

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

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Delta Center

## Long Beach State Beach Coach Dan Monson Media Conference

DAN MONSON: I don't have to answer anything I don't want to because I'm working for free today (smiling).

Did you see the Seinfeld when George was trying to get fired and couldn't lose his job, still going to work every day?

That's me. I'm a Seinfeld episode going on right now in real life (smiling).

Is it opening statement? Is that it? What do we got going?

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and start with questions right here.

### Q. Along those lines...

DAN MONSON: Is there a storyline here? I haven't noticed.

### Q. I'm trying to tease one out of here. Has it been kind of twilight zone for you?

DAN MONSON: Absolutely. I keep saying, it's worth every job I've ever had to have the experiences I've had this week with my players, with my family, spiritually, everything.

I keep using the word 'surreal'. Twilight zone might be part true. It's been awesome. I mean, the Monday of the decision was the hardest thing professionally you go through. I guess top two because I went through it at Minnesota also. Professionally is different than the rest of your life. I think separating them is hard sometimes.

Then going to the locker room and tell the players, it was super, super hard obviously. But to see their reactions. As a parent or as a coach, you're always disciplining your kids, you're always holding them accountable, pushing them. You don't really know how they're taking it until they tell



you they love you or they show you.

Those guys showed me they loved me that day. I'll never forget it. That's all you need. I've reflected this week that I don't have a job, but I don't need one. I got everything I got with my family, with my players, with my friends. It's been a life-changing week in a good way.

Next week I have a car payment, house payment. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I don't really care (smiling).

**Q. As a Big West guy, I've been following this incredible run. Wind the clock back to the Big West tournament. When did you start to realize during that run that your kids were about to do something special? When was it all starting to hit you?**

DAN MONSON: I think it hit me Monday because I wasn't prepared for our guys to react the way they did Monday when they got the news.

I said to them, Look, we still have this week, we have to respect their decision. But they also could have not given us this week. I have a gratitude towards having this week because a lot of coaches, when they're done, they're done. So let's take advantage of this week.

I said, We're in this together now. This is us against everybody else. If you need to take a day to gather, I said, We're going to watch a little film and shoot today. If you don't want to do that, great, if you want to do a little bit of it.

They said, Can we get a few minutes by ourselves. It took about 30 minutes before they texted back. They said, We'd like to watch a little film.

I go in there. Still, we got a couple of them that couldn't watch film. They went into our other room, couldn't get their emotions together. You're watching film, and you hear guys sniffing and everything.

The first thing I said is, Just bonding together is not going to be enough. Our defense has got to get better. We have to be a better basketball team this week. Just look at this first defensive clip, guys. We close out short here. The



guy is wide open, we don't get a contest. These are the kind of plays that get a coach fired.

The whole room broke up. It started right then. It was like, okay, we're going to be all right here.

We went to practice on Tuesday. It was terrible. I told them afterwards, Don't cry in the locker room and say this bothers you, then come out and not practice well. Something's got to be different for us to be different.

To answer a long question here, I guess, that Wednesday we came off the bus at a high school in Las Vegas, I waited for each of them to get off the bus. I said, Be different today, be different today. It was maybe our best practice of the year. That's when I'm like, Okay, we got a shot here. It just kept growing and growing as the week went on.

**Q. What do you make of the connections here with Salt Lake, going against Tommy and Mark? What are the text messages like?**

DAN MONSON: Tommy owes me. That's the bottom line, okay? I gave him his first opportunity. Hired him. His JC coach knew my mom. Walla Walla, Pomeroy connection. I promised Jeff Reinland that he could have a position. When I took off, I had three or four different promises that I made. Kyle Bankhead to walk on, Scott Snyder to be the DBO. Mark, I helped him get the job. It's new. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Two weeks after I get back to Minnesota, we're both reeling with these new jobs, talking. About halfway through the conversation Mark said, This grad guy you got here, what is his name again and what did you promise him? I just laugh at that now because Tommy is Tommy, where he is, one of the best coaches in America. Making enough money to buy my pizza last night.

I'm a little bit late. We get there late last night. The Few family and the Lloyds and us. Those are the things you just cherish. It's above and beyond the game, is relationships. Something I've reflected on this week. To watch Marcy Few taping the boys and my nephew, watching the last 30 seconds our game. Mark not being able to sit down, yelling at the TV. That's precious.

When we go to the pizza place and we're a little bit late, Tommy tries to give me some grief. I said, Tommy, we've been putting in that Princeton offense for three days. It's complicated. It took a little extra time today (smiling).

**Q. Gonzaga is on this incredible run of consecutive tournaments which started with you. How much pride**

**do you take in being one of the first to make this long run and being there in '95 as well?**

DAN MONSON: The Zagfather, the Dogfather, I got to have a name for that. That's my claim to fame. I can't be known as the only guy to get fired and work in an NCAA tournament for free. That's got to be my legacy is starting that.

I'm super proud of it. My only regret is that Elite Eight run was the second year of my career as a head coach. I didn't realize just how special it was, just how hard it is.

For Zag people, Selection Sunday, the NCAA tournament is part of their culture. For me, it's something that I cherish. It's something that I'm so grateful for because my kids were at younger ages 12 years ago last time we were here.

For them not to experience but one be on my staff, winning playing for me. Only bummer is that my daughter, who is captain of the crew team at Gonzaga, was not able to get out of practice today. I'm going to get that coach someday. No, he was awesome. He made it happen last week. Obviously this is the second week. Can't do that.

For her to be able to be there last week. That was what was so special last week, is that I had just God looking over me or something. Before any of this happened, my parents at 90 years old had scheduled to travel to that tournament. They hadn't been on a plane in two years. All four of my kids were there. My two sisters were there to help my parents.

As I'm waking up every morning wondering if this is my last game, I had my whole family with me. Okay, I don't need a job, I got everything I need right here. It was a great perspective week.

I'm rambling. But the Gonzaga thing, they can't ever take that off my résumé. I'm super proud, obviously sustaining it and what Mark has done is incredibly more difficult, the mind-blowing part. I was there at the beginning, that's something I'm super proud of.

**Q. What is your earliest memory of Tommy Lloyd?**

DAN MONSON: Wow (smiling). My earliest memory of Tommy Lloyd or Mark Few or Billy Grier, any of the Zag people are ones that I can really describe because we're all hard-charging youngsters. As I said last night, I'm just glad they didn't have cell phones when we started.

There was a lapse there because I never really worked for him. I just hired him. But I guess Jeff Reinland, who sold him to me, kind of gave a different impression of him, that

he was this kind of well-mannered, quiet, basketball-only guy. He certainly was basketball-only, but he had a lot more personality I guess you would want to say than was advertised. Our players call it 'your bag', more pieces to his personality than maybe any of us wanted to see.

I think that's about as far as I can go with that (smiling). I'm really trying. But he was just one of us. Tommy is a guy's guy. Tommy, last night, he's like, Hey, I got my two mentors here. It was emotional in a good, funny, joking way, as we always do.

The Zag family is deep. It's thick and it's wide. Gonzaga is still going where it is. Tommy Lloyd had a lot to do with it.

I'm still going to run the Princeton offense tomorrow. I know that works (smiling).

**Q. You've probably said this in as many words. I wonder if this has become a this-is-your-life moment, that wouldn't have been without the firing, feelings you wouldn't have experienced the same way?**

DAN MONSON: I think that's 100% true. I'm not thanking them for firing me by any means.

I think life is life. Some of it is good and some of it's bad. How you pivot through it defines who you are. I'm hoping that people look at me and say, Hey, he had a great job. What are we feeling sorry for him for? He had 17 years driving that car. It was a great ride. I knew the car was leased. I mean, they wanted the keys back.

It's not insured this week, but I still get to drive it. I'm going to try to keep it on the road, the road to the Final Four. I'm going to try to keep it on there.

Yeah, sometimes you need to step back and say, I've got it pretty good. This has helped me to do that. It's been a very emotional, spiritual, however you want to put it. I've been on my knees this week more times than not. It's been very good to know that I'm in a good place. I'm looking forward to next year. I don't even know what it is.

As I tell my players, I'm not worried about anything but tomorrow. We're trying to stay in the moment. Staying in the moment has been pretty good to us this week.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DAN MONSON: I'll see you guys on Friday. Tell Tommy I said that (laughter).

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