

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

## Houston Cougars

## Coach Kelvin Sampson

## J'Wan Roberts

## Jamal Shead

## L.J. Cryer

Media Conference

**Q. Jamal, Coach Williams just said he thinks you're the best defender in the country and you can defend anybody whether they play college or pro. What is your response to that kind of compliment?**

JAMAL SHEAD: That's a great compliment. When you get that from a coach that you're about to play, it's kind of a compliment, and it's kind of a challenge. It's a great compliment from him, but you kind of take it with a grain of salt.

**Q. J'Wan, I know you sat most of the second half. Coach mentioned last night just precautionary with a lead. Just curious how you're feeling with the shin and how are things looking for tomorrow?**

J'WAN ROBERTS: Getting better every day. Taking my time in treatment. A lot of cold tubs and just trying to get right for tomorrow.

**Q. Seems like there's a theme with Texas A&M that they have kind of transformed from the beginning of the season to now. I'm curious, when you've watched the more recent games, how different are they from your previous match-up?**

L.J. CRYER: They changed up the lineup. So that alone gives them a different identity because they have more scoring out there with Obaseki being in the lineup. They do some of the other stuff they did before. They're a great offensive rebound team. And right now they're just hot. We've just got to be ready.

JAMAL SHEAD: The team changed and adapted over the



year as any good team does. So they've gotten better since December, and so have we. And you know it's just, Texas A&M is a really scrappy team and so are we. It's going to be a war tomorrow.

**Q. Wade Taylor got hot when you guys played the last time you played. Can you explain that?**

JAMAL SHEAD: He hit a lot of big shots. He brought them back. And half of his scoring was in the half when they needed it. He's a big-time player. He's been a big-time player since high school. We've known each other a while.

But he's a big-time player and those are the type of moments he lives for. He's on a burner right now. Best we can try to do is try to contain him.

**Q. What's it mean to get Ramon back for your depth? But also, it seems like he's a guy the team rallies around a bit?**

JAMAL SHEAD: He's a guy that, the first year didn't play a lot. Got hurt, but came back when we needed him. For a while, his picture was on the wall in our locker room before it got changed. It said "never lose your chip." And that's his whole mentality.

That dude plays so hard, he brings us an energy that we were missing for a while. He just embodies our culture. I'm happy that he's back, and he's excited to be back.

**Q. Two talking points right now are obviously the fact you guys play a similar style, that this is going to be a war. Do you guys take pride in the fact that you want to show off your style and that it's better than what they do defensively as well?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: No. Hu-huh, I don't take pride in that.

**Q. How about the match-up between Wade and Jamal? A lot being made of that as well.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, Wade is -- I think this is a credit to Buzz and his staff. Sometimes you have to have the freedom to miss to have the freedom to make. So it's



really important. That means that your light is fluorescent green. There are different shades of green.

I've had kids that have a green light, but might have a comma at the end of it. Wade Taylor shoots whatever shot he wants whenever he wants. If it goes in, it goes in. If it doesn't, it doesn't. But he still keeps shooting.

I think that's a credit to -- that's hard to do as a coach to give someone that kind of freedom. But that tells you the trust level that Buzz has in Wade. And he's earned it. He is a little keg of dynamite. You never know when he's going to make seven or eight 3s, but he may have to miss four or five or five or six in a row to get to the point where he can make seven out of his next nine. And he has the freedom to do that.

I think the biggest difference in Texas A&M now versus when we played them was -- I think, evolution-wise both teams are better. Radford, I think, was injured, if I'm not mistaken -- I know he didn't play. I think he was injured, though. So he did not play. He's a major part of their game plan.

Obaseki, same way, he played but he wasn't featured like he is now. So that's a terrific, terrific backcourt.

And the frontline embraces their role. Those kids are warriors. Solomon Washington, Garcia, Leveque and Coleman. Coleman was a starter along with Leveque and then they brought in Garcia and Washington.

So the frontline hasn't changed, just who's starting. But all four of them play. Solomon Washington and Garcia is a handful to block out on the offensive glass. Those kids are tough, they're strong, they're smart. Quick twitch.

And those three guards have the ultimate green light. They just drive it and they all can shoot it. It's a tough match-up.

**Q. To that answer, curious what you've seen on film of Solomon Washington, the kind of player he is, especially on the defensive end of the floor.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, he's tough. Every coach in America would love to have a Solomon Washington. There's some kids that are tough and they're athletic, but they may not have a winning gene. Meaning, they're not always where the ball is. He's always where the ball is.

He's got a lot of winner. He's got really good intangibles and he's relentless. So he's a perfect fit for that team and what they need done.

A lot of respect. He and Garcia are one of my favorites. I love offensive rebounding, too, so when I see Garcia and Washington, they get my vote. I love them both.

**Q. You mentioned Obaseki, he seems like a different player from when you played them earlier. What have you seen in terms of progression of his game, especially over the past couple of weeks?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I didn't see him from December to now. So I really haven't paid -- I don't pay attention to -- unless you're our next team, I don't watch you play. There's teams in our league I don't see play until we play them. I don't watch college basketball like that, sit around and watching all these games. Sometimes I just like to get away from it, or sometimes I like to watch NBA games, especially if one of our guys is playing.

He had a great reputation out of high school. That was a really good sign when Buzz signed him. Very talented young man. And he fits with -- he and Radford fit with Wade. Wade's not going to pound you at the free-throw line. He's going to shoot contested 3s that are hard, and he has a lot of ooh, ah factor in him. Where the other guys, they put their head down and drive it.

He's a good shooter, too. Radford is just going to wear you out at the rim.

In terms of NBA potential, one of the things NBA guys like is, and this is just having a bunch of our kids drafted over the years, is they like guys that bring value to their game. That's what I like about Radford. He'll have -- if you have a choice between a guy that scores 20 and never gets to the free-throw line but is a great shooter versus a kid like Radford, he gets to the free-throw line, he gets 10 rebounds, he gets five offensive rebounds, he's always into the teeth of your defense -- I'd much rather have him because he can beat you in different ways.

He has a lot of value around him. And as he gets older and he starts playing professional basketball, the rest of his game will evolve with him, but he's already got multiple ways to hurt you. When that kid is 25, 26, 27 years old, he's going to be a good pro.

**Q. In getting a chance to meet your players and interact with them, there's a few themes that stick out, like accountability and consistency. I'm curious what people or what experiences have been impactful in your life maybe as a person, player or coach that have kind of molded you that you want to instill those things in your program?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, for me it was probably my dad.

I don't think I ever missed a day of school from the first through the 12th grade. Well, when I say "I don't think I did," I did not, because I have a 12-year certificate that says I never missed a day of school. That's because of my mom and dad.

If you're going to be sick, you're going to be sick at school, not be sick at home. Because they were never home. My dad was a high school teacher, high school coach. He had a nine-month contract. For the other three months he had to find a job because he had four children. I had a twin sister. I had an older sister that was a year older and a younger sister who was a year younger.

So he had four, all in diapers at the same time. And there were no Pampers back then, Hoss. So he would leave every morning at 6:00 to carpool with teachers in that area at the school he taught at. And he got home. He coached the women's team, coached the men's team. This was in the late '50s, early '60s. That was my dad.

My mother was a nurse. She worked 12-hour shifts. Didn't see her that much either. I didn't realize what latchkey kids were until I started reading about it, hey, I was one of those. (Laughter).

My parents and my grandparents on both sides, I don't think any of my grandparents got past the sixth grade. They were raised at a time before or during the depression, back in the 1900s.

Back then that's how it was. You got up and you went to work. My dad had four jobs every summer. He taught driver's ed. He sold Lincoln life insurance. He sold World Book Encyclopedias. And he worked at the tobacco market. His check was for nine months. The other three months he had to hustle.

When you ask me where I got that from, I got that from my mom and dad.

**Q. Obviously no secret late in ball games, the ball's going to be in Jamal Shead's hands. What does it do for you as a coach to have that trust with a player like that? And how did Jamal go about earning that?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, every team is going to have that guy. It's not going to always be your point guard. It may be someone else. Dejon Jarreau, who's playing for the Memphis Grizzlies, he had that. Quentin Grimes, Armoni Brooks, Corey Davis. I've had a bunch of guys that that was similar to that. A guy on my staff now might have been better than all of them, Hollis Price.

But you said the most important thing is you have to earn

it. When something's earned, that means you own it. When somebody gives you something, that means you might be renting it. That means it ain't yours.

So if they've done that, that means that they've earned my confidence and it's over a period of time. It's, like, I don't let our team vote on captains. You let a kid vote on captain, they're going to vote for their friend. I'll tell who the captain is because I watch them in practice every day. We don't pick captains before the season.

During the season, I'll say, okay, we got our captain now. I know who it is. Jamal, you're a captain. A lot of times your best player is not your captain. Those teams are liable to underachieve. When your best player is not your hardest worker, then you potentially have an issue.

Thankfully for us, our best players have always been our hardest workers. And that's a big part of our culture.

**Q. In your travels, was today your first experience with the Peabody Ducks? And I was wondering how you felt the grandkids did. I happened to be at the hotel when it was going on.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: No, I had seen the Ducks many times through my travels with the NBA. And when I was with the Milwaukee Bucks we always stayed at the Peabody. When I was with the Rockets, we stayed at -- what is it -- the Westin across from the arena. We stayed at the Westin.

I thought they were good. I mean, my wife takes more pictures of them. You'd think they were the royal family, all the pictures we make of them.

But it's just a memory. My granddaughter -- I was there, right? But she felt the need to tell me 10 times, Papa, papa, you are not going to believe what I did; I gotta tell you something, I gotta tell you something. So I let her tell me something. So that was neat. It's a great memory.

**Q. Your point guard, you talked about Jamal, Marcus, Rob Gray, Corey Davis, Dejon -- those guys that have had the ball, why have you had so much success during your tenure at Houston?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't fool around with that position. I'll take a chance on a big. I don't take chances on point guards. There is no gambling. There is no, I hope this works out one day.

That's how you get on the unemployment line real quick because what happens if it doesn't? It's not the NBA where you can go get you one at Thanksgiving.



I've been at University of Houston for 10 years and I've had three point guards. That's it. That tells you a little bit about the way we evaluate. And don't get "evaluation" and "recruiting" mixed up.

A lot of people recruit, but they don't evaluate. In the 10 years we've been here, if you look at our top 10 players, like right now we don't have a top 10 because we don't have 10. We've got nine including the kid that probably should redshirt. But in those top nine players that we've had over the years, we've had two kids transfer in 10 years. Two. And then we've only had three point guards. We know how to evaluate.

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