

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Gonzaga vs Kansas

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Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

Gonzaga Bulldogs
Coach Mark Few
Nolan Hickman
Graham Ike
Ben Gregg

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: This is Gonzaga. We're joined by junior guard Nolan Hickman, redshirt junior forward Graham Ike, and by junior forward Ben Gregg. Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Question for all three of you guys. Yesterday in the game against McNeese, Coach Few was able to empty the bench, and you got to see guys that rarely see action play on the biggest stage. Does that add to the morale of the team? What's the feeling amongst rotation players watching your teammates get a chance to shine in March?

GRAHAM IKE: Definitely as for morale, I was thinking let's see if we can get those guys in, Joe, Jun, all those guys. It was great to see Jun get the put-back dunk at the end. That really heightened the morale of the team.

NOLAN HICKMAN: It's always dope seeing the guys that don't usually play get in there, especially around this time of the year. March Madness is such a good event. It's always good seeing them guys in there for sure.

BEN GREGG: I personally loved it because I was in their shoes not too long ago, my first couple years. I know how hard they work in practice every day to give us a good look on scouts and stuff like that. To give them an opportunity in March Madness is awesome.

Q. For all of you, your thoughts on Kansas coming into this facing -- two blue bloods facing off, and your thoughts on their strengths that you see looking at



them on tape?

GRAHAM IKE: This is something you dream about as a kid, playing against a great opponent like this.

They're a good team. We've got a good plan for them. It's going to be a great match-up. It's a great opportunity for us.

NOLAN HICKMAN: Great all-around opportunity, like Graham just said. It's something I've dreamed of, something I look forward to, growing up playing basketball, watching March Madness. These games are what it's about. My squad's ready for it.

BEN GREGG: The history of Kansas speaks for itself with their great history. So being able to play against an opponent like that with such a rich history, what they're doing this year, they've got a talented team.

To be able to step on the floor for them, it's an honor for us. We've got a good game plan. Ready to get after it.

Q. Follow-up question. Probably a lot of people thought you would be on the 1 or 2 line before the season started. Talk about the season in general, some of the challenges that you had, and how you ended up here.

GRAHAM IKE: Yeah. It's been a great journey. Definitely up and down for sure for us. Everybody just had a different role coming into this. It just took some time for us to gel, and we did that at the right time.

NOLAN HICKMAN: We did that at the right time, like G said. He's pretty much said everything that's in my mind. We just got rolling at the best time, around March.

BEN GREGG: With all these new guys that came into our program this year, it's going to take some time for us to gel together. We're all super talented in our own ways, but we've got to learn how to play with these different type of guys.

So it took a while. Preseason didn't go our way. Lost a



couple games we shouldn't have. But we figured it out, like these guys said, at the right time. I think we're going to keep it rolling in March.

Q. Graham, how do you approach the challenge of dealing with Hunter Dickinson, who has been playing hurt but still ended up with 19 or 20 yesterday?

GRAHAM IKE: Listen to our coaching staff, stick with the plan they've got for me, watch some film. Ultimately, just be prepared mentally and physically for the game.

Q. Graham, just to follow up on that, how does Hunter compare to some of the other good games you've seen with Zach Edey, Donovan Clingan? What does he do differently than those two?

GRAHAM IKE: He's a great player. Biggest difference is he's left-handed from those other guys. He can stretch it out a little bit. He has a good touch around the rim. Good passer, great feel.

Just stick to the game plan, listen to our staff, and we'll be fine. We'll be ready.

Q. For all three of you, Dusty Stromer had ten points yesterday. When he's clicking, what dimension does that add to your squad?

GRAHAM IKE: It takes us to another level. It was big-time for him to step up the way he did yesterday, especially with Ben in foul trouble. Super proud of him and his growth over the season.

NOLAN HICKMAN: It's huge, man. It's very impactful. Seeing him getting there, it's dope too. He was once started and his minutes got subtracted, but it's always good seeing him if there and gives us a little level of clicking for sure when he's going.

BEN GREGG: He provided a spark for us yesterday. I know how important it was. I was in the same position earlier in the season. I always do my best to bring that spark. He did a great job yesterday, knocking down shots, getting big-time rebounds and defending his butt off. It was big time yesterday for him.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on the win yesterday, and best of luck tomorrow. Thank you, gentlemen.

We are now joined by head coach Mark Few. We'll open up for with questions for the coach.

Q. Coach, you're matching up against a Kansas team

that has been struggling with injuries. Kevin McCullar is out for the tournament. Hunter Dickinson is playing through a shoulder issue. Furthermore, the team Kansas played yesterday in Samford pressed the whole time and really tuckers out opponents, while you guys comfortably beat McNeese and were able to give starters some rest. Is that something you're considering when scouting this team, that advantage, or are you more focused on the Xs and Os and the match-ups?

MARK FEW: No, not focusing on that at all. Hunter Dickinson looked great to me last night. Made great plays. Shot a hook with his bad arm. Made three quarter-court passes like Kevin Love. I thought he looked great.

You know, Samford is a tough, tough team to play, and they had to get through that. But we're expecting a great battle from Kansas.

Q. Coach, with the connections that there are between your program and Arizona and playing in the same venue, though on the other side of the bracket, do you see any possibility of your fans rooting for Arizona in the first game and then their fans sticking around rooting for your team? And is there any benefit to that?

MARK FEW: I can't speak for their fans. I can speak, I mean, our fans are huge Tommy Lloyd fans. So I totally, 100 percent, see them supporting the Cats. From a personal standpoint, we'll be pulling hard and rooting hard for them. Heck, Mimi's been staying in our room here -- that's Tommy's daughter, the last four nights. The wives have been running around, going out to dinner and breakfast and all the last four days.

So, yeah, it's kind of standard procedure.

Q. Coach, you obviously mentioned that it took a little while to get gelling this year. Was there a game or a practice or a week where you kind of saw the light go on for you guys?

MARK FEW: Wow. I think it was more a gradual process through kind of late January and February, where it started to kind of happen. We just started playing much, much better together. The guys have always had great chemistry and really liked each other. It's been a very enjoyable team along those lines.

I think it was just kind of figuring each other out, whether it was Graham and Ryan getting used to playing together more and more and the pick and roll and really understanding each other, Anton being able to -- again,



figuring out he needs to assert himself more than he ever had to when we had Drew, Julian and guys like that.

And then, also, obviously putting Ben in the starting lineup, playing the three bigs together, it took us a while to adjust to that. Once we did, we kind of ran with it.

Q. Coach, some of your players in Las Vegas, after the final, were talking about seeing value in being slighted, that it would help them. Athletes have a long history of scouring the earth for slights to gain fuel. Where do you stand, after all you've seen, on how much value that does a have? Does it have anything to do with what you said first off the bat last night, them being so dialed in?

MARK FEW: I think, yeah, I'm with you on the bulletin board crap and all that stuff. But I think what it did do, I think it did provide a healthy dose of respect for McNeese right from the jump. When, basically, the pairing was announced, I mean, everybody started picking them. So I think whether that was being slighted or just being like, okay, whoa, we better -- it's on right now.

So I think as the week went on, as we showed them film, as they heard from me and the staff for just how good we thought McNeese was and what they were capable of doing, I think there was definitely a healthy -- it's always good to have a little bit of healthy fear and, obviously, respect for what you're dealing with.

Q. Coach, you've talked a little bit about relationship with Bill Self. I think it was earlier this year. How far back does the relationship go? What does that sort of mean to you? It's only your second time playing him.

MARK FEW: It goes back to December 27, 1962. We're born on the same exact day. I mean, that's kind of odd. Kind of crazy. But no. Just we played Bill all the way back when I was first getting going, maybe my second or third year at Illinois. Incredibly good.

We actually played him when he was at Tulsa way back when in the Fairbanks Tournament. That's where I first met him, got to know him. Just huge fan. Tremendous amount of respect. Just what he's been able to do and just a pressure cooker of a job, but just the run of Big 12 championships, success, the streak they have in getting to the NCAA Tournament. I think it's them and us and Michigan State.

Then I really like just watching his team play. We'll put in little actions that I saw them run over the years.

So big-time fan and just awesome, awesome guy.

Awesome coach.

Q. Coach, back in 1998, you guys went and played in Lawrence. At the time, you were an assistant and Gonzaga was the program nobody had heard of. Kansas was the blue blood. Almost 30 years later, now when people talk about college basketball powerhouses, both these schools come up. What does it mean to you the work that you and your staff have done over the years have elevated you to that level?

MARK FEW: It's great. It's great. Obviously, it's been a long, hard slog for us, but a fun one at that. We've been able to stay in growth mode.

And I think Kansas can probably explain it to anybody who's ever worked there or played there or coached there: It's hard to stay really, really, really good for an extended period of time. It's really hard when everybody circles the game on the calendar and you're everybody's Super Bowl.

They deal with the same stuff we deal with. It's always a storm-the-court moment if you lose on the road. And you carry with you high expectations, which is great. But if it's not handled wisely or correctly, they can be a burden.

Q. Coach, can you talk about this year's Kansas team? Do you see it similar -- similarities, differences between past Bill Self teams, and do you see a similar edge that both you and Kansas are playing with this season?

MARK FEW: I see a total Bill Self-type team in that they love to play high-low. They love to feed the post. They have great posts. Obviously, KJ Adams is just -- he's much like Anton Watson for us. He just does everything.

So I totally, totally see he's kind of back to what I always envisioned Jayhawk basketball being like. And that's what, to me, shows such a great example of why he's such a great coach.

In years past, they were running dribble drive and small guys. He was playing small ball. I mean, the success didn't slow down at all. It looks to me like they're back very comfortable in running the high-low game and playing out of the post, much like we've always done over the years at Gonzaga for the most part.

Q. Coach, you've been coaching for a long time. You haven't missed the NCAA Tournament as a head coach, except for the COVID year. You've been coaching since before I was born, which is crazy.

MARK FEW: I don't think we need to go there.

Q. Well, what do you see in the team this year that reminds you of Gonzaga teams past?

MARK FEW: The heart we play with. I think we're back to playing with a decent amount of swag. We figured out, we've been -- knock on wood -- taking great care of the ball, sharing it really, really, really well and seem to play really, really together.

So, I mean, that's my hope that all our teams look like that. This team has certainly been able to do that. I think they've done -- I mean, they'll always be special to me for just how they've hung in there.

We had probably not rough road or rough patches for most programs, but what I was alluding to earlier with Kansas, you lose a game, the sky is falling. We lost more than one. So they had to power through that. They walked into the burden of playing at Gonzaga, you know, and some of them weren't used to that or didn't know what it was all about. They had to figure it out on the fly.

Q. I know you might like to be 33-0 and a 1 seed, but is there any -- you personally, have you felt anything fun or refreshing about not hauling around that 1 the way you've done so many times before?

MARK FEW: No, totally. Totally. We've hauled it around. We had a nice run of hauling it around and dealing with it. And that 1-16 game is not fun in any way, shape, or form.

But, yeah, this has been a nice change, to be honest with you, from my standpoint. It's kind of fly under the radar and just kind of do your thing. And then it certainly probably fits my personality better.

But, hey, be also nice to have five pros on your team and steamrolling everybody too. Those are some pretty good days also. So either way is good, as long as you're in here and still playing and being able to do stuff like this.

Q. Kind of a two-part question. Do you know which of you was born earlier that day on December 27, '62?

MARK FEW: How can you even think of stuff like that? I have no idea.

Q. Second part, you used the lineup with all three freshmen on the floor at the same time, with Dusty, Braden, and Luka in the first half. What is the confidence level you have in those three guys? Normally, you tend to shrink rotations this time of year. To be able to expand it with those three, what

have they shown you?

MARK FEW: I think, ideally, I probably wish we could have gotten to that more this year. We've been in a lot of tight games, a lot of tough games. Just trust those two starting guards is mostly the issue.

But Luka came in, gave us some nice minutes. We were able to rest some guys. I thought Dusty was great yesterday, kind of back how he was a little bit earlier in the season and was aggressive and making plays and just was terrific. Hopefully, we'll get that same Dusty tomorrow.

Q. What time were you born?

MARK FEW: I have no idea, guys, and I'm regretting I even brought up that piece of trivia, actually.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK FEW: I don't even remember what I did last week. But, hey, I think it was my wife that picked up on that at some time, looking at a magazine or something. I don't know. We try to text each other on our birthdays when either one of us remember it. That's about it.

THE MODERATOR: With that, Coach, good luck tomorrow. Thank you.

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