

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Colgate vs Baylor

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

Colgate Raiders

Coach Matt Langel

Keegan Records

Jeff Woodward

Ryan Moffatt

Braeden Smith

Media Conference



JEFF WOODWARD: It's been really cool. As Keegan said, it's nice to have done this a few times to have some expectation. And it's nice to get out of Upstate New York this time of year and get some warmer weather. Can't complain about that.

BRAEDEN SMITH: I think getting here makes it real. Like Ryan said, we were done on Wednesday, had a lot of time. So being able to get here, get our feet on the ground makes it real, and we're super excited.

Q. You guys have done a team-bonding experience in Memphis. But has the trip been all about business and left everything else to the side?

KEEGAN RECORDS: Yesterday was mostly travel. And last night we had some time to go out to dinner as a team and everybody that came along with us. So that was fun just to spend time with people that all worked really hard to get here and kind of just sit back and enjoy dinner, enjoy time with each other, with the coaching staff and everybody that came with us. That was kind of what we did last night.

RYAN MOFFATT: I think it's a good balance. You want to always enjoy this moment, enjoy and have a good time with your teammates. But at a certain point when we get to shoot-around it's time to focus in and try to win a game.

BRAEDEN SMITH: We've also had some film the last two days. We're still locked in, for sure.

Q. Wondering if you guys had any pregame superstitions, rituals, a certain meal you eat before a game, a certain song you listen to, anything like that.

KEEGAN RECORDS: For me, personally, I think I definitely have some superstition, especially for home games, but when you get on the road it turns into a little different.

But usually we stay with the same pregame meal. Coach Damon does a great job setting all that up, usually some chicken and pasta. Me personally I switch up the music depending on mood and game, but that's just me.

Q. Braeden and anyone who wants to chime in, I wanted to ask you about rebounding. How are you able to make such production there as a vertically challenged guy?

BRAEDEN SMITH: The big guys do a great job boxing out, and the guards come in and kind of clean up and get the board and go. So I think there's some of that. And also just a little bit of want-to to try and fight, get as many rebounds as we can and limit the opponents to one-shot possessions.

Q. What does it feel like to actually finally get to Memphis, and obviously the game tomorrow and everything coming to a head now?

KEEGAN RECORDS: It's been great. We've had a warm welcome so far. Travel went smoothly. Feel in a lucky position to say we've done this a few times, so we got kind of used to the travel schedule. But it's been awesome so far. Excited to have shoot-around here and practice later today. But it's been all good so far.

RYAN MOFFATT: It's always good to finally get to the place you're going to play. The anticipation is great. We played Wednesday so we had some time to kind of wait and see where we're going to play. But come Sunday, find out we're going to be here, and it's really exciting. Couldn't wait to get out here. Can't wait. It's been great so far.



RYAN MOFFATT: I also listen to a bunch of different music, but I do brush my teeth before every game. So that's one thing, I guess. Colgate.

JEFF WOODWARD: Superstitions, I like to walk on the court and just in my socks. I don't know. It's like something I do, like, grounds me and just, like, makes me know that I'm there. And then music-wise, I'm listening to classic rock. A little bit of metal in there, too, just get me going.

BRAEDEN SMITH: For me, no real superstitions. I would say more routine. And music-wise, I listen to the same playlist before every game, though.

Q. Jeff, I have to ask, what's the deal with the socks, and when did that start?

JEFF WOODWARD: I don't know when it started. Probably freshman year during COVID. I don't know, it's just something I do. I go out onto the court pregame and I'll just sit there, walk around a little bit in just my socks and just kind of get a feel.

I do it especially at home games, but I try to do it on the road as much as I can. As these guys know, I don't really like shoes around the hotel. I like to walk around in my socks as well. I don't know, it's just something I do.

Q. What counts as classic rock because that means something different to everybody?

JEFF WOODWARD: Geez, the playlist I listen to a lot, it's a lot of -- "classic rock" was a general term. I appreciate the clarification. It's a lot more metal than it is classic rock. But I guess like there's a lot of Metallica in there.

Geez, you're putting me on the spot here. I'm looking like a bad music listener. But it's not as much Journey or things like that, it's more kind of towards the metal side. There's some Aerosmith in there, Iron Maiden, just stuff like that.

Q. You guys have been here and you have some experience. What would it mean to win a game now, to get past the "been here, done that" stage and to get a win at this stage?

RYAN MOFFATT: I think that would mean everything. It's what we're working towards. We've been working towards that since the summer. We have a couple of goals every single year. We've accomplished our first two. And this is our third goal.

We haven't been able to do that the last couple of years,

but we've been here. We have experience. And what better time than now to try and go out and get a win. I think we're prepared and we need to go out and play well tomorrow. But I think we're ready to do that and give it our best shot.

KEEGAN RECORDS: I agree. I think it would mean a lot obviously to all the players and coaching staff, but to the school and the university and Hamilton, I think it would mean a lot to just everybody.

It's something that we all -- it's a team goal we've had and we just try to take it one step at a time starting with the regular season championship and Patriot League championship. And now it's time, like you said, go out and win a game. We haven't been able to do that in the past, but we're obviously working towards it. And it would mean a lot.

JEFF WOODWARD: I mean, I think it would be huge. As these guys have said, it's been a goal of our team all season long, all year long, really. And, you know, based on our experience in the past couple of tournaments, we've gotten -- especially I think back to two years ago against Wisconsin -- we've gotten close.

We know how hard it is. We know Coach Langel always says how fragile the game is. We know how much it takes to get there. And we want to experience the satisfaction of actually finishing the job.

BRAEDEN SMITH: I got nothing. They did a great job of answering that.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Matt Langel.

MATT LANGEL: Just awesome to be here, I think, for me personally as I reflect back on my journey through college basketball a couple times as a player, a number of times as an assistant coach and now five times as a head coach, the spectacle of March Madness and the NCAA Tournament is an awesome thing.

I know our players are excited to be back here to have the opportunity to compete. Just like my own children, they all grew up wanting to be a part of this.

Love our team. Love the journey that we've been on. It's been a special group to coach. And very much looking forward to the opportunity tomorrow afternoon.

Q. You guys have one of the top 3-point defenses in the country and you're going against one of the best 3-point-shooting teams in the country. How do you think that match-up is going to work, and what are you



guys looking at going into this game?

MATT LANGEL: I think Baylor presents a lot of difficult things to prepare for, not just their 3-point shooting. I think they shoot with great confidence and they have usually three, three and a half, four very good 3-point shooters on the court and an extraordinary passer, I think. So I don't know if you're going to be able to take away all their 3s.

I think what we're going to try to do is make them as contested as possible. I think that that's what we've tried to do over the course of the season is not let the best shooters get the most open shots. How we're able to do that, because it's not they can't score other ways. You've got to protect the paint. They get great penetration, which leads to a lot of those open shots.

That's gotta be the first thing on our checklist. Like many other teams that I'm sure have played Baylor over the course of the year.

Q. Despite no students being on campus for the Patriot League semis and finals, I heard Cotterell Court was rocking. What does it say to you about the program you've built at Colgate and the support that the town gives you?

MATT LANGEL: It's a great question. And you guys look very professional, proud of how you guys are approaching this.

I think that -- our students were on spring break. We had a number of student-athletes that were there. I think the understanding of what it is to be a student-athlete at Colgate is extraordinary. And the other teams -- women's hockey, men's hockey, the lacrosse teams -- really stepped up to help create an incredible environment for our championship run.

I don't do a lot of reflecting at this time of the year, but to look back over 13 years and see the pride that the community now has for Colgate basketball, they're a huge part of what we do, as you guys know, a small school, 3,000 students, a village of 3,000 people.

And for it to be a point of pride for those who are there in Hamilton with us and the countless alumni and Colgate people that we hear from at this time of the year means a great deal for our program for what we've been able to build over a long term.

Q. We've seen a lot of coaches that have, with the NIL and all, the different things that are added to your duties now. Do you get to the point that this is not fun anymore to the point that everything falls to you? And

what does that mean at this point in your career?

MATT LANGEL: I think people who know Colgate and Colgate University, and I think it's been a big part of our success -- is we're a little bit insulated. Will we always be? I have no idea. But we've been a little bit insulated from the rest of the narrative of college basketball.

We've got two guys in Keegan Records and Ryan Moffatt who have been great players over their careers. They chose to come back. Tucker Richardson, Oliver Lynch-Daniels the year before that, and Jack Ferguson and Nelly Cummings before that.

And we have, because of the young men we've been able to recruit, the families they come from, what they're looking for, not just in their basketball experience but in their educational opportunity that's going to affect the next 40 years of their life, not just the next nine months, being able to create an environment and have guys who are very committed to the team.

When I say, it's a joy to coach this group, they're literally no maintenance. They take care of their responsibilities. They do their work surrounded by great coaches who work with these guys. And not just to help them be the best basketball players they can be, but share life lessons and help contribute to the men that these guys are going to become.

So, in so many ways, my job has not changed. And I'm extremely grateful and thankful to the players in our program and the guys that we recruit and the families they come from for having to be that way.

Q. Just curious for folks who may not have seen him play a lot, but how does Braeden's ability to rebound influence how you can do things?

MATT LANGEL: We're on him constantly because statistically he gets a lot of rebounds. I think that it does help us play in transition. In our conference especially we've been able to play fast and not necessarily always have to attack a set defense with him and Jalen Cox, a first-year guy in the program.

They're very fast with the basketball. I think that -- we talk about box-out responsibilities, and Braeden doesn't necessarily do that; he's usually guarding the point guard. Everybody else boxes out and he comes flying in to grab the rebound. Maybe he gives the guys a few extra ice creams at the cafeteria or something.

But he's not, like, an incredible rebounder. He has nose for the ball. I think it goes back to him being a football player

when he was growing up. He sees the play, the opening. He's quick to the ball, but it certainly helps us start our transition offense going the other way.

Q. Now having been here five years in a row, has your approach to coming to a tournament game changed at all? And is there any sort of, I don't know if regret is the right word because you've obviously been to the tournament five years in a row is quite an accomplishment, but the fact that you haven't gotten over the hump, how does that hang over things here for your group, being an experienced group?

MATT LANGEL: You're constantly tweaking and trying to figure out what's going to help your team in that year -- whatever time of the year it is, whether you're going to play Arizona in Arizona or a conference game in early March.

We've changed a few things here and there in terms of our championship always ends on a Wednesday, so save the COVID year where we were with stuff to go to the bubble right away. We've changed our approach of what you do from that Wednesday until a whole week can change later you're playing in an NCAA Tournament game.

We work with the experience of the guys. When we first started, nobody had been here before. Nobody had any idea, but now our veteran guys, they've done this a few times.

So we just talk about how their bodies are feeling, what we need to do outside of game preparation in order to be feeling your best. I think, that we need to play well, and confidence is a big factor of that, in order to win the game.

When you're in our position coming from our conference -- Lehigh won with CJ McCollum, Bucknell won a number of years before that -- you have to play a special game. And I think the fact that we've been here and haven't won doesn't put any added pressure.

It's an incredible opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime situation. You're playing one of the best teams in the country. Do upsets happen? Absolutely. But I think the more times you do it, the better your odds are and that's kind of the way we approach it.

Q. You mentioned this is your 13th season, and as you know 13 is a special number at Colgate. Has there been anything extra special about this season for you?

MATT LANGEL: The simple answer would be no. Yet specific to Colgate University, and we have a 13 on our court, as you guys know. But founded by 13 men with \$13 and 13 dreams as the lore goes. I'm not a superstitious

person.

This has been a special season, not because it has anything to do with 13, because of the guys that I get to coach every day, the coaching staff I get to work with. All coaches who sit up here will say that it's a brotherhood and a family that they have. It truly is.

The players that I coach accept my children into the locker room and on road trips and the assistant coaches' families. So for me it's been an awesome season and a special season, but nothing to have to do with 13.

Q. You mentioned the 3-point shooting of Baylor. They're also a pretty physical team; most Big 12 teams are. You all played Texas here last. What's the challenge to that, I guess?

MATT LANGEL: The physicality is a challenge. Athleticism is a challenge. Length is a challenge. Speed is a challenge. Dennis' passing is a challenge. There's a lot of challenges in these games.

I think there's going to be an adjustment period. We haven't played against that size, length and physicality in months now. So how quickly we can adjust to those things is going to be important to the game.

There's also this is not the Big 12. It's the NCAA Tournament. The game's going to be officiated like they are in the NCAA Tournament, not necessarily the Big 12. Baylor hasn't played a team like us in a while. They've played teams like Texas Tech and Cincinnati and Iowa State.

So there's certainly always a feeling-out process to this game, I think how you make it out of that first stage of the game is very important for us.

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