like not his dad that much on the coaching side. You can ask Nelly, though, that one.

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: It's different for sure. He's way different from his dad.

RICHARD PITINO: Certainly, very, very honored and proud of our program to be back in this amazing tournament. Phenomenal year for our guys, to lose kind of the pieces that we lost, to be able to rebuild, like everybody is doing, is certainly hard and challenging. But really, really excited about this opportunity.

**Q. A lot has sort of already been talked about the two great point guards, both getting some all-America honors, between Kam and Donny, but I don't imagine they're going to be defending each other. Is it safe to say true, will have a lot of the defensive assignment on Kam, and are you expecting Stevie to have a lot of the defensive assignment on Donny?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yes and yes. Good scouting report there. Obviously, Stevie is a phenomenal defender one of the best in the country, so I would assume that. We'll give different looks on cam who is certainly a traffic player, as well.

**Q. Donny described Stevie as reminding him a little bit of Jalen house. Do you see some similarities in the defensive style there?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, really physical. Probably a little bit more physical than Jalen. But aggressive on the ball. I mean, I think reminds me a little bit of some of those San Diego State guards physicality-wise. But yeah, they play on the perimeter a lot offensively, so you may think that they're not as physical as they are. But it'll be one of the most physical teams we've played all year.

**Q. You and your father, completely different styles of coaching. You've been around the game since you were probably in diapers. How much has he helped mold your coaching philosophy, and how much does that really play out at New Mexico?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, a lot. Very lucky to have worked for him. I mean, certainly grown up around him my whole life.

I think the biggest thing that I try to take from him is just his relentless drive to win and make people better. We do do it differently, but that's more because he's 72 and I'm 42. But stylistically defensively we really think the same things.

I think his commitment to excellence is something that I marvel at and something that I certainly try to mimic as best I can.

**Q. They're talking about expanding the tournament. Is it going to help the Power Fours, or will it help more the mid-majors? I know you had a lot of success this year getting four teams in. If it goes to that 76 where they're talking, where do you think it's going to help the Power Fours?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, great question. I think everything is geared to help the Power Fours right now, and it's just the system is what it is. I'm not saying -- I don't look at us like a mid-major. I understand the term, but we get 15,000 a game. There's not a whole lot of difference between our resources and when I was at Minnesota.

Now, just the metrics and the way that they're breaking down at-large bids, it's going to be more and more difficult. You look at the SEC -- not to say they're not really good. Certainly, they are. But every game is a Quad 1 opportunity. So, it kind of is what it is. I'm not as offended by expanding as everybody else. I don't think it's going to really substantially change a whole lot. We're in a profession right now, I'm a coach who's been fired for not going to the tournament enough. You've got football about 60 percent of teams are going to bowl games and coaches are keeping their jobs and players are not having to turn over all the time. I don't see why it's so bad to have a little bit more in there.

I don't think it would ruin the tournament by any means. I think it's going to happen. But I think everything right now is geared towards Power Four.

**Q. What's it been like having a player like Nelly who started with your dad at Iona and then transferred to you? Is he kind of an honorary family member now with all five years? Also, in terms of family rooting interest, how good is it that St. John's is on that Thursday-Saturday and you guys are on Friday-Sunday?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, Nelly, there's been many times this year where he's jokingly said to me, I'm not going to yet yelled at by another Pitino again. It's been five years of you two. I'm sick of you guys. But yeah, honorary family member would be a good call. Love him. He's certainly had a great year. But just as a person, he's one of my favorites. He's so loyal. He's easy to be around. He's a really good player.

As for the game schedule, yeah, it's great. I mean, we've had a lot of games that have been around the same time because of the Big East TV contract to do with CBS and FOX Sports, as well. When I'm able to watch, it's a lot of fun. Their game tonight is a little late. Don't really love that. But certainly when I have the opportunity, pulling for

St. John's in a big way.

**Q. How are you and your staff balancing still competing in the tournament and balancing all the other stuff going on at the same time, NIL, transfer portal?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, I'm not dealing with transfer portal stuff much now. I think they've got their ears and eyes open for sure. We've started conversations with our players because hopefully we win and we're continuing to play, but the portal opens Monday, which is absolute insanity. But there's going to be a lot of volatility, coaching changes, players, everything that's going to go on.

We've started the conversations with our roster about staying and being able to figure all that out.

It's not ideal. We could sit here for hours and talk about how crazy the system is right now. But we certainly got to do our job with retaining to keep pieces in this locker room.

**Q. This last game was obviously a film you looked at like all of them, but Zub I had a lot of success inside. Is there something you can mimic or that Nelly would do anyway where you think you could have some success inside with Nelly?**

RICHARD PITINO: I mean, they switch a lot of stuff. Again, for us Mountain West people, there's some similarities to San Diego State in the way that they guard. If they do switch, Nelly has got to be willing and able, obviously, to dive into the post.

Nelly and -- Zub is a relentless rebounder, offensive rebounder especially, but Nelly and him are somewhat similar, so I think when you're watching that last game in the Garden there, I think, hopefully, Nelly can see some advantages there. But they also do a great job of whether it's trapping or slapping down, as well.

**Q. You touched on this the other day. You touched on Billy Donovan's role between you and Shaka, how you took his spot on the Florida staff. Just talk about the impact Coach Donovan has had for you, and I'll ask the same thing to Shaka when he comes in here.**

RICHARD PITINO: Everything. My dad has obviously had a huge impact in my life. So has my mom. Nobody ever asks about her. I understand why. But the decision that I made to take over when Shaka left was the best decision for me that I ever made. It got me out of my comfort zone. It got me to think differently and not try to be my dad. He's a great coach to emulate, don't get me wrong, but it really taught me to be my own man. I was on a staff with --

certainly, Coach Donovan is phenomenal, but Rob Lanier is a very successful head coach, Larry Shyatt, very successful head coach. So, it allowed me the opportunity to really grow and get away from home.

I don't get Minnesota without Billy Donovan. I don't get New Mexico without Billy Donovan. So I will always be indebted to what Coach has done for me as a person. It just shows you the relationship that a coach and player can have because Coach Donovan played for my dad, and he's fiercely loyal to him, and obviously Coach Donovan impacted my life greatly, so it's really cool to see.

**Q. How do you handle those conversations with your player about next season staying when your own name has been floated nationally for various openings?**

RICHARD PITINO: I tell them all the time that my whole goal to them every single year is for them to increase their value in this free agent world. Now, coaches are not free agents like they are. We have buyouts and things like that. But when you have a great year in today's world as a player, people are going to talk about you as transfers. People are going to reach out. Maybe they don't directly reach out to the kid. They have ways to reach out. Call their high school coach, AAU coach, hey, float something out there. It's no different than coaches.

When you win, you're going to be written about. You're going to get phone calls. It doesn't mean you want to leave. It doesn't mean that my players want to leave. But there's going to be opportunities, and the biggest thing I always tell them is just continue to increase your value, and when the time is right we'll talk about why we feel like staying at New Mexico is the right thing for you. It's the same thing with me. If a school calls it doesn't mean I'm looking to leave. I truly appreciate my situation at New Mexico. We've won 52 games in the last two years. A lot of that has to do with the support that I've gotten, and I greatly appreciate it.

**Q. Your biggest fan is sitting over there. I'm curious who he picked in his pool?**

RICHARD PITINO: I don't know, we sent it to Jack. Who did you pick? St. John's, there you go. You see where his loyalty lies. New Mexico is not going to be happy with you.

**Q. Donny just talked about the difference in the mentality that his team had last year when they were here. Have you noticed any differences from your point of view between last year group and this year's group?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, I think so. I've really tried to set

that tone. High level of respect for Marquette, not going to be easy. But we hadn't been in a long time. Last year, I don't think we took it for granted because I think Clemson was a really good team and a bad matchup for us. But when you have the success that we've had, you want them to want to make noise in the tournament and not just be happy to be here.

But also with a high appreciation of the opponent that we're playing, how difficult it's going to be.

**Q. At the end of Shaka's comments on Selection Sunday, when he left, Billy Donovan said you've got to take the VCU job, encouraged him and helped him get the job, but at the end he said, don't worry, I'll find someone better than you and replaced him with you. Did Billy have any words of encouragement for you like that when he left?**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, there was no doubt that he was going to find some amazing replacements. We're all replaceable. Shaka did a phenomenal job when I got there. Everybody just raved about his work ethic. That was really good for me, too, was just being around some different people outside of my dad's tree and kind of expand that.

But there was a lot of talk of just his relentlessness in recruiting. He recruited Bradley Beal. He left, he didn't get to coach him, but Shaka was the one who did a lot of the groundwork with that.

As I said before, that relationship, whether Shaka had worked for Norwood Teague, who was a great AD of mine at Minnesota, all those doors were opened because of Coach Donovan.

**Q. Donny and Nelly got a lot of attention nationally, but true Washington was also very important for you guys this year, an honorable mention. Talk about the impact you see him having on this game against Marquette.**

RICHARD PITINO: Yeah, I think he might have scored double digits in the last game, but we were undefeated when it was like 17, 18-0 or something like that when he scored. But I think he was starting to realize that and wanted to score too much, like let the game come to you.

But yeah, defensively when you lose a guy like Jalen House who was just an on-the-ball menace, true has kind of taken up for that. But we need, and all of our guys know this, it can't just be Nelly and Donny. It's got to be other guys stepping up, and Tru had some great moments there. And the growth, it's really fun to see. I think he's a guy, if

he comes back, like all of them, who knows, he could really make a big jump.

**Q. When other schools come to you about openings, how much more do you study things, maybe based on the Minnesota experience, but also with NIL and everything? How much do you have to dig in and investigate maybe comparing to where you're at right now?**

RICHARD PITINO: You used to have a true understanding of every league and where the jobs would rank. That's all going to change substantially. It's all about investment now. I know April 7th, everybody thinks that maybe there will be some more rules and it might level off a little bit. I don't know. But it's not as much about practice facilities anymore. It's not about everybody's chartering. Everybody has all those things. It's -- do I think that NIL and rev share is everything? No, I don't, but if you don't have it, you have no chance.

It's been great at New Mexico to work together with them to continue to get them to understand kind of the return on the investment. These players, they're the reason why we sell out the Pit. They're a reason why you're getting almost 10,000 in Thomas & Mack for the Mountain West tournament.

Yeah, I think the balance of power has greatly, greatly shifted, and those conversations, any coach has with any AD or whatever, that's going to be the first thing is what's the investment looking like and what will it be down the road. This landscape is crazy. Coaches are still getting fired for not winning enough games.

As a coach, you've got to be in a place where you can win, and certainly New Mexico is that.