

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

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Lenovo Center

Baylor Bears

Scott Drew

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning once again. We are now ready to start the Baylor head coach Scott Drew press conference. Coach, at this time, could you please give us an opening statement.

SCOTT DREW: It's my personal favorite time of year, and it's a blessing to always be a part of March Madness.

One thing with the portal and so many transfers, you're blessed to have an opportunity to coach a lot of new guys, and a lot of them haven't been in the tournament. So that's always exciting to see people's first time and just the excitement that goes into it -- from arriving in the hotel and seeing the NCAA stuff and just how it's different.

I think all parents can relate to it. It's kind of like kids opening up Christmas gifts, birthday gifts. You're always excited to see that.

I know Mississippi State. Coach Jans has done a tremendous job there. You look at their team, very well balanced, but Coach Jans always has a great control with the defense, the toughness, the rebounding. Once again, done a great job with this year's group.

Q. Coach, I was curious the last time that you played Mississippi State, I believe it was in 2018 in the NIT, I was just curious as to how much college basketball has changed since then in your eyes and what the differences have been.

SCOTT DREW: It's amazing you remember the losses more than the wins usually, and I remember they beat us on a buzzer beater in that one. That was probably one of the worst rolls I've ever seen in the Ferrell center. It was a terrible bounce, for us especially.

Again, Coach Jans wasn't there at that time, so team's

obviously different, plays different. He's taken Mississippi State three straight years to the tournament. He's done a great job everywhere he's been and every staff he's been a part of. Josh Hubbard is one of the most dynamic scorers in college basketball. So we definitely have our hands full.

Q. When you have a player like VJ, what's the process, as the season's going along, and figuring out how to use him -- the best way to maximize what he can do? Then also just like going into the tournament with a player of his talent level, do you almost like throw seed out the window because you know what he's capable of?

SCOTT DREW: First, I think when you're in the tournament, we can all throw all the seeds out the window because nobody has a perfect bracket after the first weekend, it seems like.

With VJ, when you coach somebody like that, it's a real blessing because you get a SportsCenter highlight virtually every other day in practice, and that makes practice exciting.

VJ's one of those guys that is a great teammate, he's a winner, and he affects every facet of the game. So he's not somebody that has to have the ball. He's not someone that has to score. He can affect it defensively. He wants to guard the other team's best player. He wants to get a double double on the glass.

He gets as excited as much with an assist as he does a bucket. So when you coach somebody like that, really it's easy because you know he's going to play hard no matter if he's shooting or not.

At the same time, the challenge with coaching someone like that is making sure that he's aggressive offensively because he is capable of scoring 20 or 30. Obviously you want to use all his talents and abilities.

But I'd much rather as a coach have to urge someone to take shots and be aggressive rather than telling someone to pass the ball.

Q. Jeremy Roach, obviously local ties here. What attracted you to him, bringing him into the program,



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and what do you feel about his year? Just talking with him as well, he said he doesn't feel like this team has played its best basketball, its best basketball is ahead. I wonder if you could address those.

SCOTT DREW: To start with, when we got him and Norchad, we were really excited about their leadership. Both of them have been to the Final Four, both of them proven winners. I think, when you look at Jeremy's year, I don't know if there's anybody else in college basketball that's had two concussions.

So it's one thing adjusting to a new team. It's another thing fighting through health issues as well. At the same time, he's absolutely right, some years you just have more injuries than others. It just seems like this year we had a plethora of injuries. We finally had everybody healthy -- because we waited a long time to get Langston back, and he came back and wasn't ready and had to go back out.

We finally got everybody back for Central Florida, and that lasted for about four minutes and change, and then we lost Josh for the season. Just developing chemistry, rhythm, it's tough when you don't practice with everybody. We've had a lot of days where, when you have six guys in the rotation, you can't do much at practice because you can't get anybody else injured.

So the last two, three weeks before Langston's ankle injury, we were getting some good practice time. I do think we're playing our best basketball now, and Langston will play and excited to have him back in the lineup.

This is the time of year where you want to be at your best. Unfortunately for us, we weren't throughout the year, but we are now. Hopefully -- minus Josh obviously. But hopefully we can put our best foot forward. You've got guys that have won in March and know what it takes, know what it's about, and Jeremy and Norchad are two guys that are not scared of any moment and a blessing to coach.

Q. Just curious, for the uninitiated, what makes VJ special, what sets him apart?

SCOTT DREW: I think his athleticism, to begin with. I've heard some NBA people compare him to Dwyane Wade, Russell Westbrook, as far as just speed, explosiveness. And he's young, he's going to still fill out and develop.

But that athleticism and the quick twitch he has to get off the floor, you can't teach that. When he gets a rebound and takes off down the court, it's always dynamic and exciting and electric. Especially in the NBA, when you have more space, he's going to be a problem for a lot of years.

What I love about him is he's so humble and he's such a great teammate. He's everything that you'd want in college basketball and basketball in general.

Q. Some of your guys have not been here on this stage before. How can it help to have Norchad and Jeremy and their Final Four experience?

SCOTT DREW: I think players always listen more to each other than they do the coaches, that's always 100 percent certain. Just those guys that have been to the tournament on our team and have had success, just them talking to the guys that haven't, that always makes it much better and easier, and I think they'll rely on them.

Q. Just going off of that a little bit, Coach, you know something VJ talked about is that he hasn't watched a ton of March Madness. Have you talked to him a little bit about the madness or what can come with this, or have you heard any conversation between the guys about that?

SCOTT DREW: I think the great thing about VJ and the whole team is you don't want to make -- you want to control what you can control and focus in on doing your job is the most important thing. That's what every coach tries to get their guys to do and not get too overwhelmed with the, this could be my last game and whatnot.

Especially you see that in Senior Night so much, and nowadays it seems like that really has more effect than it ever used to. You just want them to get back to the habits, same old boring habits, and do what they do well and not be overwhelmed with too many thoughts of, well, what if I don't make this? What if this is the last time I put on the jersey?

Q. Coach, I'm curious, through the years what have you seen as a bonus for playing on the second day of the tournament instead of the first day?

SCOTT DREW: Well, when you're a higher seed, hopefully all the upsets happen on the first day, but now that we're a lower seed, as far as, I think, just everybody back at the hotel watching the games, how the intensity just gives them an idea of what's in store and what they have to do and be ready for.

Q. You mentioned Langston will play tomorrow. I just wanted to clarify that. Also, when he plays anecdotally, it feels like the team over the past few years has gelled and clicked when he's in there. Why is that?

SCOTT DREW: First of all, being in a program for four years, he has a great understanding of what we're looking for offensively and defensively. He's kind of a security blanket for helping guys out where to go, what to do, very cerebral player. So not only does he know where his position, but where he can help out the bigs, he can help out the guards, and a coach on the floor.

And the game's slowed down for him. You want to make the most of everything, and I think sometimes watching, because he's been injured, you learn as well. I think not only the experience of being on the floor, the game slowed down, but watching and seeing just what's needed out there has helped him as well.

Q. With the transfer portal opening on Monday, how do you as a staff --

SCOTT DREW: What opens Monday (laughter)?

Q. Well, that's the question. How do you as a staff and as an operation balance the workload and focusing on the present and trying to get this team as far as they can in this tournament while also understanding there's going to be a lot of work that needs to happen to prepare for next season as well?

SCOTT DREW: That's a great question. As far as head coaches, if they're doing their job, are delegating well. We all know the number one focus is this team. They've given us their heart and soul since summertime. We owe them all our attention and see what we can do.

But at the same time, you've got to prepare for the future as well. So it's kind of like scouting, making sure you're delegating and you have a pulse on what's going to happen next week as well.

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