

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - VCU vs BYU

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

BYU Cougars

Coach Kevin Young

Richie Saunders

Egor Demin

Fousseyni Traore

Media Conference

BYU 80, VCU 71

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with BYU. Coach, we'll start with you.

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, obviously just thrilled to get the win. This time of year, you hear it all the time, you want to survive and advance. That's where my head goes.

We knew it was going to be a tough game, super well-coached team. I think they do a great job as a coaching staff over there. They made it tough on us.

Wouldn't go away at the end.

Proud of our guys. We felt like we wanted to key in on rebounding, not putting them on the line, and taking care of the ball. Those were the three keys for us coming into the game. We won those three areas. Felt like that was a huge part of the win.

Each one of these guys was obviously a catalyst. I thought Egor got us going to start the game. Richie is a guy that's always consistent for us. Fousseyni gave us a huge lift off the bench scoring inside. All in all, a good team win, which has been kind of the calling card for our team all year.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes first.

Q. That surge you had at the end of the first half, seemed you were in control the rest of the way. What



was the key to getting the lead and keeping it?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Our team, we're so deep. As you noticed, like during that little run, a lot of the second unit was right in there making it happen. I love it because there's so many different tools that we can use as a team.

We were playing fast, sharing the ball, which is BYU basketball right there.

Q. Egor, you've had a lot of pressure placed on you ever since arriving. Up-and-down season in terms of your shot. What did you want to come out here on this stage and do and show for yourself and for this year?

EGOR DEMIN: I think we've been talking about this so much inside of the team, just come here, nothing matters but the team. We can scout as much as we want other teams, but at the end of the day nothing matters. Matters how strong we get to the court, how much effort we give, and how much we want to win.

In this tournament, I think I don't have much experience as these guys about March Madness, but I believe that we the ones who wants to win more.

Q. Fousseyni, as a senior, your last year in the program, how badly did you want to win this game?

FOUSSEYNI TRAORE: This actually mean everything to me, especially senior year. Like we just don't want to go down like that. Every single game can be our last game, you know?

We just take (indiscernible) no matter what, we just going to get it done. Like we just got one down, five more to go (smiling).

Q. Fousseyni, what sort of things are you going to look for when you're facing Wisconsin?

FOUSSEYNI TRAORE: Well, we really haven't talked about that. I don't know yet. It's like the same thing we've been doing, like just focus on ourself, do what we do best as a team. Like just play for each other.

Q. Fousseyni and Richie, you were on the court last



year when you lost in a similar situation when you were a six seed. How rewarding was it for you to get the win today?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Like Fousseyni said, it's amazing. It means so much, right? We've had such ups and downs this season. Like, we're not ready to be done yet. It means so much that we were able to win, get to this point that we haven't done before. We're eager to face the challenge, this next challenge.

Q. It felt like a home game at times. Crowd traveled well. What was that environment like? Jimmer Fredette

was here. Do you feel like this team can do something special like his group did in 2011?

FOUSSEYNI TRAORE: Yeah, we definitely believe that this is a special team. We really believe in each other. Richie?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: 100%. We just rely on each other. That shows. Again, we're not ready to be done. We're ready to keep moving forward.

Q. (No microphone.)

RICHIE SAUNDERS: We love it. It happens to us all the time. We don't take it for granted, but we love it. Everywhere we go, there's a lot of blue. Today was no exception.

Q. Richie, your little brother next to you when you were watching him take over a little bit in the second half down the stretch, big brother or little brother?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Depends how you look at it (laughter).

Q. When you were watching him take over down the stretch, what was going through your mind seeing him dominate?

RICHIE SAUNDERS: I love it. It makes me just so, so hyped. When he's doing well, when he's cooking down low, it's so fun to watch, so fun to play with that. When you know you need a bucket, Fousseyni, I can't remember the streak, two or three in a row, you know the ball is going right back to him. You know his defender is scared.

He deserves every bucket. He's worked hard. Just super happy.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes go at

this time. Thank you, guys.

Questions for Coach Young.

Q. Jimmer Fredette and Danny Ainge were right behind the bench. What kind of things do they do to help the program?

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, I mean, those guys are awesome. They love BYU. That's one thing I think that is super unique about BYU, there's so much passion from our fans, the alumni. It's something that I knew about just the fans, but I didn't factor in just all the alumni. So many good athletes that have been through BYU. Danny is a great resource. I pick his brain often. Jimmer is a guy that reached out the second I got the job.

To have that support from those types of guys is incredible. I think Taysom Hill was up there, too. The list goes on and on. I definitely felt the crowd, to your question. That was one of the reasons I was happy we got this draw to come to Denver.

There's a lot of blue everywhere we play, like these guys said, but I'm glad that the guys put on a winning effort for all the fans that were able to get here.

Q. You said yesterday you used to have nightmares coming here. Do you feel like you exorcized that a little bit today? For you, taking the step to the college game, what does it mean to have a tournament win in your first year after taking a slate from the NBA?

KEVIN YOUNG: Super rewarding. This tournament is like none other. It captivates America for good reason. Super grateful to be a part of it.

As it relates to this building and coming here, I was kind of saying that tongue-in-cheek. In the same sort of breath, I do have the comfort of the familiarity of being in the building. Even though they hurt us oftentimes, I still had a couple big wins in here.

Just the familiarity for me was actually something that was kind of calming and soothing. Really grateful to be a part of the tournament.

Q. You obviously weren't here last year, but could you feel the sense of urgency from these guys to not have what happened last year repeat this year?

KEVIN YOUNG: I did. I absolutely did. That was another thing that gave me a lot of kind of comfort as I was preparing for this, we were preparing for this.

I pulled a lot of those guys aside and asked them, are we missing anything? Are we hitting all the right things? They were definitely good sounding boards for me, being my first time through it.

That's something that we relied upon all year. Honestly, go back to my first press conference when I took the job, I made the comment I was going to rely on the returners to navigate the Big 12. Now here we are navigating the NCAA tournament, as well.

Q. How would you describe Egor's skill set given his size and age? Has it evolved?

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, he didn't answer the question you asked about his shot selection, stuff like that, or his shooting in general.

Him and I had a really good film session right before we came out here. I wanted to make sure he knew exactly, again, where I thought he was at his best. I thought the shots he took tonight, especially early, were exactly that.

I thought a lot is made of his shot. It's hard to shoot a high percentage when you take difficult shots. I think that's been a growth moment for him as the season has gone on. I thought tonight the shots he took were all in rhythm. He took one that was a little iffy.

That's a mature way to handle things, especially in a game like this, playing within yourself, not trying to do so much. The sky's the limit. He's 18, just turned 19. His feel is really good.

The thing he did that I liked tonight, there's a lot made about our three-point shooting, they go 15-38, which is remarkable. We go 7-20. You say, oh, BYU isn't playing to their strength.

But the way we have shot the ball this year, teams have had to decide are they going to guard the three or let us get to the rim. Tonight we had 38 points in the paint. I thought his approach in terms of getting downhill early set the tone for that.

I think just his maturity as he's understanding how teams are guarding not only him but our team as well says a lot about where he's at mentally.

Q. The game just ended, but wanted your preliminary thoughts on facing Wisconsin, if anything stands out to you about that matchup.

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, I don't know a ton about them. I know they score a lot of points. I do know that. I know

they can have a team where basically everybody can shoot it from three. We'll have to be dialed in on how exactly we want to guard those guys.

My coaches have been hard at work trying to make sure that that scout's dialed and ready. I know they've had some super high-scoring games, as I've followed it loosely. I really look forward to jumping into the tape and putting a game plan together.

Q. You've been big on stacking days. How does this day stack up in this vision that you've had for BYU basketball?

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, I'm just proud of the way our guys approached it. I told these guys this right when the regular season ended. My experience on the NBA side, I was fortunate to be part of a lot of really good teams and deep Playoff runs and stuff. It wasn't even just the teams I coached, but what I learned in facing really good teams this time of year.

You have to rely on your habits. You can't all of a sudden make stuff up and think it's going to work in the post-season. The way that our guys played true to ourselves, executed the things that we've done all year long, that's a by-product of stacking those days that we talk about. Happy for our guys because of it.

Q. You brought an NBA approach to the college game. Do you see it starting to transfer? It's like these guys know the expectations, the film sessions, done in a different manner. Do you feel like that's starting to pay dividends?

KEVIN YOUNG: Yeah, I think so. Obviously a lot is made of my transition from the NBA to the college game. I think it really rears its head in every part of our program. It's not just style of play, it's not just film. It's literally everything we do. Mainly because that's what I know. I'm not saying that's the best way to do it, it's what I'm comfortable with.

Our guys, to your question, have bought into the way we try to operate our program. Whether that makes it different or not, I don't know. I don't know what other teams do. I know with this particular group, they've bought into our style of play, the way we warm up, the way we watch film, the way our analytics guys are involved, nutritionists are involved, literally top to bottom. That's something I'm proud of, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

KEVIN YOUNG: Thanks, everybody.

