

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

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Los Angeles, California, USA

Crypto.com Arena

Arizona Wildcats

Coach Tommy Lloyd

Keshad Johnson

Pelle Larsson

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with Arizona. We have student-athletes Pelle Larsson and Keshad Johnson.

Q. Your coach has mentioned previously that the international trip that you guys took over the summer was very beneficial for you guys. Some other coaches who have also been in this tournament have said the same thing. For you guys personally, how did the trip help lead you guys to where you guys are at now?

KESHAD JOHNSON: The trip -- I feel like the trip was a great icebreaker. It happened in August -- July, August -- like when we were all fresh and getting to know each other, with us being like pretty much half American guys and half foreign guys, going on that trip, we learned a lot about each other, like backgrounds, ethnicities and all that stuff -- the wars that happened in other people's countries.

So we all just gained a sense of what each other have been through in this life, and that was pretty much the start of our journey.

Q. Just kind of looking at the matchup tomorrow, Clemson plays as a slow pace and they shoot the ball pretty well. How do you plan to make them uncomfortable because you have struggled a little bit with that in years past?

PELLE LARSSON: We've played a lot of teams that play slow in our league too. I think in these tournaments a lot of the game and the fight is about effort and the 50-50 balls, rebounding. Guys will get hot and make shots or not. It's



just those things you can control is your effort. I think it's going to be a big effort game.

KESHAD JOHNSON: For me, I just feel like we need to play Arizona basketball. They have their game plan where they're just used to playing slow or whatnot. We're used to playing fast. So we've got to stick to our own identity, whether we slow it down a little bit by them or we're able to speed them up.

The game of basketball is so unpredictable. So we're just going to see what's going to happen tomorrow.

Q. Pelle, you've been to the Sweet 16 before, but you've never been past it. Your thoughts as you get here today with the game tomorrow? Just the emotions and desire to get past the Sweet 16.

PELLE LARSSON: Just very excited to be here, first of all. I think, if you're not excited to be in March Madness, you're doing something wrong. We're all very excited.

We were excited the first game. We're excited now. Nothing's really changed. It's just another chance to prove ourselves and what we can do. Yeah, we're just really excited for tomorrow.

Q. We've heard you mention poise in the past, especially in this tournament. I'm curious how important you think it will be for not only yourself but for the entire team. How would you describe perhaps the poise within this team?

PELLE LARSSON: I think the poise at times is really good with our team, and at times we've turned the ball over a little bit too much and allowed other teams to get back in the game. Having possession of the ball is huge in tournaments like this.

We only have one game, win or go home. So the poise is going to be a big key. When we take care of the ball, I don't think there's a lot of teams that can defend what we're doing.

Q. Keshad, obviously most of the team has not been



past the second round. You have, you and Caleb. Have you guys had any conversations about what you think this next two games possibly could take just to get to the Final Four? And has anybody come up to you and said, hey, what can we expect? Or anything like that.

KESHAD JOHNSON: All of us have these conversations every day. First of all, just thanking God for the journey that we've been on, having the experience of getting past the Sweet 16, making it to the national stage and all that.

We talk about it every day. We know it's going to take everything -- faith, luck, just trust, and also discipline and sacrifices. The list goes on and on.

Everything comes into play when it comes to March and April. It's not just one thing we can just put our eye on. We've got to take into account all things.

Q. Clemson, in their last game, was able to prevent a pretty high-powered Baylor offense, and they'll be trying to do the same to you guys. How do you kind of avoid starting the game out in a lull or just falling into like a bad offensive rhythm?

KESHAD JOHNSON: We've just got to play Arizona basketball. We can't worry about the stuff that's out of our control. I feel like what they do is pretty much out of our control. They've got their own game plan, and we've got our own game plan.

We've got to go out, roll the ball out, stick to what we've got, and the best man will win.

Q. The last few years, talking about the (indiscernible) experience, but the Sweet 16 matchup, you had a block late in that game, steal late in that game. Impacting a game sort of with those kinds of plays like that, how much do you kind of take into that role? And then following up on that a little bit, Jaden was on the opposite side of that game last year. Has that ever come up between you two? He kind of has that same role now.

KESHAD JOHNSON: We talk about it all the time. Sometimes he gives me a hard time about it, and I rub it in his face a little bit. Pretty much the relationship that we all have with each other, it's just a blessing for us all to come together.

Caleb through the journey that he went, me and Jaden seeing each other last year, Oumar and Pelle being on great teams. We all talk about these great experiences and everything.

Going to that question about making any play, any play that it takes to save the game. We watch a lot of film. We're going to have to -- you'll see one thing on film like, okay, that will happen tomorrow in the game. If I do that to save the game, let me do that. Let me make that play. Let me dive on the floor. Let me get the deflection. Whatever the case may be. All things come into account in March.

Q. Keshad, I'm curious, you've been in this situation before. What do you think you've learned the most from your playing career that perhaps can help you and the team tomorrow to advance to the next round?

KESHAD JOHNSON: What I learned the most is just do whatever it takes. Make your sacrifice. Try to make the game easier on your teammates, whether it's Pelle getting a jump stop and he's kind of trapped, if I back cut and I could get him a release, a bailout, just try to make the game easier on your teammates, do whatever it takes.

Don't really worry about the number of stats. That's "me" problems, you know. It's bigger than me when it comes to March.

THE MODERATOR: Pelle, Keshad, thank you very much.

We'll begin with Arizona head coach Tommy Lloyd.

TOMMY LLOYD: Good to see all of you guys. Great to be in L.A. Proud of our guys and what we've accomplished and are attempting to accomplish. It's been a great group.

Obviously looking forward to a great challenge tomorrow.

Q. Believe it or not, there were some former Arizona players who weren't that excited when you were hired three years ago. Can you just kind of describe what your reaction was back then to some of the stuff that was said and how you won some of those guys over?

TOMMY LLOYD: They had a right to feel that way. This is an amazing program, and it's an amazing legacy and an amazing tradition. I probably, did I not know myself so well, I probably would have wondered what the heck are they doing hiring an assistant coach from the WCC.

Yeah, I think that's all justified, and I knew that me just talking or whatever wasn't going to earn people's respect. We need you to come and do a great job on a day-to-day basis and run the program in a way that our former players would be proud of.

Our former players are a huge part of what has put our program in such a great position nationally. I mean, these

guys, the passion they have for Arizona, the talent they have for basketball players, the great coaches that we've had -- from Fred Snowden to Lute Olson to Sean Miller -- those guys have all made my job better.

And the former players, it's the blood, sweat and tears. So those guys have a right to feel that way. I wasn't an Arizona guy at that time, but I'll tell you what, I am now.

Q. Going into the NCAA Tournament, you mentioned a lot about having the extra rest from coming home from the Pac-12 and being able to kind of reset. You were the first game of the second round and you were home before most of the games were even played. Can that same rest factor be a benefit to you again?

TOMMY LLOYD: You hope so. I think any time you can try to find an advantage, you try to wrap your arms around it. I feel like, for this time of the year, we're pretty healthy, we're pretty rested, which is a little bit of a luxury.

But just because you had an extra day or a few extra hours doesn't mean you have a significant advantage this time of year because the other team's really good. I mean, they're really, really good. They're playing for something as well.

It was good to get back, catch our breath a little bit, and have kind of a normal week of preparation for us because we're used to playing on Thursday and Saturday is basically what we do in our conference. All in all, yeah, I'd say we feel like we're in a pretty good place.

Q. Was there a point in maybe January, February, where you said to the guys, okay, guys, we can be better? Let's show it.

TOMMY LLOYD: Well, sure. I think there was a point yesterday in practice that I felt like that. But you're right. I also know that these seasons are long, and it's really hard to be trending in a positive direction the entire time.

Part of growing over the course of a season is struggling and in dealing with adversity and staring it straight down and acknowledging, hey, we might have some weaknesses. We've got to get better. Or we're not doing a good enough job, whether it's as a coaching staff or as players.

We took some of those, maybe some of those -- that tough stretch. So we were on the road for basically a month. We didn't play a game in McKale. I think that kind of threw us off our rhythm a bit. We got a little tired. We played some teams that played really well. But I think that adversity made us a better team today.

Q. Tommy, the NCAA president said today that they're going to start working on banning prop bets on individual players. Wondering your opinion on that. Also, do you hear your players getting harassed at all during games for their performances?

TOMMY LLOYD: I know as little about gambling as maybe anybody. Somebody had to explain to me what a prop bet was. So I really don't have an opinion on it.

There's lots of things going on in this world that require attention, unfortunately. My attention can't be divided on those things. So I'm 100 percent focused just on Arizona basketball, and I'm going to trust the powers that be will put our game in a good position. If some of those other things are causing problems, I'm hopeful they fix them.

Q. You're here trying to get over that hump of getting this team to its first Final Four in over 20 years. And you have guys that have been to the Final Four before. Has the team kind of just looked to Keshad and to Caleb just about, hey, what do we need to do this weekend to make sure that we end up going back to Arizona?

TOMMY LLOYD: First off, I don't see a hump. I don't see a hump. I'm just a basketball coach at Arizona in my third year. I see opportunity. So we look at opportunities as a privilege, and we want to take advantage of them.

With that being said, 100 percent we understand that every opportunity doesn't ensure you're going to be successful or you're going to be able to take that next step because it's going to be really challenging.

To be honest with you, I know it's boring, but we're a one-day-at-a-time, one-game-at-a-time cliché coach, cliché team. So we're 100 percent focused on Clemson, and we haven't looked at anything beyond that.

Q. I believe deep runs to the Big Dance always require teams to win in different ways. It seems you have done that, this team has done that the first two games of the tournament. How would you assess this team's ability to win in different ways, whether it be on the defensive end or the offensive end, especially when we look at the first two games of the tournament?

TOMMY LLOYD: When we build the team as a staff, I think the first thing we always think about is we want to give our team as many chances to win games as possible. So whether that's the defensive end, the offensive end, a secondary lineup you might use. We're trying to think of everything we can to give ourselves opportunities to win.

I think with that mindset you're not afraid to play different styles because you understand, I understand, hey, these other coaches are really good, and they're going to come out with game plans. We're not always going to be able to play 100 percent in our comfort zone. So we've got to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

I think our guys have done a really good job these first two games. And even down the stretch of the season we were seeing -- every game it seemed like we were seeing a new coverage, a new type of defense that maybe the team hadn't even done that much. So we were getting the kitchen sink. And that's not easy to play against on a nightly basis, but I think our guys have handled it pretty well.

Q. Tommy, so the NCAA president today came out talking about the desire to cut college sports prop bets.

TOMMY LLOYD: We already had this question. I'll give you the same response. Somebody had to explain to me what a prop bet was. So I'm probably the least person -- I don't understand gambling or all the things and spreads and money lines. I don't even know what all that stuff means. I'm probably the wrong guy.

Q. Kind of looking at Clemson, they're a slower-paced team that likes to shoot the midrange, shoot the three ball a lot. Your team has struggled with that in the past, like with Princeton. How do you guys plan to speed them up and play Arizona basketball?

TOMMY LLOYD: I mean, whatever their pace, their tempo, what I see -- when I see Clemson is I see an incredibly physical team that has a conviction to assert their physical will on you.

I don't really -- when I sit there, when I watch them on film, and think, wow, these guys are playing extraordinarily slow. I see they have a couple of elite perimeter players. I see they have two really good big guys. I see they have good size at the other positions. And they play with effort and toughness possession by possession. That's what I see when I watch Clemson.

Q. I know you mentioned it before, but Matt Painter mentioned in their win over Utah State the benefit of having an international trip before the season. You said the same thing as well. Could you just go in depth about what helps with that trip to get your team here?

TOMMY LLOYD: It's the first time -- and I've traveled a lot. Obviously if you guys know my coaching background, I've

been recruited internationally for years, and I love traveling and I've taken my family on around-the-world trips. We really valued, my wife and I, traveling with our kids and making that part of our life.

But to be able to take our team, it's the first time I've done a foreign trip. I didn't want to just do one of these foreign trips where you go play a couple rinky-dink select teams. We wanted to play national teams. We wanted to go to places of substance where our guys could learn.

We got an opportunity to go to Israel and Abu Dhabi. It was an awesome trip. And it was an amazing way to get everybody in our group -- we had a group of like 50 people -- to get them connected, get them out of their comfort zone.

And we fully participated in everything Israel had to offer. And it was an amazing trip and an amazing way to kind of kick off our journey, especially in light of what's happening over in that part of the world right now. It was a really impactful trip for us.

And I'm hopeful -- you can do those trips every four years, I'm hopeful in four years, I'm optimistic the world is going to be in a better place, that region of the world is going to be in a much better place. And I'm hopeful that Arizona can make a return trip over there because I think that would be really, really cool on a lot of levels.

Q. Really every game, but especially in this one, how important to this team overall this season has Keshad Johnson been defensively especially?

TOMMY LLOYD: Key's been tremendous. His toughness and versatility and effort he gives on the defensive end are almost second to none. And I don't -- we're a team with a lot of good players who scores a lot of points, and I think a lot of attention gets focused on that. And maybe his impact on the defensive end gets lost in the shuffle, but not on me.

That dude is a bad boy, and he gives it everything he's got every possession. So he's really, really helped us at that end of the floor. He's helped kind of grow our identity there. I don't even know -- I don't think he was even first team all conference defense, which is crazy. Like, I mean, wow.

Any coach in our conference or any coach in the country who had Keshad Johnson on their team would value what he brings from the defensive end. To me, he might not be All-Pac-12 First-team Defense, but he's definitely all-first team All-American all-defense in my opinion.

Q. Coach, I'm curious, how would you describe this

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team's poise? We know March Madness can be crazy and never fully know what to expect. How would you describe from your perspective the team's poise?

TOMMY LLOYD: I love our poise. It's something we talk about all the time. Poise is built from confidence and belief, and I think we have those two things.

But you're right, this tournament tests it. This tournament tests it. And one of the crazy things about these tests is you don't always know what the response is going to be. You can have an idea, and I trust our poise, I trust our belief and confidence. But that doesn't mean that it's always going to show up in the moments you need it to. That's what makes these games, I guess, such a spectacle.

Q. Kind of in the same vein about Keshad's defense, Bradley in the last round in particular, he came out and did some pretty great things defensively. Having a guy that you can turn to off the bench that can bring that same sort of defensive intensity, how important is that?

TOMMY LLOYD: Jaden was spectacular all -- both games up in Salt Lake. He made some awesome plays defensively, and he just makes plays and has a knack for really understanding the scouting report, but also having the courage to make in-the-moment, impactful decisions on the defensive end.

I think you can go down the list of our guys individually as defenders -- Bradley is exceptional; Kylan Boswell is great; Caleb is much improved; Oumar, we rely on him so much to clog up the paint and protect the rim. And KJ Lewis is like -- I mean, the guy's a dynamo defensively.

Then you add Pelle to that mix, who is -- I mean, I think the best things he does is at the defensive end of the floor. I think you have the makings of a great defensive team.

Thank you guys.

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