

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas A&M vs Michigan

Friday, March 21, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Nimari Burnett

Rubin Jones

Will Tschetter

Media Conference



What have you seen from them on film? What is the key to limiting turnovers? Is there a special sauce there?

RUBIN JONES: I think every single team we play against look at that turnover battle and think we're going to turn the ball over a lot.

I think with us, just taking our time, trying not to do too much, moving the ball. We emphasized playing for the second side, third side of our offense where our numbers are increasing, exploring a little bit more. We get to the second and third side of our offense...

Q. You have had some ebbs and flows with the rotation. Seems like the eight-man group you are using now, the puzzle fits. How have you seen that grow in the last few games?

WILL TSCHETTER: I mean, I think it's just trusting the guys that we have out there. I mean, you know better than anyone that with L.J. coming in, playing big the last week or so has been huge for us with our rotation, adding some depth at the guard. It's been big.

Q. Nimari, what is surviving a dogfight like you were in yesterday do for you? Dusty talked about the underdog role. Do you want to embrace that?

NIMARI BURNETT: Definitely embracing it. Going in there and being very excited for the moment, but also looking to take the punch to them. Go in there, have fun. It definitely gives us confidence coming out of a dogfight yesterday and going into playing another really good team.

Also in our preparation. Also coming off the Big Ten tournament is very important for us to know that close games are bound to happen at this stage of the season, and it's going to take all of us in order to win.

Q. You mentioned L.J., how he's become an integral piece. He looks like a different player the last two, three weeks. Did you see that coming into practice?

WILL TSCHETTER: L.J. has been doing that all year in practice. I think it was just a confidence thing for him. Obviously freshman year can be a real roller coaster with a

THE MODERATOR: Ready to begin with student-athletes from Michigan. We'll take questions.

Q. Nimari, looked like you were asking to come out a couple times, looked like you were dragging. How are your legs? How are you adjusting to the altitude?

NIMARI BURNETT: No, it's definitely an adjustment. Especially a moment in the first half, yeah, I got to come out. I'll be a detriment to the team if I stay out there.

Not really in the legs. More so in the wind and the breath. Definitely feel adjusted now and ready for this next one.

Q. Texas A&M focuses so much on rebounding. Going into tomorrow's game, how are you y'all planning to deal with that?

NIMARI BURNETT: I'll go.

Played against them before as an SEC team, not Michigan, but in my past. Very physical team, like you said, on the boards. Looking to get second-chance points. They're one of the best teams in the country at getting second-chance points. Majority of their misses turn into second-chance points.

Being physical, getting hits and block-outs is very, very important. It's something that's number one on our list going into this game.

Q. Rubin, they're going to want to turn you guys over.



whole assortment of different things you have to go through.

For him to just kind of stay the course and trust what some of us older guys were telling him, to stick with it, your time is going to come, this team needs you, stay locked in. For him to do that has been huge. He was pivotal in the Big Ten tournament the way he played and gave us a spark, last night the way he gave us a spark going forward.

Q. What gave you confidence in Dusty May's message to you after winning eight games last year that you could be in this position? Did you believe that?

NIMARI BURNETT: Yeah, he just wanted to recruit the best team possible, that fits his system and how he likes to play.

Coming here knowing the success that he had, inspiring us to better our games and expand on our individual games, then being team players, locking into winning. He definitely put a great group together around us to turn the page this year.

He gave us that confidence early on. To see it unfold the way that it has is truly beautiful.

WILL TSCHETTER: Yeah, I think honestly the biggest message that he relayed to me that really stuck was just recruiting unselfish, great guys. I think that we put together a team where we all get along really, really well. We're a pretty tight-knit group. I feel like the chemistry that he recruited was perfect.

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

We'll take questions for Coach May now.

Q. Texas A&M is clearly the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the nation. When a team has a strength like that, is it so easy that that is the emphasis of the game plan?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, it's obviously point number one on the scouting report. The way we've chose to attack it is just like we did with the turnovers in UCSD. We have a couple flaws that are things we haven't done well this year. It's right in front of you, either you do this, and like I said, there's an extremely heightened awareness to fix it or you're going home.

I believe in our guys. We believe in our plan. We're going to do the absolute best job we can to handle our defensive glass.

Q. I asked Buzz about last year's Texas A&M-Florida Atlantic matchup. Anything you're taking away from that matchup?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, a little bit. Obviously a different team. They've added some players, subtracted some players. But it has the same identity. Coach Williams' teams always have an identity of toughness, togetherness, of guys never taking a second off.

They're absolutely relentless in their pursuit of protecting the rim, the paint, getting second shots. They probably have as good role definition of any team I can remember competing against in the last several years.

Q. As you scout or study this Texas A&M team, what in particular stands out that you think they do particularly well beyond the offensive rebounding?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, defensively, I'll begin on the defensive side of the ball. They always disrupt your rhythm and timing and try to force you into doing things you don't want to do.

Then when you think you have an advantage, they have guys that, like I said, they don't quit on plays. They come out of nowhere. You think you have a layup, we counted a handful of possessions last night where it seemed as though Yell was going to have a layup. Just because of a multiple effort from behind the play, it's erased, then that turns into a transition basket.

That certainly jumps out. Offensively their ability to attack mismatches, identify who they want to go at, who they want to go at with whom. They do it. They do it well. They break your defense down, and therefore their guys have running starts on the offensive glass.

It all fits together like any well-coached basketball team. They're not a bunch of silos going on at once. It all fits and works together. That's why they always seem to be playing late, late every year. Marquette, Virginia Tech, Texas A&M, they're always good.

Q. You said a couple months ago that Rubin Jones, we hadn't seen the best of him yet. Where do you think he is? Can he still get you to another gear, be that outlier that takes you higher?

DUSTY MAY: I think so. I believe everyone in our locker room thinks that, as well. He made a big shot last night. We were able to extend the lead a little bit. Two of the biggest rebounds of the game. Obviously Vlad's stood out, but Rubin had a couple really, really big extra possession

offensive rebounds, tip-outs, kept the ball alive. Obviously the big defensive rebound that sealed the win.

Rubin is playing to win. I think he's done a really nice job since we put him in the starting lineup as being a connector, as someone that has tried to make sure it all fits together.

Defensively he's always a pest. He's someone that gets underneath the basketball, makes plays. I do think he looks even more comfortable in our switching schemes, that was something new for him, than he was earlier in the year.

Q. As of recent, Tre Donaldson has come back into his own. Talk about his confidence and your coaching staff and his teammates when he shoots the ball in the late-game scenarios, how much confidence do you have in him?

DUSTY MAY: The utmost. He's made a big, big shot it seems like all of our closest games. We wanted to be even more aggressive. I love the way he attacked in transition, especially in last night's game. He had the ability to break them down off the dribble and use his speed, quickness and finishing ability.

I wish we would have put him in that position a little bit more. But I thought him and L.J. did a nice job of creating some offense with their speed and quickness. They're going to need to be able to create some offense against tomorrow because Texas A&M, like I said, they're not going to let us just dribble down the floor and throw it into Vlad and set a ball screen and be comfortable and do whatever we want to do, pass the ball wherever we want to.

We're going to have to have some guys create some advantages and make good decisions. We trust those guys will be able to do it.

Q. For a relatively young man in this game, you've seen a lot of stuff. If I read my timeline correctly, you might have been present for one of the greatest moments in Colorado basketball history.

DUSTY MAY: Mike Lewis is a good friend of mine. He was matched up with Chauncey Billups, if that's what we're referring to. I actually wasn't here, but I was a part of that team. Back then the manager staff, we traveled a lot lighter, meaning just one or two.

I wasn't on the trip. But I was back in the video room clipping that up. Like I said, Mike Lewis, the head coach at Ball State, had a tough cover that night in a young

Chauncey Billups.

Q. What did it look like in the video?

DUSTY MAY: We'll save that when the cameras are off (laughter).

Q. Texas A&M on paper seems to be a team willing to give up three-pointers. Is that something you like, while they pack the paint, you should be able to get some good looks?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, it's just taking rhythm threes. We talked about it today. We haven't done a good enough job of respacing with urgency so we're in position early, feet ahead of the pass. We've been respacing at too casual of a pace. When the pass gets there, our momentum is going backwards, we're on our heels.

We've got to clean up a few things. We'll work on it today in practice. I think if we simply fix that issue, after we drive and kick, we space, our penetration reactions improve, I think our three-point percentage will continue to rise.

Q. A couple weeks ago teams that really crashed the offensive glass took advantage of that against you guys. Where do you think you as a team, front court, have grown in that defensive rebounding?

DUSTY MAY: Well, our bigs have done a better job of holding position and not getting buried too deep. The biggest jump has been our guards have gotten in the fight much better. To be honest, I'm disappointed, myself and the staff, that we haven't emphasized our guards rebounding enough because it does so many things for your transition offense for getting just offense initiated the other way. It alleviates some pressure from your bigs of having to fight a guy that's 250, athletic, and get the ball.

We put a really strong emphasis the last couple weeks. That's the reason we made incremental progress. But I'll take a lot of the blame for us not being where we need to be.

Q. Texas A&M has played a lot of close games this season. You have as well. What is it about your team that you feel like you've been able to prevail in a lot of those games, including last night?

DUSTY MAY: It's a great question. I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out exactly what it is because I've been a part of seasons where we were really, really good at it, other seasons where we were poor. A lot of times it came down to the one-on-one free throws, not turning it over against a press, things like that.

This year has been so odd because they haven't really come down into those situations. Last night it came down to one stop. The one thing that I know for certain is that when I watched our guys in the last five minutes, they have a different level of the athleticism, of intensity, of desire to do whatever it takes to win that possession.

You watch even Danny, the rebounds he gets in the last five minutes, compare them to the first five minutes, it's like a completely different guy that's 100% lost in the game, in competition. Vlad is the same way. I don't know sometimes we're conserving because we count on those guys so much. Tre Donaldson, the same thing. Those guys look super confident, aggressive and athletic. I could go on and on. They just look different.

They've grown to that because we struggled early in the year. In November we didn't win those close games. Since then we've been able to find ways to win in every one- or two-possession game.

Q. You're at a premier program.

DUSTY MAY: Agreed.

Q. With all the changes in college basketball, what do you see as the future for the 'Cinderella' program?

DUSTY MAY: I think right now there are so many older good basketball players, I still think there's a place for Cinderella. UCSD was not a 12 seed. I'm not criticizing the committee. It's a tough job. It's impossible. That's not a 12-seed basketball team. In the locker room we're watching Saint Mary's. They're in the WCC. Our FAU team last year... There's still a place for it. But it's difficult.

Also, when you have the non-Power Five teams, usually you could be pretty darn good by playing differently. That's what a lot of these teams have done. Saint Mary's being the exception. They're extremely big. But typically, San Diego has a really good formula. UC San Diego has a really good formula where they're skilled at all five positions, four really good shooters on the court at one time. The one that's not a great outside shooter is an elite one-on-one player and shot creator and foul drawer and whatever the case.

There's not going to be as many Cinderella stories. When you look at the guys that have left Belmont across college basketball, wow, it's impressive what that team could have been.

Once again, there's always going to be a group of underdogs that are able to play with anybody because

they're overlooked and maybe because they're not as tall or muscular, they don't jump as high. I don't think there's going to be as many of them.

I don't think there's ever going to be a case in a one-game scenario that Cinderella can't compete with just about anyone.

Q. Texas A&M, they're tough, deep. This will only be the second game in nine days for them. It will be your fifth. How do you feel your team is doing rest-wise? How do you counteract that depth and rest?

DUSTY MAY: It's tough. I mean, obviously the mental component, the emotional fatigue of playing in one-possession games like we have for so long, on so many nights. The way we ended our season I think was five games in 14 days, three games in three days. This day in between feels like a vacation compared to what we feel right now.

It's a disadvantage. The flipside of it is as we're playing ball, we're hooping every couple days, we found a goody rhythm. We'll probably choose to go at it from that direction.

It's going to be physically taxing tomorrow. We're going to have to make some choices as coaches, do we continue to try to push tempo, get as many possessions, or are there times we need to slow it down and let our guys catch their breath, see if we can't generate a good shot later in the clock to give our guys a little bit of, I guess, a mental break.

Q. On the conversation about the close games. You talk about the mental fatigue of the one-possession games. What is the upside when you pull those games out? Does it add to the chemistry, resolve of the team, something that becomes an advantage?

DUSTY MAY: I think it's a belief that we've been here before and we can find a way. But I also think it helps with the reliance on we need each other. If we're going to find a way to win this game, then we need everyone in this circle, we need everyone to be ready, we need everyone to make an impact, whatever that impact may be, because there's so many ways to make a difference in this game.

I do I think it's really enhanced our belief in each other and our reliance upon the team.

Q. You've talked about offensive rebounding, Texas A&M being a great team on the offensive glass. How do you balance your guards crashing and getting out for easy offense in transition?

DUSTY MAY: They go hand-in-hand. If our guards can rebound long rebounds, at least their fours and fives should be behind the play. So it puts us in situations where maybe three-on-three with an open floor is a good situation for Tre Donaldson, L.J., whatever the case.

That's why I said it's so important for the way we want to play to have guards that attack rebounds, especially can go after some long basketballs so we have an advantage right off the bat. We don't have to outlet it to a guard, and we're off to the races.

Q. This may be silly, when a team's strengths are your weaknesses, you already do those things poorly, have figured out ways to win, can that be not as big a deal as people think as opposed to a team that just does the things you do better?

DUSTY MAY: I'm much more confident that we're going to find a way to win each night than the confidence that we're going to fix something that we may just not be built well enough to fix in that moment.

Sometimes 30-plus games is a pretty large sample size. Sometimes you're just not good at certain things. You have to overcome it by being exceptional or really, really good in others.

Like I said, do I think we're going to fix that issue? I think we're going to do our absolute best and fight as hard as we possibly can. If that doesn't fix it, then we'll have to overcompensate in another area.

We believe we'll find a way.

Q. Last two or three weeks, Roddy has been more aggressive in taking it to the hole. That gives you a different dimension. Is that something that was intentional or something you've encouraged in practice, or is that just Roddy taking what the defense gives him?

DUSTY MAY: All of the above. We need him to be aggressive. When there's an angle, there's an advantage to get downhill because he's good at it.

He made a big three off the baseline out of bounds in the first half. But yeah, it's all of the above. He knows that's what he needs to do for us, and that's what he's good at. He's a really good downhill driver, getting to the line.

It's a combination of the staff encouraging him to do that, his teammates putting him in position, encouraging him to do it, but also he just looks like he's been back to himself playing again and having fun and doing whatever it takes

to help the team win.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

DUSTY MAY: Thanks, guys.

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