

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Iowa State

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Ole Miss Rebels

Malik Dia

Dre Davis

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for the Ole Miss student-athletes, please.

Q. Is this Iowa State team, a game where you feel like physicality is going to be more intense than the past couple games?

MALIK DIA: Yeah. No doubt this team is very physical. Their identity is defense and I think they're a really hard-playing team. I think this game is going to be more about us and how we can compete.

Q. Malik, I'm just curious to get inside your head a little bit. What were you feeling with your first NCAA Tournament game yesterday, and are those emotions, do you anticipate them being any different with having one under your belt for tomorrow?

MALIK DIA: Yeah, yesterday was unreal. It's something you dream about. I remember fifth grade when I was in my living room watching Middle Tennessee play where I'm from and just watching the March Madness, and that was just an unreal feeling. So being here was unreal.

And I think getting those flutters out in the first couple of minutes of the game was good. But I think now with the second game, I've got them all out and we're going to go out and play basketball.

Q. Malik, I don't know how much you've had an opportunity to watch Iowa State on film. What have you seen from Joshua Jefferson?

MALIK DIA: Yeah. Really good player. One of those position players we always talk about, can score the ball, pass, assist, rebound. Really good player. And I think he's

going to present a good challenge for us. And we also are just going to treat him as another player at the end of the day.

Q. Dre, obviously the start you had yesterday, what's the key in being able to carry that over to a game when it's a totally different kind of opponent like tomorrow?

DRE DAVIS: Just play the game that's presented. I felt like we just came into the game, trying to be patient take what the defense gives me. Teammates put me in good position. A lot of good point guard play from everybody. Just play the game that's presented.

MALIK DIA: Dre Davis is also my roommate and I told him last night you're fixing to have a career game. I'm feeling it. Shout out to him.

Q. The conference you played in, how has that prepared you for this tournament?

MALIK DIA: The SEC is one of one, the best conference, in some say the history of the game. And to play in that night in and night out is a blessing. I'm so thankful that I got to play in it. But I think this also prepared us for moments like this. Nobody is tougher, stronger than an SEC opponent, and I think that this is just building our character and building who we are as a team and getting us ready for games like this tomorrow.

DRE DAVIS: Just piggyback off that, we see, what, 13 SEC teams in the tournament. It just goes to show the power of the conference. So playing against teams that are capable of making the tournament night in and night out only gets us prepared for this time of the year.

Q. For both of you guys, obviously you both have played for multiple head coaches before Coach Beard. Can you speak a little bit to what makes him different?

MALIK DIA: Coach Beard is probably the most intense coach I've ever played for, and I don't mean that in a bad way. That's a great thing. I think he's brought the best out in me each and every day. I can never say there's a day that I can come in and be chill or cool. He's going to get the most out of me every day. And if he sees that we're not bringing it, he's definitely going to get it out of you.



So I think also he's also just brought out a different level of expectations. As a player personally, I have high expectations for myself, but I feel like Coach Beard is the one person I've known in my life who has brought me to a higher expectation, just pushing me to be a better version of myself each and every day.

DRE DAVIS: When you speak about the expectation and intensity, I feel like that's something that's not really talked about enough, just having the expectation and standard to hold yourself to. He's never going to let you slack off, never going to let you play below your A game.

We always talk about bringing our A game. It doesn't mean making shots, but giving unbelievable effort, body language, attitude. At the end of the day, he's an unbelievable coach and he's the reason that we're here.

Q. Is that a difficult transition, when you first got to Ole Miss, of dealing with the intensity, dealing with the standard that he puts on you every day and how did you come to adjust to that?

MALIK DIA: Yeah, no doubt. Not any knock on the past schools I was at, but transitioning from Belmont to Ole Miss with Coach Beard is super different. I feel like a lot more things are ran a lot more effectively here and things are going as planned, and Coach Beard is going to make sure everything is right.

DRE DAVIS: It's definitely a tough transition. But at the end of the day, it's the reason we came here. This is what we wanted, to have these expectations, to be in the position we're in now, and to play in March and compete for a championship. This is what we came here for.

Q. Kind of along those lines, Malik, he kind of got after you during one timeout yesterday. What's it like in the game when you see that intensity? Why is his approach effective in the game, not just on an off day or off season or whatever?

MALIK DIA: Yeah, not my first rodeo. When something goes -- if I mess up on something that's scouting report or something-based in the game, Coach Beard is definitely going to get after it. I feel like that's an effective way. I feel like he's just coaching.

It's the emotions of the game that we're really trying to win, and he's getting his point across. As a player, I feel like it's important that you just sit there, take the coaching, and understand the message that you're trying to get through so that when you get back out there, you do it effectively and you do it right.

Q. When you talked about that Middle Tennessee game, was that the Michigan State game you were talking about?

MALIK DIA: Yeah. So I was -- I don't know how old I was, but I remember I went home from school not knowing much about MTSU, just knowing that they're in that area of Murfreesboro. Yeah. Watching that game was unreal.

And then knowing some of the guys now, I'm working out with them back at home like Perrin Buford, Jaqawn Raymond, all them, just watching that game and having them come back and tell me about these March Madness moments. And to be in this moment now is just unreal and forever grateful for it.

Q. And about yesterday's game, I'm curious, is playing in a game like that with crazy momentum swings and 22-point lead down to 4 -- it's just one game, but do you feel like you have enough experience? How good is that for preparation to play in a crazy game like that in your first one?

MALIK DIA: Yeah, it's good the momentum swings and stuff. I think we have older, experienced guys. So I think we just stay calm in those moments and trust in our work and our coaches. We realize everything is going to be all right, we gotta just stay to who we are.

MODERATOR: All right, guys. Thank you. Good luck tomorrow night.

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