

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Samford vs Kansas

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Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

Samford Bulldogs

Coach Bucky McMillan

Rylan Jones

Jermaine Marshall

Achor Achor

Media Conference



RYLAN JONES: Yeah, no, I knew I was playing again. Obviously last year Utah State was tough. Made the NCAA tournament, but I did not get to compete. A lifelong goal of mine was to play in the NCAA tournament.

No, I knew I was playing basketball again. Was not at Utah State. After being cleared by multiple neurologists and doctors, I was going to play basketball again. I'm just happy that Samford came calling. I've loved every second of it. My teammates, coaches, everything about Samford is amazing. It's a great place.

Seeing your name pop up on Selection Sunday is one of the coolest feelings you can feel, I think, especially when you have to win your conference tournament to get there. The hard work and everything we've done to get there, it all paid off for that second.

An added bonus was it's in Salt Lake City, I get to come home and see all my family and friends. I know it wasn't the best destination for my boys right here, but I was happy to see it. I think they want to be in Brooklyn or somewhere else.

I couldn't have asked for anything else. I'm cherishing every second of it. Just happy to be here.

Q. Rylan, how much of a 'culture shock' was it to leave Utah and go to Alabama? What was the adjustment period? How did you handle any homesickness?

RYLAN JONES: I mean, the people of Birmingham, my teammates especially, I mean, I was on a visit to Samford, and these two guys right here had dinner with me. I felt right at home right away. Jermaine, he made me feel like one of his brothers right then. I had a great time with him at dinner. Achor, as well. We went to Topgolf. I felt right at home. There was no culture shock, anything. Great people. Birmingham is a great place.

No homesickness. I'm 23 years old. I've been in Utah my whole life. It was super cool to experience a new area, a new part of the country. Yeah, no, Samford, Birmingham, has been great.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Samford student-athletes.

We'll turn the time over to you here for questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Rylan, coming back to Utah, you obviously played high school ball here, what are your feelings being able to not only come back here and play in the NCAA tournament but to do so having had a fully healthy season?

RYLAN JONES: It's kind of a dream come true to come back and play here a couple more times in Salt Lake City. Obviously it's home. It's just a feeling, kind of a full-circle moment, honestly. Played four years in the state of Utah, probably played 95 college games here. I wouldn't trade those times for anything.

Going to Birmingham, Samford, been the best decision I ever made. Love every second of it. For me to come back here and be able to play in the hometown with these guys, my brothers and my teammates, it's a surreal feeling that I really can't describe.

I'm just happy and thankful to be here.

Q. Rylan, did you ever really come close to not playing ever again, especially after what you went that injury-wise? What were your initial thoughts when you saw Samford pop up on the screen?



Q. Your experience of playing in altitude, have you at least taught everyone else around you what it's like to play in these conditions? What have you done this week to adjust to those?

RYLAN JONES: Yeah, altitude... We're a well-conditioned team. The way we play makes for us to have to be well-conditioned.

Altitude, yeah, it will be a little bit of shock. That's why we got up here two days early. Practiced yesterday, practiced today. We'll get used to it.

It's all about toughness and heart. That's what we're made of. I don't think it will be that big a factor to the guys in our locker room.

JERMAINE MARSHALL: Yeah, this actually my first time here in Utah. I'm not sure what to expect. I just been here and stuff. They've been making sure we're here practicing, making sure we get our wind up. I know it will be different, but I'm not sure what to expect. I know we got to go out there and do what we do, play hard, give it all we got.

ACHOR ACHOR: Just hydration the days before. That's one of the things they mentioned. A lot of hydration the day before is one thing we key on a lot.

Q. What was it like here as a kid, as a young basketball player, during the time of Jimmer's run at BYU?

RYLAN JONES: Obviously he's a special player. Usually cheering against him. I loved watching him play. Jimmer mania that year. He had an unbelievable run, unbelievable player.

Everybody sees and remembers those runs. Kids growing up dream about playing in the NCAA tournament and making a run like Jimmer.

Yeah, it's just a dream come true to see your name, I'm playing in the NCAA tournament, have a chance to make a run, yeah.

Q. It seems like every story is about Bucky McMillan believing in you. Jermaine, it was a longer goal here at Samford for you. Tell me about that. Can you explain Bucky's dream that turned into reality.

JERMAINE MARSHALL: Yeah, I was at Akron, Ohio, for COVID year. Really wasn't playing that much. Once I entered my name in the transfer portal, Coach Bucky is one of the first coaches to reach out to me.

Everything that we done this year, he told me we was going to do, and we did it. He told me we was going to cut down nets. He told me we was going to be a team that's going to go dancing. To see all the things he told me came true, without seeing a blueprint, because nobody ever heard of Samford being a team they talked about in March Madness.

I'm just grateful to do it with these guys right here. I have unbelievable teammates, one of the best PGs in the country, always trying to find us, get us open shots, always throwing lobs to Achor and me. This man here is a dog. I would love to go to battle any day of the week with this man on my team.

I'm happy to be here, happy to be coached by a great coaching staff. I'm just enjoying the moment.

ACHOR ACHOR: I want to say not a lot of people really believed in me throughout my life. Bucky is one of the few. I felt like he believed in me when he got in a two-passenger plane. Not a lot of people in my recruiting process went to that length of extents. When he seen me, did that, and even actually when I wasn't playing a lot, he still believed in me: Keep at it. Keep at it.

Months later, look at us now. You know what I'm saying? It came true.

RYLAN JONES: Everything Bucky said has come to fruition this year. His belief in us allows us to be confident and play at our best when we go out there.

I want to touch on what Jermaine said. Jermaine here, he's the hardest-playing dude in the country. He said go to battle with us. I'll go to battle with him any day, anytime, in anything, not just in basketball. Anything that involves competing or heart, he's the toughest, meanest, most fierce competitor I know. When he's on your team, you love him. When he's not on your team, like those days in practice, you absolutely hate him.

That's why he is the player he is. That's a big piece in why Samford has made the jump they have made in the last three years, a lot because of this man right here, his determination. He won't lose. He doesn't lose.

Same here with Achor. I didn't get to see him last year, but just of the strives I've heard he's made. A lot of it is Coach Bucky believing in him. He's in the gym every night at 11, 11:30. He's the hardest worker I know. He loves the basketball game. He's contagious. Everybody loves playing with him. You want him on your team in practice. These two together in practice, it's no fun. It's fun to watch.

Without these two guys, Samford, they're the heart and soul, they make our program go. The belief that Bucky has in us has allowed them and us to be where we are today.

Starts with Coach Bucky and the belief in us, but these two leading and showing just their hard work, competitiveness, everything in practice, that's where it starts. We just follow suit. They make the game easy for us.

Q. Achor, talk about the improvement that you've had this season. You said you didn't play a lot last year. Now you have one of the best lines in college basketball. The matchup you have with a 7'2" guy in Hunter Dickinson, a guy that's bigger, but perhaps you got more outside game.

ACHOR ACHOR: Honestly, I played behind a really good Logan Dye last year. And me obviously not playing, I'm a competitor, I took it personal, honestly. I just took it on a mission this whole summer just to work every day, day in, day out, honestly.

In terms of matchup, it's basketball. You know what I'm saying? It don't matter you 7'5", 7'3", 6'2". At the end of the day, you have to step between the lines. That's how I look at that.

Q. I don't think it's been any secret it's been 24 years since Samford has been in the NCAA tournament. You are playing Kansas, a storied history. A couple people in the media are picking you to upset. Are you thinking upset coming in?

JERMAINE MARSHALL: No, I know me personally, I know the way these guys think, we don't think anybody better than us. We feel every time we on the court, we supposed to win.

I don't feel like it's upset. I feel like we gonna win. When we win, it's not gonna be surprise to us. It might be surprise to all the brackets that going to be messed up, but it definitely won't be surprise to us.

ACHOR ACHOR: I feel like what you put in is what you get out. We put in a lot of work, a lot of work for months. Us winning this game, no matter win or lose, I know we going to ball as hard as we can. That's what really matters, to be honest.

RYLAN JONES: That's exactly how I would answer it (smiling).

Q. Bill Self said the other day that Kevin McCullar is not going to play for Kansas. Do you have any reaction to that?

ACHOR ACHOR: No.

JERMAINE MARSHALL: I actually kind of like sad and disappointed that he's not playing. I want to say I hope he get healthy. I also want to play Kansas at their strength. I don't want to play Kansas when they got guys out. I want to play the opponent at their best 'cause I know we are at our best and I know what we can do at our best.

I'm disappointed he isn't playing actually.

RYLAN JONES: They answered it exactly how I'd answer it (smiling).

Q. Rylan, had your dad on radio this morning, and he made a quip about you saved him \$10,000 in terms of the travel. What was your family's reaction when they found out you were playing here in Salt Lake City?

RYLAN JONES: That surreal emotion of just playing here again. My mom made countless, countless trips to Birmingham. She was almost at every one of our home games. My dad made it out to a couple, my girlfriend, my grandparents. I had 15, 16 people out there in Asheville from Utah.

For me, yeah, obviously saving him a lot of money. It also is not just my close family get to come watch me play again in person, but all my Olympus family, my Logan High family. The whole Utah community that I grew up in here for 22 years. They can have tickets and come watch, get to watch me play again in person, it's just extremely lucky.

I'm just happy that I get to be here and happy that I get to play with my brothers right here where I'm from. Took them to one of my favorite restaurants. We went to Crown Burger on Highland Drive. Had to introduce them to Big Mike's restaurant.

I'm extremely lucky, extremely happy. My whole family's happy that we get to play here.

Q. Could you describe for Jayhawks fans that have not seen your action, your style of play? Is it called Bucky ball? Running threes? Forcing turnovers?

JERMAINE MARSHALL: We press full game. We shoot a lot of threes, layups. Try to get to the foul line. But that's just, like, the stuff that you guys see. You also see, like, how hard we play. We may with so much heart and passion and grit. We do all the stuff that don't really show up on the stat sheet, like diving on the floor for a loose ball, doing all the intangible stuff that you don't see.

We play so hard and play for one another. I think that kind of what make us special, what Bucky ball is doing, it's so special.

RYLAN JONES: Exactly what Jermaine said. A lot of Bucky ball is the intangible stuff, how hard and tough and how deep. We'll play 11 guys. There's no let-off. All 11 of us could start, play 30 minutes. A lot of it's togetherness and unselfishness that we have. Some of us will be out there one or two minutes at a time. We'll give it all we got, diving on the floor, boxing out, moving the ball. If you're open, make a three. It's all the little stuff, how hard, determination, grit we play with. We'll fight, and there's no give up in us.

ACHOR ACHOR: Bucky ball to me, we going to create chaos, make everybody uncomfortable. No one really practiced getting pressed the whole game, never.

It's like playing hard. You know what I'm saying? It's really a track meet. Not a lot of people in the country conditioned like us, to be honest. I don't think a lot of people are equipped to run with us the whole game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to your student-athletes.

We welcome Coach McMillan. We'll have him give us an opening statement, then open it up for questions.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Thanks for covering. Glad to be here. Looking forward to tomorrow. Ready to roll.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Having a point guard like Rylan Jones, he is coming back here playing in front of his hometown fans, family, friends, what was it like getting him into your program, and what impact has he had on your team this year?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I mean, tremendous. We got him late, May 30th, I believe. Had him on a visit. Talked to him coming on the redeye flight, he and Jonesy, his dad. His mom. We had a great visit. I know he had a lot of great options. So glad we got him. Such a leader on the floor. He can do it all. I mean, obviously he has some great stats.

I don't think you can even measure his intangibles. Everybody knows that his heart is in the right spot, man. He's all about our team doing well. His heart is team first. When you have a leader like, that everybody is going to kind of fall in line.

I've been around a lot of point guards, I've played that

position, I'm hard on that position. Half the time in a timeout I'll pull him aside and ask him what he wants to run. A true coach on the floor, he sees it, and he's been a joy to coach.

Q. How do you think the new interpretation of the offensive charge call is going to affect the NCAA tournament?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Man, I tell you, I don't even know if there's discretion a lot of times with charge call anymore. It's like they're not going to call a charge. Sometimes they'll sell you, We're not calling a charge. It's different, that's for sure.

I'll say this. It's been somewhat consistent all year long. I say someone call a charge, our last game of the season. I forgot that call even existed, you know?

How does it affect teams? Probably affects teams that are more athletic. Probably an advantage for them 'cause if they're not going to call charges, it's more challenging.

By this time of year, everybody should know the dole and everybody should be used to it.

Q. When you learned that Kevin McCullar wasn't guys to be able to go for Kansas, does that change for you? Were you surprised?

BUCKY McMILLAN: We prepared like everybody was playing. Does it change it much? Doesn't change much with the plan. Obviously Kansas is going to have good players for matter who they put in the game.

We've had guys out all season that still have had a great season. I know they wouldn't be as good as they've been without having perseverance, other good players that can step in.

I do know you lose a player, you don't lose a good player, it can shorten your bench slightly. You know what I'm saying? Other than that, they're going to be the same Kansas. A good team and a good match.

Q. We were talking to your team, and they were saying they love the style of play you have. Kansas has some of the best players in the country. You have unique style of players. Can you explain what you look for in a player?

BUCKY McMILLAN: A lot of our guys, besides these freshmen, they didn't have Division I scholarship offers coming out of high school. Rylan didn't. Our freshmen now do because we're Division I.

We have a unique team with players that probably at some point coming out were told they weren't good enough. They're coached by a coach that never coached college basketball before he took this job. So our bus is a unique bus and it's filled with players that aren't going to have any entitlement.

When you ask what I look for in players, I look for players that aren't entitled, that play extremely hard, that play unselfish. When you have that and play with a chip on your shoulder, you'll see guys that play like they have something to prove and they play with a lot of confidence.

It's hard for me to coach players that aren't that way. I think we have a team in a day and age of portal and NIL, me, me, me, me, I think we have a team that's a throwback team that play for the right reasons. They play for each other. They're not looking to the next step right now. This is it for these guys. They're looking at this step and being together in this moment.

Q. The Samford program hasn't reached the tournament for 24 years. How important would winning tomorrow be to this program, which would be perceived as an upset?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Anytime you can win, it's always big for the program. The further you go in the season, it seems like the bigger it is obviously.

Mainly I just want to win so these guys can keep having another game. I have not since I've been in college, I coached high school ball for years, had some fun teams that I really enjoyed coaching, since I've been in college I've never wanted a team to continue to win more than I've wanted it for this team. I just really want it for them to play well and to have the opportunity to copy playing more games.

I tell you, for coaches, that's really kind of rare. Sometimes you get to this point in the season, it's like, I got to live with these guys another day? Do you know what I'm saying (smiling)?

I never want it to end with these guys. They're just a joy. You get to see some of their personalities. They're just a bunch of dudes, they fit each other. They're a lot of fun.

For Samford, it's always big, this spotlight. This isn't going to be the last time we're in this spotlight. We'll be in this tournament on a more consistent basis than we've been in the past 25 years. Hopefully tomorrow we win. We will make a run in this tournament. We win games in this tournament.

You don't have a crystal ball. Will it be this year, next year. You don't know. We're going to be here. If it's this year, great. Down the road, great. The deeper you can get in March, the more you're in the national spotlight, the more people get to learn about our program and the university.

I think our university is one of the best-kept secrets in the world. People in the southeast knows about it. Not everybody across the world knows about Samford and all the unique things that go on at that place.

Q. Why don't you think more teams go all out press? What does it take to believe in an outlier system?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, I would say my roots of coaching, I started off coaching when I was 15 years old, coaching Over the Mountain basketball in Birmingham. When I was 17 and 16 years old, I was coaching AAU basketball. Then I was coaching 17-and-under basketball. Then I coached JV basketball, varsity basketball, then I got a crack at this job.

Everything that I wanted to experiment with, I got to do it in some back gym with three or four people watching. You know what I'm saying? A lot of times people in this spot get their first DI job after being an assistant for years and everybody is watching. They're going to do what? Trap every missed shot? Hey, you're the only one doing that. What are you doing?

I think our system, the way that we play, was modified through the years. I was fortunate enough to be a head coach and do a lot of things through trial and error. Rick Pitino, a very good coach. He said everything he learned in coaching was learning from his mistakes. I got a lot of trial and error, learned from a lot of mistakes.

You ask why they don't do it at this level. I think pressing and playing fast, you got to coach your personality. You have to. You're a risk taker. You're not. You have to coach to your personality.

I wouldn't be great sitting in 2-3 zone the whole game. Jim Boeheim has shown he can win national championships doing that. I couldn't even do it with the same players because they would see I don't believe in that, that doesn't match my personality.

I think a lot is personality. There's no one way of doing it. I'm not saying our system is better than somebody else's. I do know for me this is the best because I'm comfortable doing it.

Q. You talked about how you're able to share the



message of Samford, have everyone discover the school. When you hear some of the conversations about tournament expansion, access for low-majors, mid-majors, what is your reaction to that? How can this event be a tool for a place like your school?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, when you hear athletics can be the front porch to a university, we've all heard that, I think that's very true. I mean, there's people out here in California and Utah, they don't know anything about Samford, but they're going to watch our team play, they're going to see a team that plays with tremendous courage, tremendous heart. They're going to look it up and find a school of excellence, academic excellence, athletic excellence, a place of faith.

You ask what happens when you get away from this March Madness. What makes March Madness unique is the Cinderella stories. You look this year was the first year that the conference winners didn't get to participate in the NIT necessarily. To each his own. You see a lot of the high majors turning the NIT invitation down.

When you start squeezing, what makes us unique, because in America, let's be real, you have your upper percentage, then everybody else is an underdog. You know what I'm saying? Everybody else is an underdog to get to the top. That's why they can identify with underdog teams. Most people are that team. If you take that out, this ain't America, right?

They identify with underdogs. The more teams that we can have in this tournament that are those mid-majors, Cinderellas, I think the better.

Q. Does it present more of an opportunity to have a school with such a name at Kansas in this situation where you're talking about the very things you're talking about with the school that's so well-known, reputation?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, obviously they're a very good program. I'm assuming more people tune in, right, compared to if we were playing maybe a lesser, unknown seed. It goes right hand-in-hand with kind of the 'underdog Cinderella opportunity'. That's what this tournament is, right? It is what it is.

That's why I think, some of the most, best memories we have in this tournament are memories that started with that Cinderella and continued and continued. We're never going to forget the Butler runs, Saint Peter's, VCU, George Mason. Some of those games, in those clips, that's etched in people's minds forever.

I'll be real with you. I coach college basketball. Before that, I wouldn't have known who George Mason was. I guarantee if you start looking at those schools, the number of applicants and stuff, that brings recognition to those universities, it's special.

Q. Do you know Bill Self at all? In what ways do you see his influence or understand his achievements in the game?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Who? (Laughter)

No, I coached some very good high school players that was recruited by everybody across the country. Coach Self, I don't think he recruited some of my guys. Some that went on and played in the NBA.

To all the coaches that came before me, I'm so respectful to all of them for paving the way to get the game to this point. A lot of people when they got in the business -- a lot of people get in the business now because there's tremendous financial incentives in the business. Some of those that started years ago, that wasn't the case. They made this game what it was and paved the way for all of us to be sitting here because it's such a big deal now.

So more than anything about being a good coach, I just respect what he's done to help advance the game to where it is today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Appreciate your time.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Thank y'all for covering.

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