

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

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Prudential Center

Duke Blue Devils

Coach Jon Scheyer

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



Duke in his career. You guys kind of held him down in the earlier game. What challenges does he present defensively, and could he be a big factor in this game?

JON SCHEYER: Well, sure. He's their leading scorer and leads them in assists. He's obviously a key player for them.

The thing that he does, he can shoot shots at any time, and he can hit shots at any time. I think he's an improved passer, somebody that's not afraid.

He's a really good player, so that challenge is there for our guys. But they have challenges way beyond him. They put five guys on the floor that can all score and hurt you. But he's had a really good year, and it's going to be a tough matchup.

Q. Jon, big picture kind of coaching leadership question: Your program has always really been built on culture. What are the challenges of sustaining culture year to year with the NIL, the portal, roster turnover, and just the changes we've seen in the game?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I'm sure what I'm about to say is obvious, but our program was built on players teaching players, in addition to obviously what the coaching staff has done. But it's something you would always pass down.

That's changed the last 10 years or so with just one-and-done. It's not like the transfer portal just started. But I think the fact that since transfer portal is entered where you can leave at any time without any penalty, you have to deal with a new group almost every year. And I think that's the biggest challenge where you feel like you can skip steps when you really can't. You have to start from ground zero every summer.

And for us we went back to the basics this summer of just how to build this team from the ground up, build the connectivity, teach the standards, hold them accountable to what the standards are. And that's something I know we're going to have to do each year going forward.

Q. Is there anything about the team's approach mentally that's surprised you this postseason that

JON SCHEYER: For me and for our program, we're honored to be here. Excited to be here. We know we play a really good Arizona team. A lot of respect for Tommy and his program. I think he's one of the best coaches.

For our group, we're just ready to go.

I'll take any questions.

Q. This game has the potential -- your front lines, both teams, could look very different. I'm assuming Maliq is out?

JON SCHEYER: It's day-to-day with Maliq, and there's a chance he could be available tomorrow night.

Q. Having said that, their front line is going to look a lot different. Having played them, that game back on the 22nd of November, does it have any relevance at this point?

JON SCHEYER: I'm not sure how much it means, to be honest. I think watching that game back, I know -- I'm sure Tommy would say the same. We're very different. So are they. Different personnel. The game was slow. I think both teams are playing a lot faster.

But naturally there's still some things you can take away, but overall I think we're two very different teams playing a lot more confidently. The cohesiveness of both groups is different.

But I think the thing that's similar, anytime Duke and Arizona play, you have two proud programs, two teams that both expect to win, and it's going to be a physical, really tough game.

Q. Caleb has obviously had some big games against



you'd say is different from how they have been the rest of the year, or has it been pretty consistent?

JON SCHEYER: I wouldn't say it's different. I think it's different circumstances. So I'm impressed with how they've been able to block out any noise and attention or expectations and just focus on what's right in front of them. I'm proud of that. Obviously that has to continue tomorrow night.

But I think that gets harder to do as the season goes along. It's a shame everywhere you read or see, it's all about the transfer portal right now and other things going on, where we're the lucky ones to be preparing for a game. Our guys have embraced that and not worried about what's next, what's behind, just what's right in front of us. And to me that's been the most impressive thing.

Q. Jon, the defensive level you've achieved and maintained this season, obviously it's a credit to the entire roster. But with the way college basketball is played now with so much pace, tall offensive players, how important is Cooper's defensive versatility specifically to the scheme you guys have been able to put in and the level you just kept up all year?

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, look, Cooper obviously is a huge part of what we do with every aspect. Defense in particular, his length, and then his instincts just -- he closes that window quick when somebody does have an opportunity.

I think it's led us to really protect our rim well, but also create some turnovers and steals to lead to easy opportunities, which is important for our team.

So for our team in general, look, we have a bunch of guys that are versatile, nobody more than him. He's unique with what he does in that area.

The thing he's done great this year, though, is guard the ball. So he's a guy that can guard 1 through 5, but his defensive instincts off the ball have been a huge part of what we've done on the defensive end.

Q. On the topic of Caleb Love, I think tomorrow is going to be the 13th NCAA Tournament game he plays in his career. Long career for him. How does that make the challenge of dealing with him in a knockout format more unique, especially when you have a younger team?

JON SCHEYER: I just think for us, there's no magic to it. At the end of the day, it's still basketball. It's still the same points we're emphasizing, what was it, November 22nd you

said, because you want to win the game then. There's still the same points.

Just it's the understanding if you lose, you go home, so that makes it -- it can make you feel differently.

At the end of the day, it's still about the same values and still the same emphasis from us as a staff and for our guys as players.

I'm not sure how much weight I would put into that, although that is good experience, of course.

Q. Jon, just curious, what do you think has enabled Pat, Isaiah, and Caleb, despite somewhat fluctuating roles throughout the season, to stay steady and always be able especially as they've become more important in the postseason?

JON SCHEYER: I think it's been one of the biggest blessings as a coach this year to have guys that are ready. Of course, I think just honest conversations from myself, the coaching staff is part of that. But I think a huge part of that is the support staff they have and not getting too high or too low.

And the reality is especially as young players, there are going to be some moments that you don't play as well, you don't play as much. And understanding with this team that we have this year, certain matchups, too, it depends.

Just we've tried to keep them upbeat and understanding that's going to happen to somebody. So just all of a sudden the next game that can be totally different.

The three guys you mentioned, Isaiah, Caleb and Pat, all have amazing spirit. They have, like, a great spirit about them. Really good confidence in themselves, but also the humility to look and say, okay, here's what I have to do better, here's where I can take a jump. Obviously they've all given us a big lift in different moments.

Q. I want to catch up with you guys about since Jai left for Miami, how has the staff filled his role? Who's doing what -- is Justin Robinson doing more, is Schrage doing more, Will Avery? How has that worked out for you five games into it?

JON SCHEYER: Naturally everybody has stepped up. All three of those guys have stepped up and helped. The fact you're playing in the NCAA Tournament, you have two games a week, so Emanuel and Chris for me have been just really key guys with handling all the scouting with help from the guys you mentioned. Our video team has done an incredible job, too.

But it's been as seamless as could be when you miss somebody like Jai. Jai is obviously great with what he's done for us and what he's going to do going forward, but it's been very seamless with Chris and Emanuel stepping up and all those other guys being ready to go.

Q. I have a philosophical question for you. Over the years, you've referred to defenses as baseball pitches, like Khaman was the fast ball, Maliq was the splinker. Have you always done that? Does that come from a youth coach that did it with you playing?

JON SCHEYER: No, I don't know where it -- where I heard that one, came up with it. I have no idea. I just know how different they were as players. That's the best example I can give. I'm sure I could have given better examples.

I don't know what pitch Pat is because Pat is his own person, too. He's a little bit of each guy and his own guy. I guess fast ball, splinker, sinker. We've got to figure that out.

But no, that's not something I try to do in my spare time is come up with baseball pitches that our guys play like.

Q. Back to Caleb Love, you obviously matched up with him a bunch since the start of his career. You've mentioned he's become a better passer. From seeing him at the start to now, what other improvements have you seen from him?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I think just his game has grown, I think just with the job Tommy has done, Arizona, the way they play up tempo. He's the same player in terms of how he scores and all that. He's just better at everything.

I think that's a credit to his growth and the job that him and his teammates, coaching staff, everybody that's helped him.

He's scoring off the bounce, scoring off catch and shoot, to the rim. He's continued to develop all around as a player.

But I mentioned the passing. I think that's been noticeable, and who he is all around, I would say.

Q. Coach, do you get annoyed at all the noise around Cooper because he made the comments that he might want to come back to Duke, and everyone keeps on saying, he's crazy. I actually saw an article a couple days ago that put a dollar figure on it. I know I'm kind of getting my opinion in here, but I think they're overlooking the whole college experience. What are your thoughts on that?

JON SCHEYER: Well, a couple things. One, I think you would be amazed with how much I really don't read or block out, so that's the first thing. So that's news to me that people are still talking about that. I didn't know that.

I'll say this, and this is aside from Cooper, because Cooper is about to move on with something incredibly special with the next step he's going to go after this. But happiness doesn't necessarily equate to just becoming a pro or just making money, although they're making money either way now.

But I think it's important for guys to -- each guy is their own individual, so I think depending on the situation, guys should make the decisions for themselves.

But Cooper's thing is different. Cooper's thing is that's said, and that's going to happen, as it should.

But I don't even know the article you're referencing. I don't know what people are saying. I'm focused on Arizona and that's it.

Q. Is it true that Arizona was one of your final choices when you were being recruited for college? And if that's so, what do you remember about the Lute Olson experience of that recruiting process and why ultimately Arizona was not the place you chose to go to?

JON SCHEYER: Well, you're taking me back now. That feels like a long time ago. My final three were Duke, Illinois, and Arizona. I just loved Coach Olson. He was awesome to me to be around.

I had a great visit there, although the visit was on the heels of Arizona actually playing Illinois, and in an Elite 8 game, I think it was.

But just loved Coach Olson, loved the way they played. And ultimately wasn't about what wasn't right at Arizona, it was about what was right at Duke. That's where I felt I belonged and where my heart belonged. But yeah, really respected those guys and loved the time there.

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