

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Chris Beard

Media Conference



coach, but as an assistant coach. And we competed against each other along the way.

But, yes, a physical, hard-playing team that doesn't beat themselves. So, again, we'll have to play our best 40 minutes of the season to try to get to next weekend.

Q. I know a lot's been made of your program's success over the years in your second season on the job and how you've been able to elevate programs in year two. It's not always been about roster continuity, though. You have a lot of new players on this team. I'm curious what changes from year one to year two in a place that allows you consistently to take that next step like you have this year?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah. So much of year one is spent on building, building the culture, building the program, building the staff, building the roster. And sometimes you can get it done. Our Little Rock experience was the first year and it was special. Got two of those guys joining us tonight for dinner here in Milwaukee.

But no, I think year two, it's more about defending the culture. You never forget year one. Our first team at Ole Miss was really good. Watching Brandon played so well at McNeese State the other day. He had our whole coaching staff jumping up-and-down cheering for him. Moussa had a great season at Memphis.

No, so year two, not that it's any easier, but you can spend the 24 hours that you have each day and not have to spend as much in terms of building things, because in some ways they're built, and now you can defend it and refine it and work at it.

Q. What can you tell us about your past battles with Iowa State from your Big 12 days?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, again, great fanbase. I actually tore my ACL one time in Ames, Iowa as the opposing coach and fell down during a game. And from my perspective nobody really laughed at me. Kind of a respectful fanbase. Great basketball, people, country, job. Certainly I studied he'd it during the Tim Floyd days and all the success since there.

MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Beard, please.

Q. You guys are 17 and 2 this season when Dre scores at least 10 points. But outside of the scoring boost, in what ways does he impact winning? Because it seems like when he's active good things happen for you guys.

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah. So many stories in college basketball, and not all can be told day one. But Dre Davis is one of the best players in college basketball, an effective player at Louisville and Seton Hall. Positionless guy. He's one of if not our best defensive player. He's one of or not -- maybe our best offensive player. He can score at all three levels. He's a competitor. He leads really through his actions and his game, but he'll speak up from time to time when needed.

Off the court lives his life with unbelievable balance. He's a proud father. He's a girl dad. So, no, Dre means everything for us. And as you advance in this tournament, your best players have to play their A game. It doesn't mean they gotta make every shot, but they've gotta impact every possession. And I thought Dre was the best player on the floor in yesterday's game in the first half and we needed that.

Q. Chris, when looking at Iowa State so far, is this a matchup you feel the physicality is going to be taken to a different level?

CHRIS BEARD: I can't speak for them but from us, yes. Nothing but respect for Iowa State. T.J. does a great job. Their team has an identity, doesn't take long to figure it out. They're physical. They're connected. They're hard-playing guys.

I think it's a great coaching fit, T.J., with Iowa State. He's impacted that program for a long time, not only as a head



And I think that'll be a factor in tomorrow's game. Iowa State is deserving of their high seed. They were able to play in a driving distance from their fanbase. So we've told our guys to expect kind of a road game type environment. The good news for us is our fanbase travels, too. We've got a lot of Ole Miss people that will be here. We're very appreciative of the time and expense it takes to get here.

But when I think of Iowa State, I first think of their fanbase. Then again, from the basketball side, T.J.'s teams have an identify. You know what you're getting into. Won't be a lot of surprises with T.J. Physical, hard-playing defense, trying to get you to turn it over.

On offense they're going to put you in a lot of tough spots. They can do a lot of different things on offense. They don't have just one primary ball handler or one shooter or one post up guy. They've got true positionless players. This is a great roster build that T.J. and his guys have done this season.

Q. Following off of that, in your observation and opinion, how has T.J. put his own flair versus some of the other Iowa State coaches you've played against?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think for sure it's Iowa State basketball in terms of the fanbase and how hard they play. And I think with T.J., when I think of his career, the success he's had along the way at different stops, always really dynamic offense in terms of, again, not just coming down the floor and being predictable. They can do some different things, put you in tough spots.

Then defense, it's just defensive DNA. They're committed to keeping that ball in the middle and the sides. They're committed to making it hard when you go to the basket whether you dribble it to the basket or throw it in there.

So, yeah, I would think this is Iowa State, but then T.J. has definitely put his stamp on the program as well.

Q. I don't know if you were listening when Malik was talking about how impactful your coaching intensity and demanding nature has been on his career in a positive way. What's it like for you to hear a player publicly say that on this stage at this time of the season, and I guess what does that make you feel?

CHRIS BEARD: It means a lot to me because Dia is a truth teller. Dia is not going to say something just because of a press conference. It's one of the many things I like about him. He's an intelligent guy. So when he says something, you don't spend time thinking, did he mean that? You know he meant it.

And I think the deal with our relationship is me and Dia, is, I have high expectations for him. I think he can be an NBA draft pick. And I'm not afraid to say that. Is he there today? I don't know. Maybe not. He's got some work to do. But from the very first time I met Dia, I personally kind of had this vision of him.

People were talking about can he translate from Belmont to the SEC. I said, yeah, that's going to happen. My deal is can he translate from being a really good college player to a great college player, and then ultimately can he translate to making money one day at the highest level.

I'm hard on him, really hard. I think one day my plan is for him to really thank me for that. It's the biggest gift I think anybody can give a player is high expectations. And so with Malik, his expectations in my mind is I think he can play in the NBA one day.

Q. You mentioned roster building. You've built this roster with a lot of transfers. You're probably going to have to do that again. T.J. was just talking about. I'm curious kind of going off something he was talking about when he was here. Is there something you look for in portal guys? And more specifically, is there something that you listen for when you're trying to get to know guys in a short period of time?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, for sure. I think everybody's got the things they look for. The first, though, it's a talent-based business, period. You've gotta get guys that can play in the SEC, gotta get guys that can play well in this tournament.

Just like for T.J., I'm sure it's the same with the Big 12. So it's talent, number one. And then, number two, I think everybody is a little different. And for us we're just always trying to find that guy that has a real love of the game. And really not even love of the game. Addiction to the game. If you like something, you got no chance to play at this level. If you love it, okay. You might love your favorite TV show, too. When you tell me you're addicted to basketball, there can't be a day that goes by that you don't get some work in, there's not a minute that goes by that you're not thinking about your last game, next game, next workout, your craft.

I think when you get those guys that are literally addicted to it, nothing more important in their life other than faith, family, and whatever they're trying to get done academically, then those guys are just addicted to the game. That's what we try to find.

And the portal, speed dating, it happens fast. But you can find out if you're listening. And you mentioned that. What we really try to do -- and I tell the coaches this all the time

-- man, make sure that you're listening more than you're talking in these early conversations, Zooms, Facetimes, visits. Because players will tell you. They'll tell you who they are and they'll tell you what they're looking for if you just listen.

So we spend a lot of time literally trying to listen more than we talk.

Q. You were on the exact same stage here three years ago. Obviously a lot's changed, but I'm wondering how much you've sort of reflected on that journey when you found out it was Milwaukee again, coming back here, everything that's happened for you personally in the last three years?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah. I didn't think about it in that regard, but I think the last time I was up here was Purdue, second-round game with an NBA player, best player, got the ball at the top of the key on a sideline out of bounds. We had a hand down, man down in three. Man, if that shot doesn't go in, we had momentum, I think we win the game. That's what I was thinking last time I was here.

But, no, Milwaukee is a great city. The NCAA does a great job picking the right cities for these tournaments and regionals and first-round games. The city has been great. Our guys have enjoyed it. The downtown area is cool. Everybody around here seems to love basketball. So we're having a great experience in Milwaukee.

I think of "Laverne & Shirley," the Brewery. If I had a little bit more free time, I'd like to go check out the beer scene here in Milwaukee, but doesn't look like I'll have time to do that. Everybody know what "Laverne & Shirley" is? Anybody here that doesn't know "Laverne & Shirley"?

Too young, man. Great sitcom, man, Milwaukee-based, right? They both worked in the brewery.

Q. I kind of feel the need to follow up on you tore your ACL at a game in Hilton. Was that like a Ron Hunter situation? What happened?

CHRIS BEARD: Actually hurt it the night before in practice, Zhaire Smith, one of our great players, NBA player, was supposed to be setting flare screens from the corner. Z was a laid-back guy, kind of like Dre Davis, doesn't talk much. And I asked Z if he understood what I wanted, and he just gave me kind of -- instead of saying yes, he just kind of went like that. So I said, no, you don't, and I went out there and set a flare screen and popped my knee.

So the next day at the game, I did the best I could to come

out and shake hands and all. I was kind of limping. And the coaches at the time were like, what's up? Coach was Steve Prohm, if I'm not mistaken.

And then during the game Nyeem Stephenson -- one of our great players, Nyeem and I disagreed on a defensive coverage. And I had a great relationship with Nyeem. He's the guy that kind of talked to me during the game, and I got a little agitated with Nyeem, forgot that the knee was popped, and fell down on the floor. My own daughters were like this behind the bench.

The other thing that's classic in the story is -- we have a culture. One thing is we say you don't ever help yourself off the floor unless it's live ball. If it's not a live ball, stay on the floor, a teammate's coming to pick you up. It's a big part of our culture. So I'm laying on the floor, and nobody on our staff, including some of our coaches that are with us today, didn't come pick me up.

But from my point of view, the fanbase didn't make fun of me. Just a great fanbase at Iowa State. If your team plays well, they recognize it. And just a great basketball fanbase at Iowa State.

Q. And a player that didn't come up at the podium was Cam Brent. But in the locker room the guys were telling me he was a big part of the win in the huddles and all that and slapped the sticker on the bracket. What's Cam's role in this tournament?

A. So, yeah, Mugs is as important as anybody on our team. He's a returner. He's a senior. He's going to graduate college in three years. He did not have the benefit of an athletic scholarship or name, image, and likeness. He put himself through school. He's a son of a coach. His dad was a Division I coach, also an assistant coach at Ole Miss. We call him Mugs. Cam is just special.

Cam's got his DNA all over this team in terms of what he does on a day-to-day basis. Some days he plays in practice, some days he coaches. Some days he works guys out. Some days he gets his own shots up. He brings the energy and juice every day. Every team in the country has a Mugs. They just don't ever get talked about.

So when we had a chance to slap the bracket, there was only one choice in our locker room. Everybody knew it was coming. That was going to be Mugs.

Q. Coach, I actually covered Kentucky. If I'm not mistaken, you guys were pretty heavily involved in recruiting Travis Perry out of Eddyville. I'm just curious what were you attracted to by him?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I love Travis. He's one of those guys that's addicted to basketball; loves it. Basketball guy. So I enjoyed recruiting him, getting a relationship with his family. In recruiting you don't get so many more guys than you do get. But I was really happy for him that he found a great fit and played a great role as a freshmen for Coach Pope's team. And he's a guy I always cheer for, have nothing but respect for. That dude's a baller, man. He loves basketball.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Good luck tomorrow night.

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