

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Kylan Boswell

Oumar Ballo

Media Conference

Arizona 85, Long Beach State 65

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Arizona. We'll take an opening statement from Coach Lloyd.

TOMMY LLOYD: Great job by our guys. Super proud of them. We're in this game as a program last year, we don't assume or take anything for granted. I was really proud of how we responded. I know, sitting in your guys' seat, you like the drama, all that stuff that comes with this tournament.

There's another side of it -- the players and coaches who have to actually live it and feel it. A lot of us are pretty tunnel vision, besides our families, a lot else in our life. We feel the emotions.

For our guys to overcome that day, we got off to a decent start, they made a run at us, we settled in, took control. So really proud.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Can you talk about the importance of the three-pointers. There was a school record for the NCAA tournament. How important was it to get them out of the zone.

TOMMY LLOYD: Hey, I knew they were going to play zone a lot. That seems to be a little bit of a trend playing against us lately. I think our guys are settling in, getting better against it.



The funny thing about zones is they're all a little different. You have to kind of figure out where the little pockets and openings are. When you look analytically at them, opponent that shoot a high percentage of their total shots are three-point attempts. We had to really shoot some threes. We focus on jamming the ball inside, pounding it in there, getting to the paint.

I knew we were going to have to take a lot of three shots. 35 three-point attempts for us is a lot, but that's what the game called for today. Our guys did a grit job of knocking them down, including this guy right next to me here.

Q. Kylan, what was the message in the locker room? Long Beach State made it a game early on. It was a dogfight for most of the first half. What was the message from Coach Lloyd in the locker room that got you settled in?

KYLAN BOSWELL: Main thing he told us is taking one task at a time. Coming out in the second half, the first four minutes, our group, make sure our lead is still there, maintain or try to put a push.

All of us did a great job coming out in the second half and staying strong.

TOMMY LLOYD: Jim, you don't have one for Big O? Big O has been kicking ass. I'm super proud of him, the way he's been playing.

Q. Looked like you guys were really starting to have some fun in the second half. Were you having fun in the second half there?

OUMAR BALLO: Yeah, we were. In the second half we were playing really good defense. I felt like our defense always dictate our offense. We just did fast breaks. Have stops like that, you have to celebrate. That's how we're having fun every game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse our student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Lloyd.

Q. What was different about this year's matchup



compared to last year? What lessons did you take away as a coaching staff from the loss in the first round last year that you applied to today's win?

TOMMY LLOYD: I think the lesson, I mean, we could dissect a lot of different ways. I think the first thing you have to acknowledge is it's hard. These games are hard. I've been in a lot of 116, 215 games. No matter what you guys think, they're hard. You have to get comfortable with hard. If you don't, panic can set in.

I thought our guys did a great job of not letting the tournament pressure get in. We turned it up, really focused one task at a time, made a few plays, flipped the script.

You have to make a team like that that's playing with emotion and positivity, you got to show 'em the end of their season. You got to give 'em a glimpse of if they don't start playing better, this could be it. You have to flip the script on them. I thought we were able to do that in the second half. They saw the end, and we didn't.

But they are tough games.

Q. The first four minutes specifically, the way you flipped the script, what were you doing there?

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, I think our guys actually settled into the game. We kind of got a little more comfortable with some things we could run against that zone. A lot of times against the zone, you can have these great little X and O diagrams. But it comes down to your players making good decisions and plays, creating opportunities for themselves and others.

I thought defensively we were able to make a couple plays. O blocked a couple shots. We were able to get out in transition. We feed off that stuff. You guys talk about celebrations. You may think I'm crazy, but that's something we practice. You have to play with joy. We practice celebrations all the time. We want to do things on the court that should be celebrated, celebrate our teammates' successes. That energy builds.

I'm happy you noticed our guys have fun. That means a lot to me.

Q. I know obviously you're friends with Coach Monson. At what point do you just have to set that aside?

TOMMY LLOYD: Hey, make no bones about it, I wanted to kick Monson's ass. Don't make any bones about it. We're competitors. It's like playing, I'm the little brother.

I've always been the little brother to all those guys. Sometimes little brother has got to fight back.

That doesn't mean I don't love Mons. I felt, I almost do now, like tears starting to well up when I hug him at the end of the game. It's a lot.

People don't know what we go through with our families. And think that guy gives 17 years to Long Beach State, and they fired him without another year in his contract. He's walking out of this deal in 30 days with no benefits, no severance pay, no nothing. When you sit in my position, what we put our families through, I mean, I don't think that's right.

That guy does not deserve that. He's a great man. He deserves another job, another opportunity. That's where my heart goes out to him and his family. That's the other side. That's the stuff we talk about. We don't just talk about -- joking about the game, the Princeton offense. We talk about the real stuff.

What he and his family are going through right now is hard. There's another side to this business. We know it's a tough business. But still he's got kids in college. Our jobs are pretty special, specialty based. Not a lot of them out there. I hope things go good for him because he deserves it.

Q. How impactful is rebounding to the success of this team?

TOMMY LLOYD: Caleb had a double-double? Good for him. That's great. When Caleb is contributing in other ways, it really helps us. Obviously he's a pretty offensive-centric player. We can all get fixated on that a little bit.

He made a hustle play today. I think he turned the ball over, blocked a layup attempt. For him to do that was huge growth. That's a championship effort. I was really proud of him.

O has been so steady the last two months. He's been a force that's hard to deal with every day. I really admire his consistency. That's been awesome.

Q. Today was Keshad Johnson's ninth career NCAA Tournament game, and he scores your first seven points of the second half. When you went on the 7-0 run to close the first half, big burst in the second, how much does having real-game experience mean?

TOMMY LLOYD: It matters. The thing with Ke is he's got such a special ability to lock into the moment. There's no

moment too big for him because for him they're all equal. They're just moments.

I've been really impressed with that. I didn't realize he scored our first seven points, but I'm not surprised he did. I know he had a layup on the baseline I thought he got fouled on. He must have made a three and something else.

It's huge. Pelle makes our first basket, three. Caleb settled into the game. Kylan played really well today. Their experience is rubbing off on him.

It's great. We don't assume anything. We know whoever we play Saturday is going to be a tough game, a knock-down, drag-out. We're going to have to put our best foot forward.

Q. You opened by talking about the tunnel vision you have, the difference between you and us. It applies to the fans, too, I would say. At some point in the first half it's easy to thinking about here we go again, last year. Different cast of characters. Do you have to wonder, is there a moment of, I hope our guys aren't thinking like that?

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, we try to talk about our guys, talk about that stuff with our guys. Human emotions are really powerful. As a competitor, you just have to fight those thoughts. You can't go there.

Yeah, I mean, hey, the tournament pressure deal is real. Anybody that says it's not is lying to you. I mean, it's a real thing. That's one of the things that makes it such a fun tournament to watch. It makes it really hard to play in.

Fortunately I think this is my 25th time in the NCAA tournament, so I've been around it a little bit. Some of our guys have been around it a little bit. To be quite honest, I think we're built for it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

TOMMY LLOYD: Thank you, guys.

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