

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

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Texas A&M Aggies Coach Buzz Williams Henry Coleman III Solomon Washington Jace Carter Media Conference

Q. Henry, how would you say that you guys have changed since your first meeting with U of H? Obviously Boots didn't play in the game, but what's different about this team now than the one that played UH back in December?

HENRY COLEMAN III: I would say the roles are a little bit better. I think guys knew their roles but now people are kind of playing even better in their roles.

I think defensively we're a little bit more physical. I think on the offensive end guys have a lot more confidence 1 through 5.

I think overall we're just a little bit better, but we have to still do the things that we do well each and every day -- rebound the basketball, play physical, just play Texas A&M basketball.

Q. Solo, you basically covered everybody last night. What do you think your role is going to be defensively against U of H the second time around?

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: I know I'm going to have to step up big. Probably going to guard each five possessions on every possession going down on the basketball game. So just me being ready to accept that challenge at any time.

Q. Solomon, I heard after you forced a turnover last night, coming over, talking about the all-defense team. Do you use that as motivation that you weren't named



to that?

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: Yeah, I take it personal. I feel like I'm one of the best defenders in the country. And for me to be left off the defense team, I was a little salty, so I'm just trying to prove I'm the best defender every night.

Q. Jace, could you speak about the kind of defender he is? And does it surprise you that he wasn't on the defensive team?

JACE CARTER: Yes, it surprised us. We feel like Solo is one of the best players in the country. He goes out and shows it every night, playing 1 through 5. His chase-down block is a serious thing now. It doesn't surprise us that he does what he does every night. He should have been on the all-defensive team for sure.

Q. We see Jack Easterby giving hugs and spending some time with you guys in the locker room. Could you speak to the impact he's made with you guys and how he's been around?

JACE CARTER: He came around when we played in Athens. That was my first time meeting him. He leads our chapel. He's led our chapel ever since. This is a good dude. Prays really hard for us.

He was there when everybody kind of went away and kind of shut us out. He's been there since Athens and we appreciate him coming, spending time with us. And I have been in a relationship with him since then. He's a good guy (indiscernible).

Q. The Longwood coach last night talked about how hard it is to simulate Houston's speed and aggression on defense in practice. The fact you've played them, does that give you advantage, but some help heading into this game, seeing them a second time?

HENRY COLEMAN III: I would say we've played some of the fastest teams in the country within the SEC -- Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, they're some of the fastest teams in the country. Since then we've played some fast teams.



In practice we play fast. And I think the physicality speaks for itself. We're a very physical team. We play physical at practice. We've played physical at practice all through the summer and through the winter.

So I don't think it's going to come to a shock. I think it's something that we prepare for each and every day. So we're excited to play and we're humbled that we're here. We know there has to be a lot of work to be done if we want to be successful.

Q. Jace, you started a large part of the season, but lately you've been coming off the bench. Seems like you've been showing more aggression offensively. How hard was it to readjust to coming off the bench? And do you think you have been more aggressive going to the basket?

JACE CARTER: Took me a little time to get adjusted to just because I just started a lot of the games. It's basketball. You go out, you're playing, if you don't play hard you kind of stick out like a sore thumb.

I have been trying to be more aggressive downhill, not relying so much on my shot, and just making an impact at the rim, try to get fouled more.

I feel I'm comfortable. I'm happy that we're winning games. I don't care if I'm playing one minute or 100 minutes. As long as we're winning, that's all I care about.

Q. Jace, I see the "Stay on That Side" on your shirt. Could you explain the origin of that saying for your team and what that means to you all?

JACE CARTER: It's self-explanatory. We were 6-4, beat the No. 5-ranked team in the country. We were on top of the world. And then we lost five games straight. Kind of everybody shut us out. Nobody thought we were going to make the tournament or do anything.

Then we then flipped the switch and won six out of our last seven games. Now everybody's trying to try to jump on the bandwagon. We're just, stay on that side. We lost to Vanderbilt and we lost to all these teams, everybody was kind of counting us out. We're here now and it's a different product now.

Q. Buzz talked a little bit last night about switching from the suit to the leisure wear and the rally that sparked. With Coach Roc, did it surprise you when he came in clean shaved? What was your first reaction?

HENRY COLEMAN III: For me, I've known Roc for a while when he was at East Carolina, when he was at Virginia

Tech. I've always seen him with the beard and long hair.

When he came in clean shaved, short hair, he didn't look like Roc, but he looks a lot cleaner. He doesn't look like Santa Claus. (Laughter). He looks a lot better. We're happy for him.

Even with Coach, when he doesn't wear the suits anymore, I know he loves his suits. But he does whatever he feels gives us positivity to let us win. So if he feels that he has to wear a little bit dressed down, not wear his old fancy suits, that's what he has to do. It just speaks to the character of the two coaches.

Q. Jace, you all scored at least 80 points in each of the last five games. Earlier you all had some issues sometimes offensively. So what's changed in this last five-game stretch?

JACE CARTER: I think it's just confidence. Obviously Manny Mo is playing out of his mind. It's definitely giving us a spark. I think, like Henry said, everyone has embraced their role. I don't think anybody has tried to step out of who they are or step out of, what we call predictable shots or predictable plays. And we're just playing with confidence in ourselves, a chip on our shoulder. I think it's shown the past five or six games.

Q. I realize none of you guys are locals, but you are Aggies, and we know how significant that is. The fact it's Texas A&M and Houston with a trip to the Sweet 16, are you aware the juice it brings, whether you've heard from fans or family or anything like that?

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: Yeah, we know. Houston is a great basketball program. They do a lot of things well. So do we. It's going to be a clash on the rebounding, the rebound battle. We know we have to, like Henry said, all the little things that matter in this game to come out on top.

Q. What has Manny done down the stretch to pick his game up?

JACE CARTER: Nothing different. Manny Mo, he's the same person every day. His work ethic hasn't changed no matter his productivity. Start of the year he wasn't playing as much as he wanted. And he wasn't playing probably to the level he wanted himself to play at.

And he was the same person every day. Came in, worked out every day, got his extra reps in every day. So to see him do what he's doing now, it's no surprise to any of us. We're all happy for him because of the person he is.

But it's not anything crazy different; it's just confidence.

Once you get the fire and you survive, you start to feel better about yourself and you start to do things you know you're capable of doing. It's been good for us. It's been a big a spark for us, and we're happy to see him be successful.

Q. You guys lost five games in February, obviously some of them to, like, Vanderbilt. I think Arkansas was in there. What did you learn about the mental makeup of your team from a mental standpoint and physically on the court during that stretch that's allowed you to bounce back and play at the level you all are playing now?

HENRY COLEMAN III: I would say it's what we've done all year. Coach talks about E plus R equals O. There's going to be an event, there's going to be a response and your response is going to equal your outcome.

With those games, we didn't respond in the right manner, and we saw that. It trickled down and had a compound effect over time for us. But when teams go on a run, when teams have a big block, have a big dunk, your response has to be in the right manner. I think over time we figured out how to respond in the right way.

And even last night, when Nebraska was going on runs early in the game, guys weren't shaking, we weren't shook by what was happening. We were, like, we have to respond now. We have to get another stop. We have to crash the offensive glass. We have to go back to what got us here.

I think our responses the last four and a half weeks have been unbelievable, from coach to player, coach to coach and player to coach have got us where we are.

JACE CARTER: I can't say any more than he said. Spot on.

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: Besides what Henry said, it's just the belief we have in each other. We know the person next to us is going to give us their all every night on the floor. So even when people do go on their runs, make big shots, we're not discouraged.

Coach Dev always tell us, players are going to go on their run, teams are going to go on their run. How are we going to respond and punch back?

Q. To go off that, Buzz kept saying "everything we've been through," when he spoke yesterday. Is that just that five-game losing streak, or is there more that happened off the court? What all happened, "everything we've been through"?

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: If you've been here since Buzz got here, like Henry been here three years, he's been through a lot. I've been here two years; we've been through a lot together. And Jace been here a year, still been through a lot. It's a compound of things that don't go our way and we have a right response.

HENRY COLEMAN III: I'll feedback on that, talk about especially for guys who have been here three years, me, Wade, Boots, Manny, Hayden Hefner, we've been on the side of where we're sitting in Tampa and everybody says we're in the tournament, we've played our tail off, and then we don't get in the tournament.

So I think we've used that every year as motivation that, like, you can't leave it up to anybody else; we have to put ourselves in places to -- we're in it. We have to play super hard each and every possession.

I think once everybody figured that out that we can't leave this up to anybody else, we have to put ourselves in a good position, then you have seen the results over the last four and a half weeks.

So I think just for the coaches, players that have been here for so long, we've had a lot of stuff go not our way. So we kind of keep that same mindset in that we're blessed to be here but there's a lot of work we still have to do.

Q. Solo, I don't think Tominaga is going to send you a Christmas card after last night. Seemed you got him a little flustered. What were you telling him that caused him to lose his cool a little bit?

SOLOMON WASHINGTON: I can't remember the exact words I probably said. But I just talk. Make the game more fun for me. It's nothing personal. He's an amazing player, terrific shooter. That's just the way I play, how I like to play the game. Chirping back and forth, it makes the game more entertaining and fun for everybody to watch.

Q. Solo, you've been scoring more. Henry, you and Jace were both in double figures. Three guys over 20. With all this additional scoring, do you all still look to Wade to lead the way for you all? Has that changed now that more guys are contributing?

JACE CARTER: Wade's the best point guard in the country. So not really going to look away from him. He's going to do what he does every night. He's shown that day in, day out, who he is. He's our quarterback. He's our point guard. We roll with him. I don't think anybody's going to look away from him. Obviously last night we had three people with 20-plus points and he had 25, had seven

3s. We won't look away from him. Like I said, he's the best point guard in the country.

Q. Is Tyrece Boots, and why do you guys call him that?

HENRY COLEMAN III: When I first got here, I actually knew Boots, took a couple of visits to Virginia Tech when Coach was at Virginia Tech.

I had known Boots for a while. He tells you he's tough as leather. If you're around him, he'll play with a broken finger, dislocated shoulder. Tough as leather. He'll do anything to be out on the floor.

When he's out there, his physicality, how he plays, downhill. Boots, honestly, the paper might say he's 6'3" or 6'4", he's about 6'1". Him being in there, him flying around playing like he's 6'6", 6'7", that's just Boots.

His mindset and mentality changes our team. You see that and everybody else wants to play super hard. That just helps with the team. So we're always playing for each other.

So to have Boots and his leadership, he's one of the oldest players in the country. And it helps us a lot on the team. He's played in so many games. Down the stretch in games, he can give us some knowledge on what we need to do. He can kind of help us when teams go on runs, and so his presence is always felt when he's on the floor and when he's off the floor.

Q. Kelvin talked last night that considering you all played in December, he would rather kind of be in your locker room tomorrow to play the revenge card. How much different is your team from that game in December?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Yes, ma'am, we're completely different. Whatever Coach said, that's fine. We're way different.

Q. Have you sensed anything different in Wade as far as, is he more relaxed or anything like that now that especially late that he's getting so much more help offensively, or is Wade just always the same?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think he's been pretty consistent since he got here. I think maybe the first semester he was in college, Hugh did a really good job trying to help guide him. Dex was a great, great model of consistency.

But you know, you've been around him his whole career, he's a magnet. His personality is very magnetic. The bigger the stage, the better he seems to play. So I don't

feel that way.

Q. Those of us from Houston happened to notice that former Texans executive vice president Jack Easterby is with you or with the contingency here. I was wondering what kind of impact has he had on you and your program, the players? And does he have an official role with the program?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: No, he's just visiting. I've known Coach Jack for, hmm, long before he was with the Texans, long before I was at Texas A&M. Over a decade. He's just here at the game.

Q. How do you change the approach that you have to take with a quick turnaround like this or in the SEC Tournament? And how much of an advantage is it to have already played U of H once when you go through this prep?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think when you have some prior information, it's helpful. We still try to maintain the same groove, rhythm, routine in prep. We call it two-day-before, one-day-before, day-of.

This morning we did two-day-before. And our guys know exactly what we want to cover in two-day. And this evening before dinner we'll write our thank-you notes and do one-day before. And tomorrow morning it will be day of the game. Obviously we can't come to the arena, so we'll do it at the hotel.

In the SEC Tournament, as you know, it's the next day. There's not a gap of a day. So the way we've done it, the last two years, is we do two-day, the night of the actual game, one-day the morning before breakfast and then day-of when we have shoot-around. So it's just more compressed. With a day in between, we just spread out our work over this day and do two-day and one-day today.

Q. Was there a point leading up to that South Carolina game when Manny got inserted back into the lineup that he was doing something different at practice that you're like we've got to give him more leash, or was it just making most of the moments in games?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think against South Carolina we started the group that had started the first, whatever it was, six or eight games before Boots got hurt. We started H. We started Henry. We started Wildens. We started 4. We started Boots.

We didn't start the game very well. I think Mo's first start was at Georgia the next game. I could be wrong on that.

The one thing about Mo, he's very diligent and he's very consistent. And I know it's not the sexiest thing to say, but I actually think part of why all of this has turned favorable for him is how he handled all of the failure.

He didn't complain. He didn't go meet with compliance and turn his name into the transfer portal. His mentor didn't call and say, why is he not playing. He played nine minutes against Houston and went 0-5 and was lost the entire time.

There's a level of respect that's harder and harder to find. Players know when they're being held accountable -- player to player they know. And he never backed away from any of it.

And I think it was, at Georgia would have been a Saturday, I think. So then it was at Mississippi State -- versus Mississippi State at home, and then it was at Ole Miss. Somewhere in that early sequence he was co-player of the week or whatever in the SEC. As you know I've kind of quit looking at my phone.

He sent me a picture, I guess, that was on social media and sent a text message that long, kind of walking through in almost chronological order of his impact as a freshman, broke his hand in conference game number one against Florida, and I'm reading it. And you would have thought he was 30 in what he was saying. And how he had processed all of those lessons.

Obviously I admire it but I didn't have to live through it. But he has changed our team because he's back on pace. But I actually think it's turned back around because he wasn't trying to dodge it. And that's rare anymore.

Q. When we were with you in December in the Toyota Center you were so complimentary of that event and that match-up and that atmosphere --

BUZZ WILLIAMS: It was unbelievable. I felt like it was here yesterday, we playing the Nebraska Super Bowl.

Q. The fact that we've got these two programs, again, for a trip to the Sweet 16, realizing you have more important things to worry about than the fan base, can you appreciate the juice that this match-up and these stakes have?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Nebraska probably had 10, 12,000 people here yesterday. And I stayed and watched a little bit of the game last night. Like, Houston was very well represented.

So I anticipate it will be the same tomorrow. They're the number one team in the country when the season ended.

And what Coach has done there over the last decade, I guess it hasn't been done since Coach Lewis was there in many respects decades ago.

So it's two Texas teams trying to play in Texas next week. We're just doing it in Memphis. So our group has been somewhat used to playing road-game environments. And I anticipate that's what it will be again tomorrow.

Q. Being a native Texan, that was along the lines of what I was going to ask, is it cool this is an old SWC meeting with so much on the line? And if you have a favorite member of SWC hoops?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think the world of Coach and always have, whether that's public or private. Every picture I've taken with Coach I have. He signed some of those pictures for me. So I think the world of him.

But Pat Foster is probably my favorite University of Houston coach. I still talk to Coach all the time. He's 82 now. He's one of the wisest men that's ever been a coach.

So when I think of the Southwest Conference I think of Coach Metcalf obviously. I was really young.

But specific to the University of Houston, I know bits and pieces about Coach Lewis. Obviously I know Coach Brooks from our time together at A&M. Coach Brooks was the first person outside of my family that held Mason when Mason was born at College Station. But when I think of University of Houston I think of Coach Foster.

Q. With how many ups and downs there are to a season, how do you get and how does a team peak at the right time, late in March and playing your best basketball when you need it?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I don't know that there's necessarily an exact formula for that. For the most part, everybody gets nine weeks that the NCAA allows before the season starts. And then for the most part every team plays eight weeks of non-conference games.

Not everybody plays 10 weeks. The weeks were a little different in the SEC for the first time since I've been here because we had a bye. So instead of it being nine weeks, it was 10 weeks.

I don't know when the last time Easter was in March. So I think there's a little bit of calendar that goes into this particular year.

I think when you're in this, in regards to building a team you for sure want to have some level of crescendo, but it has



become so result-oriented because of the NET. So who do you play, when do you play them -- and sometimes you can get lost in your NET but it's really the NET of who you're playing. That's really what you have to pay attention to.

So this is our 29th week. That's a long time to be with any group. And how do you formulate, keep working with all the things that you can control along with the things that you can't control? Because the line has just become invisible. We're seeing it the last two days, and it's going to continue today and it will go into tomorrow.

I think your language has to be very important. I think the consistency of your work has to be an absolute. And I think that there has to be an insatiable desire within your staff -- is there one thing that we can do that gives us a metric on how to be just a little bit better? And if there is, how do we teach that to our guys where they understand the value of it?

And I think that we just happened to have a group of really good human beings that are a little smarter than the average group, and they love working. So it's just all of those things probably are tied into it.

Q. When you watched the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, Jamal Sheard, on that end of the floor what stands out?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: He can guard anybody in the United States, no matter how old they are, no matter how much money they're getting paid through NIL or through the National Basketball Association. He is an elite defender. And I personally think he's an elite leader, but I don't coach him.

I think he's continued to improve offensively with each passing year. But not to take away from the first-round picks that they've had, the lottery picks they've had, not to take away from any of that, but a four-year building block that's probably based on identity that Coach wants and Coach coaches to.

Coach Sampson doesn't have to come here. They ought to just let No. 1 come up and talk because whatever he's saying that's what Coach Sampson said yesterday. And you can hear it as a coach.

And I remember I did a home visit with him when I first got hired, and I loved his mom. Loved his dad. Met the high school coach for the first time. And I said, I know we're like two and a half years behind Coach Sampson and his staff, but it's a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to watching your career. Like I knew where it was going. I

just wanted to be respectful.

Man, what an unbelievable career he's had. And I think it all starts on that end. But I think that that's their team and that's also their program.

Q. Do you sense a little extra spark or drive with Solo, not being on the SEC All-Defense team? And how is he a different player from the first time that you all played Houston?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I've never participated in any of those postseason deals so I don't, in truth, I don't know exactly how that gets done. I'm sure somebody in our office signs my name that I voted.

I think Solo can really guard. He's a different type of defender than No. 1 is, but his length, his IQ -- he can guard multi positions. We can do a lot of different coverages with him on the ball and off the ball.

I think he's continued to improve throughout his career, and I do think he's more mature than he was in mid-December. I think some of that was forced on him, Henry's injury. He's been able to play more and more minutes, and. He's in the meat of the season.

Like I thought yesterday was really bad. I was telling him this morning at two-day, I'm, like, we have no chance against Houston if tomorrow you do what you did yesterday. You played like four or five minutes in the first half, second foul's 50 feet from the basket. We can't absorb that.

But it's partly to your question, I think it's the impact that he has for us on and off the ball. But he's done such a great job of helping us with the defensive rebounds. And as he's garnered more possessions where we can't take him off the floor defensively, I think his confidence has built and grown offensively on when it's time for him to attack, when it's okay for him to shoot a buzz shot from the perimeter.

Numerically, in the month of March, he's drastically different than he was in the month of December. Who was on the defensive team?

Q. (Inaudible).

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Good.

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