

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Long Beach State vs Arizona

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

## Long Beach State Beach

## Jadon Jones

## Lassin Traore

## Aboubacar Traore

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Long Beach State student-athletes.

We'll open it up for questions to our student-athletes.

**Q. Jadon, as you have been preparing for this game and this opportunity to play in the NCAA tournament, how have you been able to take in the experience so far? How has it been for you?**

JADON JONES: It's been a great experience so far. Obviously we're very blessed and humbled to be here. We are just enjoying it. It's obviously a new experience. None of us have been here before.

Try not to come with any expectations. Just really be in the moment, take everything in. We've worked hard to get here, but we still know we have more work to do. It's the first game of the tournament. We're not satisfied with just being here. We want more out of this. We want to take it as far as we possibly can go.

We're going to enjoy it, but we're still hungry to win.

**Q. You know the storyline this week. What was the feeling when you first heard about your coach last week? What did you do last week? Did you just start playing better because? Did that motivate you? What was the feeling there?**

LASSINA TRAORE: It's been a tough week. When we first heard that the coach and the school are parting ways, it was a real shock. In the locker room everybody was sad because we wasn't expecting that.



We knew that our coach leaving, it wasn't only his fault, it was us as well because we on the court, we wasn't playing well. That's why he got to the point.

We had a talk in our meetings as a team. Brought us together, we talk about it. We didn't want to let the coaches down. We just used that as a motivation to start playing better like we never done it before.

We just wanted to send him off in a better way. We went to Vegas and we just kept playing well like we never did before. Yeah, it was amazing.

ABOUBACAR TRAORE: I think, like Lassina said, we were disappointed at first, but we just used that disappointment as a motivation as a team. I think this was the best moment for us to just come together. Like Coach Monson been saying, playing for each other, not worried about our personal stats, but worried about your action, you thinking about your next move or your teammate will help the team.

It's been team first. It's not personal stuff and personal matter like stats and stuff. Yeah, we just kind of had like a common goal on and off the court. Make sure that our coach leave on a better note. Just make sure that people remind him, like, his last season he brought a team to the NCAA tournament, yeah.

JADON JONES: To piggyback off what she said, we felt like failures. We were on a five-game losing streak. Truly I don't believe it was his fault. We were the guys out there. We're the ones guarding and putting the ball in the basket.

I know it's a business and they have to make business decisions. But to do it before the tournament, it hurt. It felt like we had let him down. They had completely given up on us. They didn't believe we were even going to compete.

We knew that we had to prove them wrong.

I think Coach taught us that you have to play for each other and not with each other. I think that's a really powerful statement. It's really a big difference. When you're playing



for yourself, you can only kind of approach the game differently. When you're playing for someone else, you're really willing to do whatever. You don't want to let anyone down. You never want to be a disappointment to anyone.

That's kind of the mental space we were at. We were going to play for the betterment of the team, for Coach. We want to make sure he was going to enjoy his last season and go out on a special note.

We rallied together. We decided that we're going to do whatever it takes. We're just going to trust in the process and the coaches and live with the results.

**Q. Jadon, being from Long Beach, how does it feel to represent the Beach in the NCAA tournament?**

JADON JONES: It feels great. I'm a local kid. I've been in Long Beach pretty much my whole life. It's special. Not a lot of people get the opportunity to play for their home city. I get to have my friends and family around every home game. All the Big West games are pretty local. It's something special. I've gotten messages and things for people being proud of me, saying I'm showing respect to my city.

I'm also here to represent this team, my teammates. It's not just about me and my city. This is me, these two fine gentlemen next to me, coaches, everyone. It's not just about me and my narrative, where I'm from. I'm a part of this team and this brotherhood. I'm representing everybody.

**Q. Jadon, what do you like about Dan as a coach and having him around?**

JADON JONES: It's a lot of things. I think our relationship has gotten better over time. Obviously I came in as a freshman, just trying to do whatever it takes to get on the court, do the right thing.

As time has gone on and I've gotten to really know him, he's a great dude. Where do I start, man? He gave me the opportunity just to be here. He puts a lot of trust in his players, I will say that. He very rarely tell you you're doing something wrong or it's a bad shot. He's never really going to put you down. He might correct you, say, Look, we need a better look. He's never going to try to take your confidence away. I think that's one of my favorite things.

He opens his doors to you. He's had plenty of us at his house. We'll host family meals. His wife, Mama Darcy, has been great to me. She's back there. She's been nothing but an angel to us. She'll make food and snacks for us. She put pillows on the bus for us one time to make

sure we got good rest. They really care. Looking out for us.

He may not always express it, but he goes out of his way to make sure we're all right. I think he needs more acknowledgment in that regard because he's been a great coach. It's been a pleasure being one of his players for the last four years.

I'm extremely grateful for him. I wish him nothing but the best because I've had a great experience with him.

**Q. You played with a real chip on your shoulder the last three games of the Big West tournament. I'll be a little bit biased here. Aboubacar, you should have been Big West tournament MVP. Lassina, I think you were very much worthy, as well. What is it going to take to carry on that energy into a game where you're going to face a really talented team in Arizona?**

ABOUBACAR TRAORE: I don't think I understood your question, honestly (smiling).

LASSINA TRAORE: I will go.

Honestly we all played against a team at this caliber before. During the pre-season, we played against USC, Michigan and DePaul. We're not going to come this game thinking it's going to be easy. We play with a chip on our shoulder. We not coming just to play, we coming to win.

We know it's going to be tough. They got super, great athletes on their team, super basketball players. I'm pretty sure we also do got a lot of good players on my team: Aboubacar, AJ George, Marcus Tsohonis, Amari Stroud. Everybody, we all good.

We all here to win. It not going to be easy, but I'm pretty sure every play we play for each other, we going to come out with the win, so...

JADON JONES: You want to go?

ABOUBACAR TRAORE: No (smiling).

JADON JONES: I think the most important thing going into this game is making sure we don't lose our chip. I think a reason why we played so well in the Big West is because we were hungry for it. We felt like we had something to prove. That fuel really pushed us to be the best team we could be.

We know we can play with anyone. Obviously Arizona is a very decorated and respected school. We're not taking them lightly. We know it's going to be a tough game.

We've proven in the pre-season we played with Michigan, USC, we played with DePaul. Our talent is there. We have the guys for it, the coaching for it. It's just us to go in with the mentality of what we had in the Big West, which is we're not satisfied with where we are, we're not satisfied with how we're viewed, and we still have a lot to prove.

Going in hungry and with faith because we know there's going to be a lot of adversity. Being able to be mentally strong enough to stick through it and just play as hard as you can no matter what is how we're going to view it.

THE MODERATOR: We will excuse our student-athletes.

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