

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arizona vs Duke

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Newark, New Jersey, USA

Prudential Center

**Arizona Wildcats**

**Coach Tommy Lloyd**

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



**TOMMY LLOYD:** It's great to be here. Obviously we're excited to still be playing. It's been a fun season. We've had a lot of events happen, good and bad, so it's been really cool to kind of endure those.

I know we're in a business where losing is not a good thing, but it's created a lot of opportunity for us this year, a lot of opportunity for growth and experiences for the players, for me as a coach.

It's been a fun season, and we look forward to letting it rip tomorrow and seeing if we can continue to play on.

**Q. Tommy, what did you see from Caleb Love at Carolina that made you want to recruit him out of the portal, and how has he grown as a player and a person since getting to Tucson?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** You know, it happened really fast, to be honest with you. We were at a position -- I liked our pieces coming back, but I just felt like we needed an influx of scoring and shooting.

I talked to Caleb initially, and then a couple days later he committed to Michigan. I think it was just a cordial phone call, it was nice. And then obviously something happened with admissions at Michigan and an opportunity popped up, and we had a lot more clarity of what we needed.

Coach Rob had recruited him at Carolina so there's a relationship there, and we jumped on a few phone calls, and it went good, and we thought it was going to be a fit on both sides.

I thought it was such a good fit, I thought he was going to commit without visiting. Because I was down in Puerto Vallarta on vacation. It was a tough ending to the season, so my son and I were kind of down there a few days ahead

of my wife and our daughters because they were finishing up school.

And obviously family vacations in our business are a big deal, and I remember talking to the Love family, and there was like two days they could visit, and it was right in the middle of the vacation. I'm like, hey, I am down in México on vacation with my family, but there's an opportunity for you guys to visit if you want, not thinking yeah, we're good, we're going to come. Oh, we'd love to visit.

So my wife flew down and right when she landed, I said I'm going back to Tucson for another day. So it was a pretty funny story, but it was awesome trip. Went back, had a great visit with them, and he committed. Listen, it's been an awesome experience.

I know a lot of people want to talk about Caleb, and I'm obviously more focused on the team all the time. And I understand why they want to talk to him, because it's an interesting story.

It's been an awesome experience, and it's something I would do 100 times over again. And I think if I do it again, I could even do it better and help him out more. He's an awesome person. I have not seen many 22-, 23-year-olds that have had to endure what he's had to endure in his life, and he continues to show up every day.

And I've never had a bad experience with him with attitude, body language, talking back, anything like that. That's the real Caleb Love. I get to know the real Caleb Love. You guys know a perception of what Caleb Love is in what you see on the court.

I think a lot of the assessments of him are unfair, but that's the reality he has to live, and he's handled it really well.

**Q. Tommy, you've had a long line of international players find success in your program. When you look overseas, what are some of the traits you're looking for in trying to figure out if they can adapt properly to the United States, the basketball here, and what have they brought to your program?**

**TOMMY LLOYD:** Well, obviously you're looking for talent and -- talent and good character, those two things. Then

it's what you said; you've got to figure out if their game is going to translate or be developable over here. Not all of them are.

I've had a lot of international players, and it's worked out for a lot of them. And a few it hasn't. It's not like I've batted 1,000 on it.

I just always think it's fun. I think it's a global game. I think it's fun to add that mix into your locker room and have a really diverse culture within your team.

I think strength always lies in diversity, and so I want to create a locker room that has a lot of diversity, and I think it's a ton of fun.

I think those kids overseas are learning a good style of basketball. If you look at the NBA right now -- I don't know the percentage of players that are international -- it's really high. It's normal.

To me, what I do is normal. I mean, I'm not a specialist. I'm building normal basketball rosters for high-level teams, and that's how I've always looked at it.

**Q. Tommy, a lot of coaches will say about this tournament the key to making that run is to keep making the tournament and then it will happen at some point with a certain team. For you guys, you sort of said last weekend, we can thrive in chaos, that there's that nature to our group. How do you balance your group's explosiveness, all the different things that you're capable of, while also keeping the hand on the steering wheel at the same time?**

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, I think the way we play is comfortable for us because it's how we practice every day. We're not trying to be a perfect team. I'm not trying to be a perfect coach.

But we want to accumulate as many good things as possible, and I think the only way you accumulate as many good things as possible is you've got to be aggressive. And when you're aggressive, you're going to make some mistakes sometimes, but you've got to keep coming. That doesn't mean that we're not trying to fine-tune things, or hey, that might a little too tough of a player or too tough of a pass.

To be honest with you guys, I'm not a highlight guy at all. I don't even sometimes realize, okay, that was a dunk or whatever, that was two points and we're going back to the other end.

But I also understand that our players -- I mean, they're

athletic. They're talented. They like to do that kind of stuff. It's just kind of -- you're right, it is a little bit riding a fine line of being aggressive and being overaggressive.

But I think that's one of the reasons we are successful and hard to play against is because we keep coming.

**Q. Big picture, coaching, leadership question, has the rise of NIL in the portal changed the way you handle kids, whether it's coaching, in practice or even the way maybe you speak about guys in the media?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Absolutely not. I'm a college basketball coach. Always going to be a college basketball coach. I think that you're going to find over time that the coaches that continue to be good college basketball coaches and figure out how to navigate this NIL landscape are going to be the most successful.

I think you're going to find that guys that come here and try to coach them like pros, I don't think that's going to work because a lot of them are 18-, 19-years-old. Just because players are making money now, doesn't mean they're any better than they were 5, 10, 20 years ago. They're still the same players and they still need to be developed if they want to get to the next level or be good in college.

NIL is something that on a daily basis we don't even talk about in our program. I'm literally coaching the same way I have for the last how many years. I understand it's part of the game. I understand it's part of getting players to come to your school. But on a day-to-day basis in our culture, they're treated the same as they ever have been.

And I think that's important that they are treated that way. You know what, to be a pro is something you have to learn how to do. And there's lots of guys that think they know or skip steps to be a pro, and they don't make it. I'm not going to do that to our guys. I'm going to continue to give them the same foundation we always have.

**Q. Another Caleb Love question. Just in terms of on the basketball court, what kind of development have you seen from the beginning of his career or even just the last couple years you've had him?**

TOMMY LLOYD: Listen, Caleb is really a dynamic player. I think people maybe get focused on his shooting or his efficiency sometimes, but the guy has been really good in playing in pick-and-rolls and making plays. He can make all the passes.

He can finish at the rim. He can hit a floater. He can hit a three. He can hit a three off the dribble. He's just a really dynamic player. You can play him off the ball in

pin-downs, all those things. He can push the ball in the break.

I just think he's just become more well-rounded over time, and I think the thing that's probably picked up the most is his play making, something we really emphasized and are comfortable teaching how to do. I'm comfortable when the ball is in his hands. Not that I expect perfection, but I know he has the ability to make things happen.

**Q. I'm going to go back to November 22 when you played Duke. There was two areas where they obviously beat you, three-point percentage, rebounds, and you're not used to losing that rebound battle. Now of course Krivas played almost as much minutes in that game as Tobe and Veesaar played combined. I would assume that you're confident that you can get on them on the boards better this time around. Three-point percentage, though, the team -- a lot of the guys are kind of not hitting at the same rate that they did last year. Is that the key to this game or --**

TOMMY LLOYD: We'll figure out the keys when the ball goes up. But obviously rebounding is always something that's important for everybody, not just us.

Obviously we're a different team than when we played them, and we didn't play good that game. I'm sure they would say they're a different team, and I don't think Duke played that great that game. It's going to be interesting to see how it looks when we get out there tomorrow.

The rebounding is something we're always going to emphasize, and we know it's not going to be easy, but we're here for it.

The three-point percentage, I mean, like I said, the last five games or so, we've shot the ball better than we have all year. I don't know, maybe it's these sticky NCAA balls and soft rims. I don't know. But we seem to be shooting the ball pretty good right now and pretty confidently, and let's hope that continues tomorrow.

**Q. I was just wondering your thoughts, a lot of buzz about no Cinderellas in the Sweet 16 and maybe NIL kind of killed the Cinderella or whatever. You've got a couple guys from mid majors. I was wondering what your thoughts are on that.**

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, if you're 4-5 at one point in the season, does it make you a Cinderella? I don't know. No? Okay.

Hey, I don't know. It's hard. The tournament, it feels like it's just kind of a little bit different every year. One year

there's three or four teams from maybe non-power conferences that break through, and then this year there doesn't happen to be really any.

I don't know if there's enough sample size yet to say this is NIL driven or just how it broke this year. I don't know why there would be so much difference from last year to this year and I don't how many teams made it from last year.

But obviously Trey Townsend was on a team at Oakland that I think they won their first game and lost their second last year. I mean, those stories still happen. But to win this second game is really hard.

Nate, our SID, told me only seven teams have made three out of the past four Sweet 16s, and we're one of them. It's really hard to win that second game and get to a Sweet 16. And once you're here, you've got to take a breath and you've got to come out and be ready for the next fight.

I don't know. I don't have enough higher level view to maybe give you the answer you're looking for on that. I don't have a good soundbite on that one. But who knows, next year it could be four teams that make it through. This year there's none. But it is what it is.

**Q. There's multiple scandals, sports betting scandals in the NBA and college basketball right now. In your region, Arizona State was tarnished by the Hedake Smith point-shaving incident in the '90s. In your view, is there enough being done in terms of educational outreach and safeguards for the players to protect them there?**

TOMMY LLOYD: There is definitely enough being done from the institution and the NCAA standpoint, but it's complicated. I mean, I think that the one thing with the sports betting is it's in your hands now. It's literally in your hands. You have these kids on campuses that are living in dorms and their parents are sending them money, and it just gets complicated. And then there's some sick people out there that are taking advantage of those kids and stuff.

It's a little bit heartbreaking. But I don't know. There must be a reason they're allowing more gambling, and obviously the reason is probably a lot of people are making money on it, besides the gamblers I would imagine, the government and things like that.

It's just complicated, because, you know what I want to do? I just want to coach hoops and I want to hang out with my dudes and I want my dudes to be normal. I don't want them to be getting crushed for missing a free throw that caused the point spread to go one way or another.

But I guess that's the world we live in. And I really don't have much more time to think about it other than you asking me that question right now. But it definitely is something that does linger, and it's kind of sad, so hopefully it'll somehow -- we'll find a safer way for everybody.

**Q. Was there a point earlier in the season after the struggles or during the struggles of practice or a game where you felt things click and it started to turn, or was it more of a process?**

TOMMY LLOYD: It's always a process. Development is always a process, it's not an event. I knew we were a good team, and I knew we were going to be good. We just had to get through it.

I never had any doubts that we'd be here right now, and I told myself I don't even know how many times in my own head, we're getting to the Sweet 16. No matter how we slice it or dice it, we're going to get to the Sweet 16 and figure it out from there. So we're here and we're excited to try to take the next step.

For me, there never was any doubts. It was just a matter of rolling up our sleeves and getting to the work. But I can't think of an event that was like, okay -- I just always believed because I knew we were good.

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