

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Nevada vs Dayton

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Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

**Nevada Wolfpack**  
**Coach Steve Alford**  
**Jarod Lucas**  
**Kenan Blackshear**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We welcome from the University of Nevada student-athletes. We'll open it up to questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. Wanted to ask you guys, you dropped a few games in January, then since about February you guys have been hot, not losing, playing together. What has been the difference?**

JAROD LUCAS: I think it was when we lost in New Mexico in The Pit. We lost by 30. We're a veteran. We knew that wasn't us. We knew we had to get connected because we felt like that was a bad game, but it was embarrassing. I feel like ever since then, we've changed. Our one keyword as a team has been 'connected'. We say it every time we break the huddle.

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: To piggyback off of what he said, we had players meeting right after New Mexico. We got embarrassed. We told each other we're in this for the long haul. We're going through the valleys and the mountain together, just staying connected is the most important thing that we could do through this time.

It's shown in February.

**Q. This is what you dream about. You grow up playing backyard basketball, you always think about playing March Madness. Jarod, you obviously have been here a couple of times. How much of it is a dream come true?**

JAROD LUCAS: I think it's awesome. For us to be able to play in Salt Lake City, the closest location you can get to



Reno, is awesome. Easy for my family to get to as well as for all of our fans.

Mentioned before, but kind of hoping for a home game, all of our fans to get there. Obviously pretty cool, a dream come true. Like you mentioned, I've been here before. So has Ke and some of the rest of our team.

We're ready to go. We've pretty much seen everything you have seen in college basketball. I don't think there will be any surprises. We got to handle business.

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: This is a dream really. My second time around. My first time I was really in awe of being around all this, just seeing all the March Madness stuff everywhere. Now, like, I feel a little bit more comfortable. Now I have to instill that in my teammates who haven't been here. That's it really.

**Q. It's the last time potentially you put on a uniform wearing 'Nevada' across your chest. Kenan, to be able to make your mark as a player as you go on this kind of final stretch...**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: I always just wanted to elevate each year for me personally. For my first year to this year, it's been tremendous elevation really. I think the legacy that it will leave here at Nevada, having been here a while, just getting back to the expectation of what this group can do.

I feel as if we can do that.

JAROD LUCAS: I think it's definitely going to be a little different knowing that potentially could be the last time we're in a Nevada jersey. Take a lot of pride having that across my chest. I don't want this thing to stop. It's a really good group of guys.

For me and Ke, we've enjoyed every moment. We're going to do everything we can to keep this rolling. Me and him being seniors, we have to lead this team to victory. We got embarrassed against Arizona State in Dayton. Hopefully we can go out there and play our game.



**Q. What sticks out about Dayton on film and DaRon Holmes, specifically?**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: I feel as if he's a real good presence in the inside. We going to have our hands full with him. He has shooters around him. It makes it kind of hard to help, things of that sense.

We have game plans intact for him, for the team.

JAROD LUCAS: He's a really good player. We know he's an NBA guy. Obviously very, very skilled. He's done a tremendous job leading his team. I know surrounding the floor they have tremendous shooters. They have probably the best shooter in the country in Brea. They have shooters around him, a really good big. Obviously he's had a tremendous year.

It's going to be a tough matchup, but hopefully we can go out there and handle business.

**Q. You're great when you get off to a good start. How important will it be for you guys to get out of the gate quick tomorrow?**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: It will be very important. This team, like he said, they have one of the best shooters. We have to just put our foot on their neck early and continue to have that momentum throughout the whole game.

JAROD LUCAS: Yeah, I think it will be important for us to go out there and play our game, keep our identity. Things can't change once you get to the NCAA tournament.

We've been a good defensive team all year. We had a lapse the other night in Vegas when we lost to Colorado State. Hopefully we can go out there, play our game, slow them down a little bit, and once again get off to a good start.

**Q. When you look at Dayton on film, anyone they remind you of that you played this year, the style? Anything that can kind of stick out in your mind?**

JAROD LUCAS: I don't think so. I don't think there's too many bigs like DaRon Holmes in the country. I saw he was All-American. They're probably the first type of team we've seen, elite shooters to surround him.

They're going to be a really, really good team, obviously a tough matchup with DaRon Holmes being the player he is. Hopefully we can do our best to slow them down. It's not going to be easy. 20 points, eight rebounds, All-American. It's not going to be easy.

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: I can't really think of no other team. Probably the closest is probably Utah State. With him and Utah State's big, how they surround him, I don't think there's no other team like them.

**Q. How could you compare the challenge of Holmes versus from LeDee, at least from what you've seen on tape?**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: Probably their motors are similar. Never giving up really. Oh, also they draw fouls at a high rate, both of them. They do. I think those are the two biggest similarities that they have, I feel.

JAROD LUCAS: Yeah, Kenan mentioned it, both Jaedon LeDee and DaRon Holmes do a good job of drawing fouls, both All-American, Jaedon LeDee, this guy, Holmes, is All-American.

They're both really good players. I think they both kind of have their own types of games. Jaedon LeDee is a little bit more physical. Not too many physical specimens like him in the country. They're both very good players.

**Q. In terms of their three-point shooting, you have done a great job this year defending the three-point line. When is the key in terms of the way you play defense to keep that three-point shooting at bay?**

JAROD LUCAS: I think we have to close out with a high stick hand. Honestly, I don't think there's another team we faced all year with Dayton with their ability to shoot the three ball. We have to close out urgently, knowing they're elite shooting the three.

It's not going to be easy. We have to go out there with high hands, do a good job of helping each other out when they drive the gaps.

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: Pressure. It really comes down to our pressure, how on the ball we are. I feel when we're pressuring the ball, pressuring the offensive player, I feel as if we always have the answers. We be in the gap more, we'll be more connected really. That's what our defense is really predicated off, is pressure.

**Q. Could you talk a little bit about what it would mean to you guys to win an NCAA tournament game for Nevada, to be able to advance in this tournament.**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: I don't know the last time, probably 2019, if I can be correct, I think 2019 was the last time they won an NCAA game.

It would mean a lot to Reno, really, to just have their team

advance. You know the historic history with the twins and the people that came before them. I feel as if it will be big.

JAROD LUCAS: I think it would be awesome, knowing that Reno community takes a lot of pride in the basketball, especially in our team. We've gotten great support all year. Winning this game would be awesome. To be able to do it in Salt Lake City, where we're very, very close to Reno, I think it would be pretty cool.

I know our fan support isn't like anywhere else in the country. Once again, I think it would be pretty cool.

**Q. You're playing much different caliber of basketball to end this season compared to last year. I don't know if looseness is the right word or maybe freedom. How would you compare how you're feeling heading into this tournament compared to last year?**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: I feel like it comes down to experience really, being that me and Jarod are the leaders. It starts with us really. We have to have a calm head. That gives our soldiers calmness inside, within. Just tell them to enjoy this moment, just go out here and have fun really. This is the last moments we'll have as a team together.

JAROD LUCAS: Kenan mentioned it, but I think especially for us seniors, we have a decent amount of guys, could be potentially their last time wearing a Nevada jersey.

I think another thing is enjoy the moment. Not everybody gets to play in the NCAA tournament. Enjoy the moment, have fun. If you put the work in, it's going to show when the lights get on.

**Q. Playing for the Mountain West, Colorado State getting a win for the conference, do you feel like the Mountain West has something to prove in the NCAA tournament, getting those six bids but not the seeds?**

JAROD LUCAS: Yeah, I think that we definitely were disrespected as a conference. It was great to see Colorado State win last night and hopefully Boise State does the same.

As the Mountain West as a conference, but also here in Nevada, we got to go out there and win games to prove to the committee that the Mountain West is the real deal.

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: Piggyback off of what he said, I feel as if we did have a little hate toward the committee with how they treated the Mountain West teams. It's been a good league all year. We wanted to show our league is so good.

**Q. The league was so physical this year, great defenses. How much do you want to put that on display, to be a physical team on the floor, to be a team that obviously defends at a high level? Is that on your mind going into the game?**

KENAN BLACKSHEAR: Yeah, our defense carried us the whole year really. Our identity is defense. We have a defensive coach really. I feel as if we just show how physical our defense is, I feel as if they'll feel us.

JAROD LUCAS: Yeah, I think our conference as a whole is a real good defensive league. San Diego State obviously has been known for plenty of years being one of the best defensive teams in the country. I feel us, Nevada, have done a tremendous job on the defensive side this year. Hopefully we can go out on the big stage and show that we can defend.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Appreciate you. We'll excuse the student-athletes and begin with Coach Alford.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

STEVE ALFORD: Obviously just excited to be here. We talk about it all the time, it's a blessing to be in this tournament. Our guys have done an awful lot of good work over the last four months to get to this point. Very rewarded because of it.

Hopefully we can continue to play well. We've done a lot of good things on both of sides of the basketball all year. Our guys have listened well, matured well.

Being a part of March Madness is always a very special feeling. I think our guys are very excited about it. We weren't very experienced last year. We have a lot more experience this year. Hopefully that equates to playing better basketball this year.

Very fortunate and pleased to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. At what point this year did you think that your team had the talent to make it here, to advance?**

STEVE ALFORD: Yeah, that's a tough one because we knew we could be pretty good, but didn't mean we were going to make the NCAA tournament. We talk about it all the time. 362 schools and only 68 make it. It's the most exclusive tournament. Hardest tournament to get in in college athletics, let alone try to advance and win.

In the next three weeks, everybody is ending their year with a loss except one. It's a very demanding tournament.

We knew this time last year, when we got beat in the tournament, we started putting together a little bit of additions to our roster. Watching our guys last spring come out of the late season, the postseason we had last year, we knew we were going to have more experience. That experience has been one of the reasons why we're back here.

They tasted a little bit of it last year, but they wanted more of it. They've been able to accomplish a lot more this year along the lines. They've been very, very consistent. We knew we had a chance to get there. Being in a very demanding league like the Mountain West Conference, you knew you had to play well. We played really good basketball in January, February and March. We're well-prepared because of the league we came from. We knew we had a very good team.

There are a lot of good teams that aren't in this tournament. But we knew we had a collection of guys that could get us back here.

**Q. You look at the big man inside for Dayton, Holmes. Your thoughts on what you've seen from him on film, how he compares to Jaedon LeDee?**

STEVE ALFORD: Yeah, one, our league again, the Mountain West Conference, has helped us prepare for that, playing against Osobor, playing against LeDee, other bigs. New Mexico's big.

So we've been able to play against really good bigs. This individual, Holmes, is outstanding. He can shoot the three a little bit. He handles the ball a lot. He's got an apt ability to draw fouls. Gets to the free-throw line like 10 times a game.

That's where it all starts. Their guard play is outstanding. One of the best three-point shooting teams in the country. Doubling him and giving him a lot of attention opens up a lot of things for the perimeter.

We have to be very careful, diligent in how we go about guarding him and the rest of the team. But obviously a huge concern 'cause he's been a dominant player all year. He's got a -- looks like a very good pro prospect as well.

Hopefully we've been prepared by the league players that we've had to guard already.

**Q. How do you get your players to focus? It's not just another game, it's a tournament game. You**

**experienced a little bit of that last year. How do you get your players to play their best, have the energy, but play within themselves?**

STEVE ALFORD: It's a great question.

I think a lot of that has to do with what your experience is. Last year we had no experience. Jarod was the only one to play in an NCAA tournament when he was at Oregon State. That was a COVID year. Nobody in the stands. Even he had a different experience last year.

Sometimes as a player you work so hard, this is where you want to get to, and then you get to a situation like this and you excel. It's like, We made it. Well, if that's your approach, then it's quick lived. It was quick lived last year. We didn't play good basketball.

There's a different feel to this team. Doesn't mean we're going to advance. That doesn't just happen. You got to play your A game. Now, we again have been in an outstanding league, and the Mountain West has drilled us for the last two months if you don't play your A game, you lose.

The difference when you get to this point, you don't get another game. I think our guys have a little bit more experience now. I haven't seen this team excel. Last year there was an excel, We got in. We're last team in, but we got in.

This team has been a little bit different. I think they wanted to prove themselves all year long, which is what they've done. I think they want to stay here as long as they can because they want to experience more of what March Madness is all about.

Hopefully we just stay in character and we put our best foot forward. If we do that, things take care of themselves. If it's not good enough, we can still look in the mirror and say, This is who we were, this is who we are, and we did those things to the best of our ability.

Hopefully that's what happens to these young men because they're very deserving of it.

**Q. You mentioned the three-point shooting and slow pace. In terms of your defense, what are the types of things you hope to see from your guys, the type of physicality to bring to keep that at bay?**

STEVE ALFORD: Again, our league has been very physical because, one, of the maturity of our league and the age of our league. We have a lot of teams that are playing four, five seniors. It was ironic, but every time we



put up a scout board in our offices, it's senior, senior, grad, grad, senior. You're playing a lot of older teams now.

Dayton is a team that wasn't in the tournament last year, now they're in the tournament. Anthony has done an incredible job with them. They got a lot of guys coming back. In fact, I'm not sure they have a senior that's in their rotation.

It's a team that is scary that way.

So we've just got to be who we are. I think that's the thing that we've got to do. Our offense, I think we're one of thirteen teams right now in the country that have a KenPom that's in the top 40 of offense and defense.

That's what you want to be, pretty solid in both areas. Our team has been that. They're a very good defensive team. It's going to be a challenge for our offense, and they're hard to guard 'cause they stretch you to the three-point line, then they've got a pro that's in the middle. It's going to be a challenge to our defense as well.

Again, we've played teams like this. We've been prepared for teams like this because of the league we play in. Hopefully our guys can sense that. You have to get off to a good start, impose your will a little bit, and hopefully we can do that.

**Q. You have at least a familiarity with Dayton basketball going back to Donoher.**

STEVE ALFORD: Absolutely. Newcastle is only about an hour from Dayton. A lot of familiarity. I knew about Dayton growing up in Newcastle, but I didn't attend camps. The only camp I attended was Coach Knight's. I knew about Dayton a lot, but didn't really become familiar with it until '84 when I was on the Olympics, and Coach Donoher was our assistant coach. Then I really started following Dayton and feeling that.

Obviously we were in the First Four last year. It was great getting to see Coach, spend some time with Coach when I was there for the tournament last year.

Just incredible respect for Coach Donoher, what he's meant not just for the university but what he's done for basketball 'cause incredible what he's done for the game of basketball over his entire lifetime.

My recollection of what Dayton basketball is all about goes all the way back to Coach Donoher. Q. You just referenced KenPom --

STEVE ALFORD: Be careful. I referenced it just because

of KB telling me about it this morning. Don't let me have to dive into KenPom analytics because...

**Q. What is the extent that your staff dives into analytics and uses that?**

STEVE ALFORD: Very much just because we have a young staff, other than Coach Neal and I. We're the experienced old guys. There becomes a part in our meetings where all this analytics, all this graph stuff, all this is great, but then Coach Neal and I will throw in, He can really play, period. Or, He's not that good. We go back to the old-school stuff, as well.

Yeah, analytics today are huge. They're a big part of what you do, how you set things up. We are still a little bit old school, too. It's like the custodian that said that a long time ago when I was at Manchester, You got to put it in one end and keep it out of the other end. Sometimes we make it more complicated than that.

**Q. You mentioned Mountain West, how much that's prepared you. Last night Colorado State went out and had a nice statement win over Virginia. Your authorities on that? The Mountain West being undervalued nationally, the chip on the shoulders...**

STEVE ALFORD: It's the first time I think in my career that we actually had a group text of the head coaches after the Selection Show. It was good that Niko and his team kind of got things rolling in a very fired-up way. They obviously played really well to dismantle a Virginia team that's very, very well-coached and a lot of experience. Very impressive.

Our league's gotten off to a really good start. Hopefully we can continue that.

**Q. You're talking about being an old-school coach, older coach. How much is NIL and transfers figured into it where it didn't a few years ago? How has that changed your job?**

STEVE ALFORD: A lot. It's made it just a busier time. I was talking to our athletic director and staffs, boosters that we have in the hotel this morning about it. Normally this is all about watching tape on Dayton, watching as many game tapes as you can that they've played, the schemes that you want to try to devise both offensively and defensively.

Yet we're on the phone doing Zooms last night for almost two hours with recruits. It's very, very different now. Recruits are on visits now. That part of it's odd.

I still wish there was a period of time that the 68 teams that are in the field can enjoy being something that you've worked for for four or five months, to be a part of something special like that, that's your only focus. When we get past Phoenix, the Final Four, then we open it up. That's always been the norm. Coaches know once your season is over, that's when recruiting happens. It's odd the recruiting is now happening before your season's even over. I think that's an odd thing that really shouldn't happen.

We do a good job. It's all about our current team, all about what we're doing. The rules are the way they are now - or the lack of. You have to do the things like we did last night to prepare for the next wave of recruits that are coming in.

**Q. I know you've worn a patch honoring Coach Knight throughout this entire season. What do you think he would have thought of this year's version of Nevada?**

STEVE ALFORD: I think for the majority of the season he would have really liked what he'd seen because I know what kind of characters we have on our team. These are high-character guys, they do the job in the classroom, they do the job in the community, they represent. You play for Coach Knight, you always know it's about the front of the jersey. I think he would appreciate what our guys do and how hard they play.

We've talked about it here late in the year, they've understood. One of the things that Coach was great about, was going about the will to prepare and the art of going from being a hard-working team to a really good competing team, going to that next level of work.

I think he would have been impressed with how we value the ball. We don't beat ourselves very often. We take care of the basketball. We get good shots. Then we really try to guard. I think, if anything, he'd probably be shocked that it was somebody like me that's coaching a team that is guarding well (smiling). That's probably what he'd be most shocked about.

**Q. You have obviously built this program up and take a step every year. What would it mean to be able to go to the NCAA tournament this year and win a game and advance?**

STEVE ALFORD: Yeah, I think that's the plan, that's the next step. I hope our guys can play well and give ourselves a chance to do that. We know we've got an incredible opponent to do that against.

That is our next step. This year we took a next step in the league play, we took a next step winning a championship

in Hawaii. Our non-conference was much better. Everything has been better, better, better. This team is better than last year.

Again, doesn't mean you're going to win and advance, but we got a group of men in that locker room, that's their goal, that's their game plan. Hopefully we can take another step and continue to build this program the way we want to build it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

STEVE ALFORD: Thank you.

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