

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Montana vs Wisconsin

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

## Wisconsin Badgers

Max Klesmit

John Tonje

Steven Crowl

Media Conference

**Q. Obviously the first thing you do when you see the brackets come out is you look at your opponent. How long did it take you to realize you were coming back to Colorado?**

JOHN TONJE: Yeah, it was pretty cool to know that I'm coming back to a familiar place. Brings back a lot of memories just driving around and seeing the downtown area of Denver.

It's definitely a blessing to be back in Colorado for a little bit.

**Q. What did you learn during your four years at Colorado State that you've brought with you through your year?**

JOHN TONJE: I've learned a lot. I think I really learned a lot from my coaches and just understood basketball a lot better throughout my years; continued to get better each year.

And yeah, it's kind of hard to point to one thing that I learned, but I think overall just understanding the game outside of high school was really big for me.

**Q. Have you heard from any of your former teammates, coach? Do you also keep an eye on them? Because in addition to you having success, they're having success.**

JOHN TONJE: Yeah, for sure. They're still my guys. I watched their game, and super happy for them to see them make that run at the end of the year and stamp their



names in here and get in March Madness. It's awesome. I'm pretty sure we're both pulling for each other and just happy to see each other here.

**Q. John, what a ride you've had as a career. Where did you think you would be at this stage of your life years ago? Could you have imagined yourself being almost 24 and still playing college basketball?**

JOHN TONJE: No, but I wouldn't trade my journey for anyone else's. I think I'm super blessed to be in this position. Obviously I didn't expect to have a sixth year. It just was the cards I was dealt last year and that's what God wanted me to do, have an injury and come play for Wisconsin.

I'm not second-guessing it. I love it here, and it's been a blessing.

**Q. Max, Wisconsin fans travel pretty well when you guys are on the road. What do you hope the environment is like tomorrow and how can that help you guys in this tournament?**

MAX KLESMIT: Yeah, like you said, the Badger fans travel well. I remember a couple months ago when we were in Greenbrier for the Thanksgiving tournament how many Badger fans were there and how loud that got.

It should be electric. I think we're super excited. I've never been to Denver before, so it's cool to see a new venue, get out here, play where the Nuggets play. It'll be a sea of red tomorrow. We're excited to see it and happy for the opportunity.

**Q. I'm wondering what did last year's abbreviated season do for you this year?**

JOHN TONJE: It did a lot. I think I learned I got a chance to kind of slow down, which I never had a chance to do, just sit down and reflect, watch a lot of film of my old games and kind of figure out what I want to do with basketball and how I want to approach getting better.

I think it was also kind of refreshing to kind of start from the bottom again, being injured and going day by day, and just seeing improvement week by week was just huge. I had to



go back to the basics and kind of be in the gym alone. Had a lot of time kind of to myself. I had a more quiet year not really in the limelight, and I think that was great for me being an introvert, just getting to focus on hoops, and it got better for me to learn from it.

**Q. What have you guys seen from looking at Montana tape and what do you have to focus on to come home with a victory tomorrow?**

STEVEN CROWL: I mean, we watched the film last night. Like most mid majors they've got a lot of shooters. They're a little undersized. From what we saw they play really hard. They're a really talented team. I don't know how many they rattled off during the season but I think it was double digits. I think it's more about us than anything, and that's not just against Montana; that's against whoever we play. We are just more focused on us and where we can get better.

**Q. As the longest tenured player on this team, how did John come in here as a new player in this program and assert himself and have the season that he's had?**

STEVEN CROWL: I think the transition for him has been seamless. Credit to the coaches for finding him and bringing him in. I think he fits right in with us, as do all the other transfers and freshmen we brought in, too.

Like I said, that's a credit to the coaches for bringing the right guys in, and we're just happy to have them all.

**Q. John, back to your tournament appearance with CSU, do you take anything from that experience a few years ago? How does that tournament experience apply to this year's with the Badgers?**

JOHN TONJE: Yeah, it was big to go there the first time and kind of see what I was getting myself into. This time around I kind of know what things are going to be.

There's a lot of media and a lot of flashy things going on outside of the game, and I think this time around, I just want to kind of find a way to just calm the storm and just focus on basketball.

At the end of the day, that's what it is. Even though there's a lot more going on and you can kind of tell that, but I think that's one of the things I'll be telling the younger guys in the locker room is it's just another day of hoops, and just approach it as that.

**Q. Have you talked at all about the altitude and what that may either affect the way you guys try to play or try to prepare for the game, or is that something that**

**you're just going to figure out when you're in the middle of the game tomorrow?**

MAX KLESMIT: No, I think we're prepared for it. It's kind of one of the things we thought of right away. But I think we've got really good trainers, really good strength coach, strength and conditioning program here. I think we've got the right people taking care of us and we're in the right hands.

Everybody is prepared. They've got to play in it, too. It is not just like we're going to be the only ones playing in the high altitude.

I think it's something to look forward to, something that we haven't really had to deal with before, and I think it's a new, fun and challenging opportunity.

**Q. John, what was it that drew you to Wisconsin? What was it about Madison or the school or the team that you chose the Badgers? I'm sure you had a lot of opportunities to go anywhere.**

JOHN TONJE: Yeah, I chose the Badgers because they believed in me and I also wanted a chance to challenge myself and come to a Power Five school. A lot of Power Five schools weren't -- didn't really know if I could compete at that level this time around in the transfer portal just because of the injury.

But Wisconsin really just did their homework on me, and they believed in me, gave me a chance that I'll forever be in debt for.

The coaching staff and just the culture of Wisconsin, just being able to watch them in their March Madness runs a couple years ago and just seeing how big basketball is and wearing this jersey, it's a blessing to be here. It's surreal.

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