

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Bryant vs Michigan State

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Bryant Bulldogs

Phil Martelli, Jr.

Earl Timberlake

Rafael Pinzon

Media Conference

Michigan State 87, Bryant 62

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: The last game is always really, really hard because you can't really put yourself there to think about the end. And it hurts. There's a lot of tears.

But the beauty of this, that I told them, is when that goes away, there's a lot there. And there's a lot of teams that end their season, and there's tears and there's disappointment. And then when that goes away, there's still an emptiness because you didn't accomplish what you started out to get, and this group did it.

We met on June -- still don't know the date. I probably should have looked it up at some point, June 15th. I told them, last year was a good year, and everybody wanted to say good year, it was nice, but it felt empty. We were chasing great.

This group this year found greatness. They rewrote history at Bryant. They've made their mark. I could not be more proud of a group. I just told them 22 years of coaching, I don't know if I've had more fun coaching a team than this group right here.

Q. Earl, how is your head and how were you trying to motivate your guys after you left?

EARL TIMBERLAKE: My head is ringing right now after the game, what with adrenaline going and stuff like that. I just wanted to come out there and be there for my guys, man, bloody or not.

Q. Raf, in that second half when they were crashing



the boards, how much did you want to get things going offensively for your team?

RAFAEL PINZON: I was just trying to leave it all there for my guys and the coaching staff. They had it going, but I told these guys, we're not going to quit no matter what the score is looking like. We're never going to quit, and we didn't.

Q. Earl, I'm curious, do you even remember the play when your head got split open, and at what point did you realize you were bleeding and how bad it was?

EARL TIMBERLAKE: Yeah, I remember trying to go for a rebound, his elbow hitting the top of my forehead. Next thing I know, I'm leaking from my face. After that, I'm just thinking, how do I hurry up and get this thing cared so I can get back out there for my team?

Q. For both of you guys, can you put into words what this season meant to you to get to this stage, get to this point, get this opportunity?

EARL TIMBERLAKE: It means a lot. We've been through a lot, like, individually and as a team, like the last couple years here at Bryant. That means everything just to get here to the tournament and go out this way, with a great group of guys.

RAFAEL PINZON: It means a lot because we fought through adversity during the season, and the fact that we got over the adversity and made it to the tournament definitely means a lot.

Q. Raf, can you speak to your closeness with your teammates now that the season wraps up? How special is this group together?

RAFAEL PINZON: Really special, man. I told them in the locker room that we're locked in forever. We really are.

Q. Earl, where can this program go from here? Where do you feel like you and the rest of the coaching staff can take this in the future?

EARL TIMBERLAKE: Sky's the limit. They've got a great group coming back. The sky's the limit for them. It's a



great staff, people really care about you and want to see you do well. And Smith Hall is a great place, as well.

Q. You didn't start your college careers at Bryant and at some point transferred, but can either of you speak on what Coach Phil has meant to you guys up to this point?

RAFAEL PINZON: Coach Martelli, man, he trusted us from the beginning. I cannot thank him enough for that because he really trusted us and gave us freedom and gave us the right tools to get better as a player. I'll be forever grateful to him for that.

EARL TIMBERLAKE: This is my guy right here, man. I kind of thank him, thank Coach Cole for giving me the love back for basketball. A lot of people don't know I was in a very dark place a couple years ago coming from different schools. I didn't even want to play basketball no more. I just thank them for helping me get the love back for the game.

Q. There's a picture circulating with blood on Earl's face. He comes back into the game. How does that epitomize who he's been to this team?

RAFAEL PINZON: I knew he was going to come back in the game, no doubt. It didn't surprise me when he came back in the game because I know it. That's my guy right here.

EARL TIMBERLAKE: I want to give God all the glory. We wouldn't be here without him, so I want to thank him.

Q. Phil, just from a physical perspective, how difficult is it to try to last 40 minutes with a team like that, that rebounds the way they do and has the identity that they do?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, I mean, it was the things we talked about, like it was a simple game plan, it was get back in transition and keep them off the glass. The hard part is actually doing that over a 40-minute game. They were actually a little faster than I thought. Even watching them, you know, the way they get the ball down the floor, and certainly the physicality, and some of those, to be honest with you, some of the rebounds, they were just bigger than us. You know, we got the right shot. It's a long rebound. Now it's a seven-footer over the top of 6'8" and he's just reaching up and grabbing it.

They fought. They gave us everything we got. I'm proud of the guys. They did not back down. Even when it started to spiral a little bit, some of those huddles, they were pretty locked in, saying the right things, talking the right talk of

staying together, hanging together, go get a stop.

But yeah, that's a pretty darned good team.

Q. Phil, did you take it in the moment at all, looking across, seeing Tom Izzo coaching as a head coach in the NCAA Tournament today?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, I mean, it's an honor to be here. It's an honor to coach against a Hall of Famer. He's forgotten more than I'll ever know about this game. It's an honor. It's an honor to go against somebody like that, that isn't just a great coach, but a great person. To try and go toe-to-toe and learn your lessons from that is pretty cool.

Q. We've talked about Earl and his toughness a thousand times, but he comes off the floor, he's bleeding from the head. What's going through your mind? Was there any doubt he'd be back in that game?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, I had no idea what was happening. I didn't know what happened. If him walking off the floor covered in blood isn't a one shining moment clip, I don't know what is, as someone who feels like a one-shining moment aficionado. Seeing them all for I don't know how many years, but yeah, I didn't even see what happened, so I didn't know -- I was kind of blocked. Our huddle was coming, I didn't know.

All of a sudden, a couple of them were yelling to Troy to come down and get him. So I had no idea. Then I did see him briefly go down and covered in blood. My thought was, he'll clean it up and be right back, and he cleaned it up and he was right back. That's Earl Timberlake.

Q. Coach, we know you're a big family guy. Can you just speak on what the role of your family was getting here and how much they meant to you getting to this point?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, I mean, it's special. It's special to have done it on their side, watching my father, and now on this side. It's unique. You get to see both perspectives. There's not a lot of times where you can see both perspectives.

To have my parents here, to have my brother here and my nieces, my brother-in-law here, my nephew, my cousin delayed her trip to Disney and she's a Disney nut, she changed her whole trip to come here, fly here. They're driving to Buffalo, flying out of Buffalo to Orlando. I don't know that I would have done that for her, but it's very much appreciated. My in-laws being here, and then my wife Megan, my son Phillip, my daughter Marra, my son

Nathan. For them to get to experience what I experienced around the same ages, they've sacrificed a lot. This is not an easy journey for any of us, but especially not on the families.

Megan doesn't get as much of a pass because she knew what she signed up for. The kids didn't sign up for this. Megan knew. Megan was a great player. She's a coach. She's the daughter of a coach. She knows what this life is like. Now, she probably didn't know exactly what this life was like, me taking her to Niagara Falls for a couple years, and then to Delaware, then being in Philly, and then being here.

But the kids, like, they live and die. They live and die. I know what that's like, and I know what it's like to watch your father succeed, and I know what it's like to watch him fail and how hard that is.

So, I'm -- my family is everything to me, and I've always said this. If there was a day where Megan said I can't do this anymore, we have to stop, I would stop. All she's ever done is pushed me and supported me and given me everything she possibly could that I could never give back. I could never give it back; what she's given to me.

Q. Phil, off the back of that, and maybe similar to what I asked Earl, where can this go from here in terms of two NCAA trips in four years, got the new building coming in, in a couple years, you've acclimated well to a new league. How good is the job, how good is the program, and can you sustain this moving forward?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, I mean, we have to. We have to sustain it. This was not a one-year -- we didn't chase great this year to then go back and chase good or mediocre or whatever. We're chasing great, and that starts now.

In this day and age, there's not a whole lot of time to stop and catch your breath. Transfer portal is opening Monday, and I say it all the time, like, we jump in that transfer portal knowing what we need to do. Some people jump in that transfer portal with their eyes closed and they're Marco Polo. We're not going in there to play Marco Polo. We're going in to get the right guys and talented guys that fit us, that are about the right things. We just had a group of great teammates that cared about the right things. We're not going back on that.

That's the challenge, and I'd be lying if I haven't already started peeking at that list and knowing what's going to be in there and then getting back in the gym. That's what we know.

A couple of them -- Barry was already talking to those guys about getting right back in the gym. Typically, you take some time off, maybe give them a week or two weeks, and I don't think this group is built like that. We'll get back in there quick and get started back and get guys healthy that need to get back healthy, and then we're trying to get right back here, if not further.

That's the challenge. That's the challenge for sure, but it's one we're up for.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Coen Carr's impact in the first half. What was most impactful about what he was able to do, and when a team can bring a guy like that off the bench that changes the athletic tone for them and depth has been their thing all year, how dangerous can that make a team?

PHIL MARTELLI JR.: Yeah, that's huge. Dynamic, dynamic athlete. The way he sprints the floor, crashes the glass. He was able to get those offensive rebounds, a couple of them like we had to help, and now you've got this guy crashing from the corner, the wing, and we'd have to be perfectly on time to get there to keep him off the glass, and we just weren't. We were a step slow, or we just didn't get there. But that was a big jump because, to be honest with you, we had guarded them the right way really for most of the game. We had guarded them the right way. Now, they went and made 10 threes which that hasn't really been their MO. But yeah, you throw a guy like that in there that's instant energy, and we've had some guys like that, Kvon Cramer did that for us, Jakai Robinson, guys are able to come in the game and there's not a drop off. You can just keep going, and that's what he did for them tonight.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports