

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Clemson vs Baylor

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

Chase Hunter

Joseph Girard III

PJ Hall

Media Conference

Q. I wanted to ask you each about Preston, what he's brought as your strength coach, and having him back at Clemson and just what he's provided for you guys?

PJ HALL: Yeah, Preston Greene, he started off with Coach Brownell early on in his time at Clemson. And then headed to Florida with Billy Donovan. He's been to a handful of Final Fours and national championships. It's ridiculous the kind of stuff he's able to do to our physique and conditioning and stuff. It's really incredible stuff.

What's funny is Justin McClelland was a guy under him at Florida, with the women's team. He came to Clemson and the guys who were here before Preston were, like, PJ you were built by J Mack and fine tuned by Preston. That's what they jab at J Mack about. He's incredible, though.

JOSEPH GIRARD III: Preston has done a lot for me personally, just changing the way my conditioning is. Obviously playing a different system from Syracuse to Clemson, it's a lot different playing zone to man for 40 minutes.

He's done a lot for me body-wise, shaping my body and getting me in better condition and better shape to withstand a 35-game season plus.

Preston is unbelievable. Obviously has a lot of connections. A lot of people trust him and he's pretty noteworthy in the industry.

CHASE HUNTER: I think he's just brought a different level



of experience for us. He's an older guy, a guy with a lot of experience, like I said, and he took us through a very grueling summer. We had some hard conditioning.

And he's just been a guy that speaks up. He speaks up for us. He makes sure that we're good, our bodies are good. And I'm very thankful of Preston. Like they say, he's a great guy. Just a great guy to be around and we're lucky to have him.

Q. PJ, wanted to get your opinion on RJ Godfrey's performance yesterday, coming in with you and Scheff in foul trouble. What has his development been like over the course of a season, and to see it now in a postseason setting, can you describe that for us?

PJ HALL: Yes, it's special to see him blossom there in yesterday's game. A younger guy who hasn't played in any postseason games, you never know how things are going to shape up when you're out there. R is a very free-minded guy, he's like me in that way. He's going to go out there and put it all on the table.

He did just that. He went out there and gave us a huge spark, had a lot of incredible rebounds. We were able to push it up the floor and get some advantages. He was huge for us. Not only that, having some size rebounding, but also defensively he's such a presence. And then obviously he has some explosive things around the basket. He's a special guy to be able to come in off the bench and give us a huge spark at all times.

Q. Baylor is one of the best shooting teams in the nation. Very similar to New Mexico. They shoot a lot. But how do you guys lock them down like you did New Mexico?

CHASE HUNTER: I think it's just coming out again with the same competitive spirit, competitive fight. Making sure that as guards we're getting in with ball screens and making sure we have hot hands and just limiting their 3s. Just making things hard for them. And we'll be successful.

JOSEPH GIRARD III: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is trying to make sure they're not really rhythm 3s, trying and



keep them on the move a little bit. Like Chase said, get open on screens and off the ball, just be head turning at all times, because they have three, four, sometimes five guys on the court who can shoot a 3.

They've always had a great offense, and it's going to be a tough task for us, but I think like I said if we just stay locked in, focused where our guys are and knowing our own personnel we'll be all right.

PJ HALL: I think Joe hit it on the head. The rhythm 3 is a big key point, making sure whenever we are -- we're going to give up a couple 3s, that's how it's going to go that we know we're not giving up easy step-in rhythm 3s, basic thing, keep on rhythm and be more disruptive.

Q. What's the challenge now that you've got a win under your belt in this event and sitting out there as a Sweet 16 berth, how tough is it to stay focused, and does playing Baylor, a team that has a recent national championship, maybe help keep you focused in this task?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: Once you get in March, you kind of have to wipe the slate, no matter who you're playing. So after the New Mexico game where not a lot of people picked us to win, we were on edge, had a lot of competitive spirit and fire, you have to wipe it away and realize there's a new 40 minutes ahead of you, especially against a team like Baylor, like you said, who has had so much success in March recently. You've got to be focused. But at the same time, stay doing what you did all year, have that competitive spirit, have that edge that we just gained back hopefully this past week leading up to these games and just, like I said, stay together and make sure that you're focused for the whole 40 minutes.

PJ HALL: Along the same lines, wiping the slate clean and making sure that, you know, there's a new task at hand. What you've done in the past is not going to affect the future. Make sure you recognize that.

BRAD BROWNELL: Just happy to be here. Really proud of our team and the way we played yesterday, beat a very good, well-coached New Mexico team. Certainly have our hands full with Baylor.

Scott did an unbelievable job down there. His team, like a lot of his teams, super offensively, just incredible 3-point shooting, great spacing in their offensive package. Run a lot of different types of action, a little bit of false motion into mis-direction, baseline-runner action and pick-and-roll stuff in the middle of the floor. Obviously he likes to change defenses.

They had a lot of success. Been very successful in this tournament, obviously winning a national championship. But we're excited about the challenge and looking forward to tomorrow.

Q. Coming off of the defensive performance last night against the Lobos -- I think it was the Lobos -- does that help when you're getting ready to play a team like Baylor that shot 16 3s yesterday?

BRAD BROWNELL: I hope so. But I don't know if there's a lot of correlation because the offenses are different and the players are different. Certainly there's middle pick-and-roll from both teams. So there's some things there that maybe we can use.

But at the end of the day, I'm just happy that our team played well and we have some positive results to go back to. I think that's what's as important as anything. And, again, we'll have to do it -- we've got to duplicate it against a really talented team that's a little more dynamic from the 3-point line. They certainly shoot the ball better than New Mexico did.

Q. The game's all about spacing and shooting now. We've seen a couple teams, though, have some success with post play -- NC State, Purdue, obviously you guys. What do you think about that? Is there something to that? Is it a correction or is that something specific to you guys?

BRAD BROWNELL: I think it's about your personnel. PJ Hall for us is a first-team all-conference guy and super talented. And the schools you mentioned have similar players that were all conference players.

I think it's coaches trying to utilize their players in the best way they can.

Ian Schieffelin's development for us sort of helped us move to this a little bit because we felt like we had two guys now that are good enough to score around the basket, make some 3s. So we kind of run a little more old school high-low, with our post players kind of moving up and down at times.

We did a little bit of that last year, but we certainly have done more of it this year. And, again, a lot of it is because of the development of really both Ian and RJ Godfrey to supplement PJ.

Q. Coach, representing the ACC, just what you can say about what that means to you, not just Clemson but the conference as a whole, as we haven't seen as many spots in the NCAA Tournament the last couple of

years. But we've seen the success with the teams that have gotten in.

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, certainly trying to represent Clemson first, but the ACC as well. Unbelievable basketball history. Probably known a little bit as a basketball league.

I think there's been a misnomer, if you will, that the league maybe hasn't been quite as strong. I've said that Pittsburgh and Wake Forest from our league are both tournament-worthy and easily could make Sweet Sixteens and advance.

And I'm not surprised at all that our league has done well. I'd be more surprised if we didn't. I just think there's really good players in our league and good coaching. And certainly we're a proud representative right now and trying to do our best to continue to push the ACC forward.

Q. You mentioned how Baylor likes to use a lot of misdirections, open up their shooting on offense. How much will the mental side of the game be important compared to the physical side for this match-up?

BRAD BROWNELL: I think that's a big change, right? Because there's such a quick turnaround. We had several days to practice for New Mexico, plenty of time to get our minds in a good place, get used to what they do, practice at full speed.

Today you really can't do that as much. And that's what's different about being in the tournament and not being in conference play. In conference play, we all know each other so well that when you get to the end of the season that's probably not as important.

This time of year it's more challenging, and it is much more mental than it is physical because you're not going to be able to get out there and bang with your guys as much as you would like in a normal, maybe two-day prep.

Q. Apologize for bringing up bad memories but back in 2003 you were on the wrong end of a buzzer-beater with UNC Wilmington. What impact does that have on you as a coach over the course of your career? And is it something, when you get this time of year, the setting that think about at all?

BRAD BROWNELL: It's crazy. I just walked into our locker room and one of my former assistants from UNC Wilmington was on the Longwood staff. And he left a quote on our bulletin board on there. It said -- I've got to remember it -- "it's a jungle out there; you better know Tarzan."

And the quote is from a guy I coached by the name of Brett Blizzard, who was on that team. And we used to joke around a lot about it. He was a terrific player for us at UNC Wilmington. We probably used to think he was Tarzan for us.

That team was terrific. We lost on a last-second shot to Maryland. Hadn't thought about that maybe except for that quote today. So it's probably appropriate that you asked me the question.

But that was a painful, painful loss. It was my first year in coaching, and we had a great team at Wilmington. Thought we could advance and do well in the tournament. Drew Nicholas made the one-foot runner from about 27 feet to beat us. Thanks for that memory.

Q. When you face a team that shoots the 3 as well as Baylor does, how do you avoid being sucked into a 3-point shooting game? Is that something you need to avoid being sucked into that?

BRAD BROWNELL: You know, I don't know. We can shoot it as well. And we just talk about having good balance. We want to have good balance on offense. We want to score in the paint, get free throws and we want to make some 3s.

I think some of it depends on how we're being played. Some teams trap the post, some teams pack it in, some teams spread it out, some teams pressure. And different styles open up different things.

If you're good, you can figure that out and adapt. And we'll have to adapt tomorrow. So it will be a little bit based on how they play. Certainly trying to defend their 3 will be part of the game plan.

Q. Just want to ask you, a few weeks ago, I guess, you had the comments on the Big 12. Kind of ironic that you're going to play a Big 12 team in the second round?

BRAD BROWNELL: It was in no disrespect to the league, but I do think they figured some things out. It's probably more of a compliment than anything. I think there are a lot of teams in their league that scheduled in a way that help their NET. And there's different ways to do it.

You can schedule really hard games and hopefully try and win those games. Or it seems you can schedule some teams that aren't maybe as good and beat them by a lot and pad your offensive and defensive efficiency numbers.

I wasn't saying anything that hadn't been already put out there, not only by people and other coaches in our league, but some media people had figured it out.

And I do think that's a problem. I think that's a problem with the system. And we really need to look at it. This tournament is too important to too many people.

And, again, I have all the respect in the world for the committee. Our heart was broken last year being left out.

One of the things we were penalized for, I think, was maybe our non-conference strength of schedule. Now, that's hard too because last year at that time I was arguing that your non-conference strength of schedule shouldn't matter as much as just your overall strength of schedule. Whatever your overall strength of schedule is that's what it is.

If you play in a really hard league, like the Big 12 or the ACC, you may not want to schedule over your head in November and December. The season's hard enough. But I do think that there are some things happening with the numbers that are changing whether teams become Quad 2s and Quad 3s.

And I get it, behind closed doors maybe they don't view the Quad 2, Quad 3 as much as everybody else on the outside does. But starting in December, January and February, that's all anybody in media talks about. That was a bad loss because it's Quad 3. That was a good win because it's Quad 2.

And everybody is killing you about your bad losses, and a team who -- we had a stretch there where we had five ACC teams that were Quad 3, and they were all between, like, 75 and 95. So we have five teams and we have five home games that were all -- I think we were 4-1 -- NC State at the time beat us and they were a Quad 3.

For a long time NC State was a Quad 3. Right now they have a chance to be in the Sweet 16. So I'm not sure that all the numbers are adding up. And obviously I made that clear and that comment with that interview.

Q. The Lobos were kind of a popular upset, picked to upset you guys in the first round. And most pundits have Baylor beating you guys. Do you guys embrace this underdog role heading into the tournament, into this match-up?

BRAD BROWNELL: We certainly recognize it. I mean, I don't know that we have this big boulder on our shoulder that we're using it as a rallying cry.

I have an older group, they're more concerned with being prepared and trying to play great basketball. We know if we do what we're supposed to do and play well, good things will happen. I think we've proven that with our performance in a lot of games this year.

But certainly we notice it. You can't turn on the TV and radio, and I know somewhere on ESPN we were the first -- there were 10 upsets and we were number one. We were like the guaranteed upset in round one.

I certainly mentioned it to our players. Our players were well aware, but we didn't like plaster it all over everybody's locker and everything like that. Our guys, I think, are more mature than that and understand that playing good basketball and being prepared is going to win.

Q. Last week, I asked you about your guards, how important they play, how well they play. Yesterday, obviously, Chase played well. Does he really drive the ship for you guys and make sure he's in that mode to help kind of get you guys over the top?

BRAD BROWNELL: Well, I think he's certainly one of the drivers, but I think we have a lot of guys that in these games you need multiple guys playing well. One of the things about Baylor that's so impressive, it seems like they have five guys -- it might even be six guys -- that average double figures, all between 10 and 14 points a game. It's a little bit, all right, which one are we trying to stop. It's hard.

And that's why they're really good, is when you have multiple guys that can have good games -- last night it was Ian Schieffelin with 16 and 12, and certainly Chase. And you almost forget about PJ having 14.

But our guys all have roles. I think when we're playing our best, everybody's contributing well. And it takes that to beat the quality of opponent that you're going to face at this time of the year.

Q. The defensive effort you guys put out there yesterday, does that carry over? Does that help with some confidence playing against a team as offensively talented as Baylor is? And maybe even going way back to what you guys did at Alabama, what you guys did at North Carolina, when you're playing those teams that like to get up and down the floor.

BRAD BROWNELL: I don't know. It's good for us to have those positive thoughts. It's good that we've had some recent practices where we've been successful and been able to practice and continue to build good habits.

But Baylor is a different animal. They present some unique

problems because of their shooting and so many of their guys that can shoot, and the athleticism of their center. I mean, that guy, you throw it anywhere near the basket he's dunking. It he gets behind it, his athleticism, his speed. He's a much better high post driver than you think.

Some of that is because there's so much space, because of the shooting all over the floor. But it's certainly better to be playing them after a game where you have a lot of positive thoughts than it is not playing well on that end of the floor and then trying to deal with it.

Q. You mentioned Baylor's center. How important is it for your bigs to stay out of foul trouble, especially PJ?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, it is important. He's had a few games this year where that's been a problem. We're obviously better when he's out there. He's got to be a little bit more disciplined defensively.

We talk all the time that when you're a guy playing the center position at this level, everybody probably starts the game with two fouls.

If you don't get two fouls, you're probably not playing very hard -- protecting your basket, rebounding, whatever it is. And then there's going to be some other things that can happen to cause you to foul.

So it's the silly fouls, it's the illegal screens, it's the slaps. It's things that you can control staying down and not walling up, leaving your feet that he's got to be a little bit more disciplined on sometimes.

Q. When you have a veteran guy like Chase coming off a game like he had against Boston College and you've got nine days between games, do you as coaches notice that he's taking it as hard as he's taking it? He was saying yesterday he took it really, really hard. Do you have to do anything differently maybe to instill that confidence back in him? How do you guys handle that when you see it?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, you do. And he and I met and talked briefly and just talked about things that happened when he's playing well, and giving him reasons to believe that that was more of an accident than anything else.

And then sometimes when you've had some poor performances, here are some things that seem to be sticking out in those poor performances. And here are things that stick out when you play well.

You're not going to be able to account for shot-making and things of that nature, but maybe some other things you

can.

So we met and talked about a lot of things and just tried to reassure him a little bit. A guy with his ability is a confident guy. And so we believed he would play well in this tournament.

Q. I spoke with you earlier this season about Joe Girard III, why you brought him in. Now that you've had a regular season and postseason with him, what's he meant to this team on and off the court? And just hindsight 20/20, that decision to bring him in, what that's meant for you?

BRAD BROWNELL: It's been huge. He's a terrific player, terrific young man, he's been a joy to coach. I think we delivered on our end in terms of what we thought he could do for us. And he certainly has delivered to us in terms of productivity and confidence and experience and swagger and leadership.

It's just been a really good fit, and I think he's been comfortable with our players. Our players have done an unbelievable job -- PJ and Chase, especially -- two veteran guys that had open arms with him and brought him in and really made him feel welcome and feel like he's a part of our program.

I think he's really enjoyed his time at Clemson, maybe even more than he thought. Not just the basketball, but just living in Clemson, being a part of our community, our school, the school spirit that comes with it, just enjoying life in the South a little bit. I think it's been really good for him.

And he certainly has fit our culture extremely well, and I think we've done a good job of helping him in basketball and a couple things that maybe he didn't get a chance to do at Syracuse.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports