

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - BYU vs Alabama

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Newark, New Jersey, USA

Prudential Center

**BYU Cougars**

**Richie Saunders**

**Trevin Knell**

**Egor Demin**

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



to play for somebody that you can run through a brick wall for. He has that conviction.

Then we just all have trust in him. I think it's huge, and I think in terms of recruits, like who wouldn't want to play for an NBA coach that has already been there? We have an NBA strength and conditioning coach. Everything down the line is all NBA. Danielle is also the nutritionist that's been in the NBA, so it's been awesome to have a whole NBA coaching staff learn us to help build us up. So I think who really wouldn't want to be at BYU.

EGOR DEMIN: Yeah, adding to Trevin's words, I think it's a little bit about attention to details and focused on NBA-wise just how they do there, they just translate it here.

Answering the question about how attractive it is, me personally, I'm here most of all because of that, because of KY coming from the NBA. This is the coach I want to play for, obviously.

Talking about future recruits, I think it's going to be one of the main parts of the recruiting, just the status of, as Trevin said, our coaching staff that is all around NBA.

TREVIN KNELL: We had different things -- we call it a shake up. We used to call it snap, and snap is also a back screen. We called that an OKC. So just all offensive terms are completely different, which sometimes it still kind of trips us up, but it's awesome to be able to have that lingo. And we've all kind of dialed in, especially at this point, so it's going to be awesome for next year going forward.

**Q. Richie, you grew up a BYU fan. How meaningful is it for you to have kind of become the face of this BYU team in the Sweet 16, something that the program doesn't do a lot historically?**

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Yeah, I grew up watching these games, and I'm just really praying and hoping that BYU would get in and make a run or whatever. But to be on here, it means a lot. To do it with this team collectively, it's so fun.

I just feel like as a team we just care about each other so much, which I couldn't ask for anything more. But I'm just super grateful to be here and to be here with BYU. It's a

**Q. Richie, this year you had a lot more starts, a lot more minutes, and yet your numbers have gone up. That's a statistical anomaly. Usually when you play more minutes, your efficiency goes down. How would you explain that?**

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Yeah, I mean, I kind of just play my game. But I'd say it really just comes with good people on the court with you. Like success for one person goes up when everybody succeeds, I think, just as a team.

I think it's been a good little -- I've just learned so much from the new staff, and it's kind of helped me to get into my spots that helped me be effective. Helps to have good point guards that can really get you that dialed in. Just have helped to get me the ball in certain areas.

**Q. Kevin was just in here talking a lot about his NBA experience and time with the Sixers and being in the NBA. How much have you guys learned from his NBA background? Anything specific on where your basketball IQ went up from his NBA stuff, and how much do you think that's attracted I have to guys like A.J., Devonta and future recruits?**

TREVIN KNELL: Yeah, I think it's everything. When he first got here, the lingo was completely different from previous coaching staffs. So we had to relearn the lingo, like the NBA calls different things.

But as a shooter it's been awesome because every play he runs works. But he's a super competitive dude. He's also super humble. He's always asking us for different advice just with the college aspect. I think it's awesome to be able



dream come true.

**Q. Richie, we obviously know about your family connection to tater tots, but can you tell us, kind of walk us through how the deal came together and how you and the team are balancing NIL and going viral with trying to stay focused in the tournament?**

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Yeah, when all you eat is tater tots, it definitely makes it easier. For everybody listening, yes, it is true.

Just touching on, first of all, your question, a tweet came out, I guess, a couple weeks ago, kind of went viral. It was just saying, like, yada-yada-yada. Also Richie Saunders' great-grandpa invented tater tots.

And for some reason, some ESPN announcers during the Big 12 tournament kind of latched on to that and kind of were talking about it during a game. It wasn't even one of our games. But it just kind of blew up from there.

Just kind of -- Ore-Ida, the company, the tater tot company, just reached out and we kind of figured out a deal from there. It's been a super fun partnership. It's been so random, but so awesome. They've been super good.

Balancing all that is interesting, especially during a time like this where your focus needs to be so high. You need to be so focused and dialed in.

But KY has kind of, through the few months, kind of shared with me -- because usually I like to segment my stuff. I'm going to worry about the NIL, all that stuff, after the season. But he's kind of helped me see, like, for example, being a professional basketball player, you have to have these kind of conversations during the season. And it can't detract from your focus, but you need to have them. You need to have these conversations.

I think the reason we're here is to play basketball, and you win basketball, good things happen off the court. Just in closing, I would just say you focus on the basketball. This stuff can be little things that you have to take care of, but your focus is not trying to promote tater tots. It's about winning games, and in turn, the tater tots are going to win too; know what I'm saying?

**Q. Just to follow up on that, for Egor and Trevin, Coach said you started eating tater tots this week at team meals; is that right?**

EGOR DEMIN: First time.

**Q. What did you think?**

EGOR DEMIN: It was good. It's potato, I guess. I found out that it's potato. I always thought it's something sweet.

TREVIN KNELL: I mean, I grew up eating tater tots, but yeah, it's kind of funny to have tater tots kind of be like the whole thing with the whole team now. Ever time we go to team meals, we're always joking about where's the tater tots. But shout-out to Richie and his great-grandpa, honestly.

We're glad that he can stay in the family business.

**Q. How important is it for the future of the college athlete to be able to cash in right away on something that's trending, something that's buzzing, and supplement income or supplement free food or whatever it is that your deal is? To be able to go forward with something like that NIL money, NIL deals?**

RICHIE SAUNDERS: Yeah, I mean, a lot of it comes on the company's -- I think Ore-Ida has done a really good job because they jumped on the ship real quick. They flew a team to Denver when we were there. I think a lot of it is up to them if they want to try to cash in just like I feel like they have. Tater tots have been sold out in Utah County this whole week.

**Q. Tomorrow's game is being compared to this classic game from 1990 when Loyola Marymount beat the defending champion Michigan Wolverines 149-115. Because of that, how shocked would you be if both teams score 100 tomorrow, and do you need to play at that rapid fast pace to beat Alabama?**

TREVIN KNELL: Yeah, I mean, shout-out to Alabama. They're a really high-octane offense. They have really dynamic guards that are really well-coached. I think it's going to be fun to play a team from the SEC and fun to play a team of that caliber.

But I think I would be shocked. I feel like we're both -- especially we've been really focused on defensive strategies, defensive mindset -- to try to slow them down. But again, like we're both one and two in offensive ratings right now, so it's going to be definitely a high fast-paced game.

But I'm excited to hopefully be able to play some good defense, not have it 150-149 or something like that like in the 1990s, but yeah, that would be awesome.

EGOR DEMIN: Yeah, in addition to what Trevin just said, I think it's important for us just to be focused on our

basketball and not changing anything in how we play and try to play good defense and make them score less than us.

**Q. Richie and Trevin, both hometown kids. It's been 14 years since BYU was in the Sweet 16. Where were the two of you in 2011, and what does it mean to be in the Sweet 16?**

RICHIE SAUNDERS: I'm trying to do some quick math here. I was, what, eight? I remember watching them, though. It's funny because now some of those guys are on our staff and stuff.

I mean, yeah, I can remember watching these games and just being super excited for them. But yeah, I think I was in middle school.

TREVIN KNELL: They would probably joke that I was on the team.

But no, I don't even remember. I probably was in school watching them, trying to sneak it on my phone and trying to tune in.

No, I've been talking to Jimmer a ton. He's given me a ton of help, a ton of advice for the first two rounds, and then I called him again on Monday and he gave me some advice going into the Sweet 16.

Just like Egor said, we've got to play our brand of basketball, at the end of the day. Alabama is going to play theirs, we're going to play ours. It's going to be a fun, fast-paced game, and I'm excited.

I'm grateful for this opportunity and grateful for Cougar Nation. We had a really, I feel like, hometown crowd in Denver, so it was really fun to play up there and especially kind of rewrite history again. Jimmer, he won two games in Denver and then the Sweet 16, so it's fun to write our history but also replay that history, as well.

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