

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

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

## Kansas Jayhawks Coach Bill Self Hunter Dickinson Dajuan Harris Jr.

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin the Kansas media availability with the student-athletes.

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

**Q. Hunter, everybody has been wondering how does your shoulder feel? Are you practicing with any pain? What percentage would you say you are?**

HUNTER DICKINSON: The shoulder feels good. Good enough to be out there with my teammates. I feel like everybody's dealing with a little injury nowadays, especially towards the end of the season.

I feel good and ready to get out there with my teammates.

**Q. From a morale standpoint, how much did you anticipate Kevin would be able to play? What has been the process been like to say we're moving on and be ready anyway?**

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, I think we were obviously all hoping he'd play 'cause he's one of the best players not just on our team but in the country.

We've seen the amount of work that he's put in to try to get back, especially me personally because I was rehabbing my shoulders, knees, hips. I've been in the training room with him. He's been doing two to three sessions every day for the past two months. It's not his fault by any means. It just wasn't feeling right. I was with him when he was trying it out. He's just going through a lot of pain.

I wish the best for him. Hope that he can get back as soon



as possible. We got a good group of guys that are going to try to rally around him and try to win a couple games here for him.

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: Basically what Hunt said. He's been dealing with it. We've been trying as a team to go forward without him because we never knew it was going to happen.

We just wanted to keep trying to get better. We need to work on us, get better, prepare for this week, so...

**Q. When are you guys at your best? You've had some ups and downs this year. What are you doing when you feel like you're playing your very best?**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: I feel like when we start out the game playing defense, if we start with our intensity on the defensive end, that carries a long way for us. We start making shots.

It really starts with defense. If we get that going, we'll be in pretty good shape.

HUNTER DICKINSON: To piggyback on that, defensively, if I were to be more specific, guarding the three-point line. That's something I feel like when we hold teams to less than, like, 10 threes, but definitely less than eight threes, we're very successful at the end of the game. Just guarding defensively.

I think offensively just getting the ball moving, really having it not stick out there. Having all five guys touch it, not really worried about who's shooting it. Just looking for that best shot.

**Q. Full court pressure, that's what they're known for, forcing turnovers. Certainly high intensity.**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: Samford, they play 10 to 12 guys. They're going to be prepared. But I think we going to have to take our timeouts, take a deep breath, like just be focused. Like you said, they're a high-intensity team. We're low our man on our team right now.



We just got to stay focused, follow the game plan. Coach, he knows what he's doing. We just got to, like I said, follow the game plan.

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, I was watching one of their games. One of the announcers said that the players are more worried about the amount of possessions that they play, instead the amount of minutes. I thought that was really interesting.

I feel like their team is really centered around trying to get as many possessions as possible. That's why they're a top-five team in scoring, a top team in forcing turnovers, stuff like that. They're constantly trying to make sure they get up and down and have as many possessions as possible.

I think that's the reason why they're able to play so many guys and have that team chemistry where guys aren't worried about their minutes. They really have a lot of possessions. Leads to a lot of shots, scoring opportunities for guys. I think that's a big reason why they're so successful with their style of play.

**Q. Hunter, you guys switch off a lot. Achor is a 6'9" kid, shoots well from beyond the arc, not as big. Talk about the matchup.**

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, no, I don't think I'll be switching off him much. He's a really good player. I've seen a couple games, one when he had I think 36 versus Western Carolina. He can score from all different levels.

I think they do a lot of playing him to the pick and pop because they have a lot of good shooters out there. They keep trying to space the floor. He's good at putting the ball down on the floor, being able to drive big men, but also on short closeout he's able to shoot it as well.

He's a really skilled player. I think it's more than just him. They have a trio of bigs that are pretty talented. Like I said earlier, they're always rotating guys in and out because of the pace they play at. It will definitely be a tough task for me and Parker to kind of have that kind of rotating belt of big men that we got to face.

**Q. Hunter has come back so quickly from a dislocated shoulder. What does that say about his toughness?**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: I mean, it says a lot. We need him. He knows we need him. We're going to ride him along this whole March run. But he's one of the best centers in the country. We just got to follow beyond him and make him make plays for us. I got to make plays for me and him, too. We just got to play together.

**Q. Four out of five losses coming into the tournament. Has the team had many meetings? What do you think the team's attitude is going in?**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: We had a meeting every loss. We needed them, those meetings, to get better. We got to play our best basketball here in March. We lost a couple games. It's a new season, so everything starts over.

I believe in my teammates. I believe in my coaching staff, too. We just got to come together, play together, play for each other.

**Q. I wonder what you thought of playing in the altitude. What is it like to practice and play in it?**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: To me it really doesn't matter. I don't think it affect me. I don't even think it affect my teammates. I think we just got to play our game, come out with intensity, play basketball, so...

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, I would say I feel like the more you think about it, the more it might affect you. I think if you're just out there playing, it really won't affect you that much. Might get a little bit more winded a little bit faster.

I think for me, just making sure I'm well-hydrated, getting enough rest. I've played in Colorado before, so I know it's not Utah but it's a high elevation. I feel like I have a decent experience with elevation.

**Q. Obviously when you're at Kansas you always have a target on your back. Kevin out, Hunter's shoulder. An upset special. I'm sure you've heard that. Does that noise resonate inside the locker room?**

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: Not really because we beat some pretty good teams without Kev this year. We got to come ready to play. Like I said, on the defensive end we got to play together.

We beat some pretty good teams without Kev, so I don't think that really matters that much.

HUNTER DICKINSON: I would say that's one of the benefits of playing at Kansas. Like you said, there's that target on your back. Everybody is going to give you their best game. During the regular season, you can kind of be like, Man, why is every team playing so good against us every night? I think that really prepares you for the tournament.

I think a lot of teams, when they're high seeds, they're not used to teams playing great versus them every game. I

think that kind of catch people by surprise sometimes. That's what leads to upsets.

Here at Kansas, you're used to that every time you step on the floor, somebody is going to give you their best shot because they want to try to make a name for themselves versus one of the best college basketball programs of all time.

I think that's a reason why Kansas is so successful in March, is because you have that target on your back, you're used to people hitting shots that normally they might not hit, stuff like that.

I think we're well-prepared for Samford to come out and make a couple shots that are pretty tough.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes. We are now joined by Coach Bill Self. We'll have him open with a statement.

BILL SELF: I know I am and I know our team is, as well, thrilled to be in the tournament, thrilled to be in Salt Lake City. The weather's been better than perfect. Hopefully our play will match what the weather's been.

We know we got a tough draw, but certainly looking forward to it and playing a very good team tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up with questions.

**Q. Did you have to work with team morale after the loss of Kevin? Did you feel like the guys might sag?**

BILL SELF: I don't know that we've done anything much since necessarily the loss. But we did do quite a few things -- not quite a few, but we did some things as a group since the Big 12 tournament, which I think has been very good for us. We rented out a theater, watched movies, done several motivational-type things, things like that, trying to dwell on what we have accomplished as opposed to what we were in the last 10 days because the last 10 days we haven't been very good.

**Q. Specifically with Kevin, had the guys to really expect he'd be back? Is that something you've had to work through with them?**

BILL SELF: It's been a strange deal because we've known for six weeks what the deal is. I mean, some days it's good and some days it's not good. He's good enough to go get 19 in the game against good competition, then not be able to go for two games later.

I really felt like, and I think that he did, too -- he tried, but I

think he felt like, and I did too, nine days off was something that we didn't have the luxury to do, would put him in position to be ready to go by Monday this past week. It just didn't work out. He tried. Just couldn't get there.

**Q. Do you remember what it's like to be where Bucky is now, three, four seasons in, first NCAA tournament?**

BILL SELF: Well, when I was getting started, we lost 18 games in a row. We didn't get an at-large bid that year (smiling).

The thing that he has done, and I don't know him personally, but the thing that he has done in a short amount of time is remarkable. Great roster, got depth. Trust his roster because he plays everybody 10-plus minutes. I think he plays ten 10-plus and two more 7 and 9.

The style is fun style. There's pressure all the time. It's a style that you don't have to play perfect, but you have to play athletic and quick to create havoc and force teams to make plays maybe at a pace they're not as accustomed to making plays too.

What are they, 25-9. I think he's done a fabulous job. I think he also plays a way that will warrant to continue to get good players because people want to play like that.

But he's in a far better place than I was early in my career.

**Q. We've gone against full-court pressure, transition, three-pointers, forcing turnovers. Talk about how they look different or similar to what you faced in that full-court pressure, using the extra timeout perhaps, does that help you?**

BILL SELF: It needs to help us. It needs to help us, especially playing in a little bit of altitude. It's not like playing in Laramie, I don't believe. There's obviously some altitude here. We'll play eight guys. They'll play 12 or whatnot. Yeah, sure, that will be a factor.

But I don't remember ever playing against anybody that presses after misses, that presses on missed free throws, that press on missed field goals. They're going to get after us. They mix it up. Sometimes it could just be man, sometimes it could be run-and-jump, sometimes a 2-2-1, a lot of different things.

What it forces you to do is players make plays as opposed to players run offense in a lot of ways. A lot of things that you do, We're going to run this play, we're going to get the ball here. Well, a lot of times you won't even get your players in position to get to that play until there's 15

seconds left on the shot clock, then it's too late to run the play.

They make you go make plays. I think it is different than anything I've ever gone against. I think it's actually more aggressive.

**Q. 6'9" kid, Achor.**

BILL SELF: He's good. He's good. Stats are misleading with him. He's scoring over 16 a game, but he's playing 22 minutes. If he's playing 32 minutes a game, he's getting 22, 23 a game.

Yeah, he's a load. He's a load. They've got really good personnel.

**Q. Long Beach State is here, Dan Monson, a unique story. Curious what you think of that situation and whether you believe there's a right way and a wrong way for a coach to be fired?**

BILL SELF: I will say this: I'm so happy for Dan, but I'm not near as happy for him as some because when I was at Tulsa my first year, he had us down 34-8 at halftime when he was at Gonzaga (smiling). I've harbored that feeling for my entire career.

Dan obviously was at Minnesota when we were at Illinois. We've known him for a long time.

I read his quotes. I thought absolutely on point and classy in everything he said. He's been there a long time. I know that administrators, administrations are forced to make hard decisions. They've been made all across America this year already. Some of them don't seem right from the outside looking in. We're not on the inside, so we don't know what's right or not.

There's not too many guys that can go out the way that they would dream they could go out. Dan gets to do that. I think we should all be happy for him on that.

**Q. You've said Hunter looks okay. Is there anything that he's in any way limited to?**

BILL SELF: No, no. No limitations. The question we had initially was if he tried to go up and dunk the ball hard, hang on with one arm, something like that. But there's been no limitations. That doesn't mean he can't get a stung and come right back, but he's done really well so far.

**Q. You were asked about Bucky's style. Specific to the press, some coaches lean hard into it, but it's not been something that is far spread. What do you think**

**it takes to lean into an outlier system?**

BILL SELF: I think sometimes as a coach -- now this is me, so I can't speak for Bucky -- I think sometimes from a philosophical standpoint, we look at it, what do we have to do? We can't give up layups, second-shot opportunities. Those are things that from my philosophical standpoint, I would say, Let's try to stay between our man and the basket more.

From his philosophical standpoint, we'll create more havoc than we give up. With me, if I was pressing, we'd be terrible at it all the time. Same thing, we go zone, they make a three, what do you do? You're mad, you get out of the zone. Team shoots a layup against a press, what do you do? You're mad, get out of the press. He's like, No, let's just keep rolling with it because over a course of time it prevails.

He last a strong commitment to that, which I think is hard for a lot of coaches to do.

**Q. With this season, especially the tail end with the losses and injuries, what has been most challenging about it for you?**

BILL SELF: I would say really probably not knowing day to day what your hand is. You go into a practice and you say that we're going to practice this way with these guys, and that may not even be the team you start the next day.

Hey, injuries are part of it. Maybe we should have been a little deeper so maybe we could overcome some of those things better. That's part of it.

I think to the point earlier, the NCAA tournament is good for a team like us. You get the extra timeout in the first half, you get longer timeouts. There's more time. If you're going to play five, six, seven guys, there's actually an opportunity that we can get more rest than they could over the course of a regular-season game.

**Q. In general with losing four, five at the end, Kevin's injury, the thin bench, do you have to mentally prepare the team differently than maybe you can remember? Different kind of feel, isn't it?**

BILL SELF: It is. I think that when you feel you're more talented, you go into it believing that you can score enough. Sometimes when you take out the offensive firepower or whatever, now I think it's okay that your mindset kind of changes saying, 'Well, if the other team can't score, we can't lose.' Whereas before, 'We're going to be fine if the other team scores.'

I think that it's kind of a mindset of what is our personality going into this situation. I know what I want it to be. I know what we stressed. I believe it's going to be that.

Certainly you can run crap offense and get it to a guy and he can make a hard shot. You don't have that as much. You better run pretty good offense the entire time.

**Q. How do you feel about the state of mind of the guys going through this tough streak that you haven't many times come into the NCAA tournament with?**

BILL SELF: No, we haven't very many times at all. I kind of like it, to be honest with you. I think even though people will equate Kansas and seed and all this stuff as, Well, you positively should still do well, I equate it to this is one of the first times I've been in a tournament where we should be the ones with the chip on our shoulders. I think that will be good for us.

**Q. Nick said when you had your team bonding thing the other day, you watched a movie called 'Boys in the Boat'. I'm curious why you chose that movie.**

BILL SELF: I have a buddy that is the sports psychologist for the Cowboys and the Yankees. I think he knows far better than me what to watch. It was that or 'Barbie'. I went with 'Boys in the Boat'.

No, he told me it was good. In all honesty, it's pretty good. It's kids that have been dealt a hard hand and rallying out of that. I'd recommend anybody to watch it, so...

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

BILL SELF: Thank you, guys.

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