

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

## Montana Grizzlies

## Coach Travis DeCuire

## Kai Johnson

## Te'Jon Sawyer

### Media Conference

Wisconsin 85, Montana 66

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Montana.

Coach, some comments on today's game.

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: Tough one. We went into this with a ton of confidence. For stretches of the game we showed that we could play with them. We just couldn't sustain it. We had long stretches where I don't think we were executing very well on either side of the ball. I think a good basketball team met a better basketball team today. I thought they did a good job of preparing themselves. They played their game.

I think one of the things for us game-wise was to try to contain the guards, knowing if we did that, we would free up the bigs a little bit for shots. We played the percentages in terms of the bigs usually shoot a lot of threes leading up to this game. Today they were very aggressive about stepping in. I think that led to some other issues for us defensively.

You can't win these kind of games shooting 39% and giving up 55% to your opponent. Got beat tonight on both sides of the ball.

A lot of respect out to Wisconsin. We'll be cheering for them on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Kai, you guys got down, then made the run to get within 51-47. What happened after that? How come**



**you weren't able to sustain that run?**

KAI JOHNSON: Yeah, I think we hit shots on that run obviously. Put a couple stops together. I don't think we had runs like that throughout the game because we couldn't string our stops with our buckets.

I guess shots just didn't fall after that run. Just it is what it is.

**Q. Te'Jon, how do you feel like you guys did inside? Seems like for the first half, you kept them bottled up. Paint battle...**

TE'JON SAWYER: I feel like we did a decent job. They're bigger than us, but I felt like we were as strong. We tried to make it hard for their guards, seeing if the bigs can try to beat us. They made shots, but I think down low, we was pretty physical.

**Q. How does this team want to be remembered? You guys made a pretty strong run.**

TE'JON SAWYER: I could go with that.

I think just how hard we fight. This team has been through a lot of adversity, one of the most that I've been a part, not only just myself but, like, down the line, all 16 had some type adversity. It was us showing we can fight through battles. We had a lot of close games, showing we had heart.

I think that's a team to be remembered, just by our fight.

KAI JOHNSON: Yeah, I'd say this is the most talented team I've ever been a part of, probably one of the most talented teams out of this conference. Sometimes that's hard when you got a lot of talent on a team to come together and be able to play together. I've been on teams with a lot of talent. You just can't mesh because there's egos, people that want the ball, whatever it may be.

How this group came together and learned to play together, then playing together throughout the entire year, the season, I think that shows with our 25 wins. That's what I want to be remembered for is how close this team is on and off the court.



**Q. Going through this past couple months, the 14 wins, 15 games, the moments that you had the last few games of the season, do those magical stretches make it a little bit easier at this point to look back and say you accomplished so much compared to a couple months ago?**

TE'JON SAWYER: Yeah, for sure. I think this group came, like Kai said, we came together. We had a group talk when we was struggling in the pre-season. Small group talk. Talked it out. Like he said, it could be egos. We said we're going to buy in. This team really bought in, and that's what I'm happy about for the season.

KAI JOHNSON: Yeah, I think those records and the streaks, I think that just comes with us not caring about those types of things. I think when you don't care about those things, they come to you naturally instead of looking for rewards as a team or even individually.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you, men.

Questions for the coach.

**Q. Pridgen got in a bit of foul trouble there in the second half. How did that change how the game played out?**

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: Yeah, foul trouble was a problem for us in multiple areas. Kai as well. Just the four fouls backs you off.

One of the things we talked about going into this game was try to keep them off the free-throw line. You can't have a guy score 19 points on five attempts and think you're going to win a basketball game.

We needed to do a better job of defending without fouling. I thought that was one of the things that killed our momentum. When we got stops, we got in transition, they struggled to guard us in transition, went about a four- or six-minute stretch where we were taking the ball out of bounds, whether it was free throws or there were a couple possessions they might have turned it over, walked it up the floor. But there was no transition, so we lost our advantage in that regard.

**Q. There was a stretch where you guys were close, then their No. 7, Carter, hits a three-pointer, then takes the charge, hits another shot. How big was that sequence?**

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: Huge. That's what players do in these

moments, right? We're in the Big Sky Conference championship on the 12th. Kai Johnson hits a three, gets a three-point play, back-to-back positions to stretch out a lead for us to win the Big Sky championship. That's what happens in these games.

It's important for us to respond. We came down in between those possessions and shot open threes and didn't make them. If you can't respond, you've got to tighten up and get stops defensively, which we didn't do either one.

**Q. With the transfer portal and everything right now, how do you change your approach to recruiting coming off a season like this one?**

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: I don't. I don't. I won't do anything different. From day one, before COVID, I always believed that you replaced seniors with freshmen, high school kids, and replaced transfers with transfers. You're losing experience. Experience can't be replaced by 17-, 18-year-olds.

The same thing has continued with us in the new age of the portal. We replace transfers with transfers. If the guys that have eligibility, if they walk out the door, we'll go find some replacements.

**Q. You had just a little bit of a height disadvantage in this game. What's the approach going into a game like that? How do you think that aspect of the game played out?**

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: I don't think it had much. They got some point play baskets around the rim. We went small with our four-guard lineup early in the first half. They got some offensive rebounds. I thought that impacted us then.

I think the most important thing for us when we do that is to spread them out on the offensive side of the ball. We didn't find the advantages we were looking for during that stretch or I would be sitting here maybe saying we won that stretch or we broke even.

We've had moments where we've been smaller in every game this year because we play four guards a lot. I think the biggest issue for us was that some of the role players jumped up and made big shots when we were focused on some of the other guys.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, coach.

TRAVIS DeCUIRE: Thanks, guys.

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