



BYU MEN'S BASKETBALL

NOTES AND QUOTES | BYU VS. NC STATE | FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2023

The following notes and quotes are from BYU's 95-86 victory over NC State in the championship game of the Vegas Showdown at Michelob ULTRA Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Series Results: NC State leads 4-1

TEAM NOTES

Shooters gonna shoot

BYU went 14-of-33 from 3-point range in the win, becoming the first team in 15 years to open the season 6-0 against Division I competition and connected on double digit 3-pointers in every game.

It's a marathon, not a sprint

Following another slow start, BYU turned it on in the second half as the Cougars scored 57 points shooting 56.7 percent from the floor, 60.0 percent from three and 100.0 percent from the free throw line. BYU is now shooting 53.8 percent in the second half this season.

Cardiac Cougars

The Cougars trailed at halftime for the first time this season after having outscored the opposition by 106 points in the opening 20 minutes in the previous five games. With the comeback, BYU improved to 12-8 under fifth-year head coach Mark Pope when trailing by five or less points.

Keep chopping wood

The Cougars trailed for 29:21 in Friday's win over NC State, nearly 10 minutes longer than they had trailed in the opening five games combined (19:24).

Bench Boyz

BYU's bench scored 41 of the Cougars 95 points marking the fourth time this season they have eclipsed 40 points. Jaxson Robinson became the third different player this season to score over 20 points and first off the bench.

Hot start continues

With its win over NC State, BYU opens the season 6-0 for the second time under pope and 11th time since 1949-50. They last did it in 2022-23 where they were ranked as high as No. 12 in the AP Poll.

Make it three straight

After going 1-7 in its first eight meetings against current members of the ACC, BYU has now won three straight games with Friday's victory. They enter the championship game having beaten Virginia Tech in its previous meetings (2019, 2016).

PLAYER NOTES

Noah going nuts

Noah Waterman was named the MVP of the Vegas Showdown after finishing with 15 points and six rebounds in the title game. The senior has now scored in double figures in three straight games, his longest such streak doing it five straight times in February 2022 for Detroit Mercy. The Cougars are also now 17-3 when he starts the game.

The game changer

Jaxson Robinson scored a career-high 23 points for the Cougars, going 7-of-14 from the floor, 3-of-7 from three and 6-of-6 from the charity stripe to go along with four rebounds and two assists. It marked the first time he scored over 20 in a NCAA game having scored 26 during the Cougars trip to Italy and Croatia in August.

Egyptian magician

With Atiki Ally Atiki out and Fousseyni Traore only playing six minutes due to an injury, Aly Khalifa stepped up huge for the Cougars as he played a season-high 27 minutes. He was one of the main catalysts for the comeback, finishing with five points, nine rebounds and five assists.

Lucky No. 13

Spencer Johnson went 1-of-3 from 3-point range giving him at least one triple in a career-best 13 consecutive games.

Tough Trevin

With his three 3-pointers on Friday and 114 for his career, Trevin Knell is now tied with Randy Reid (1992-96) for the 18th most 3-point makes in program history.

CAREER HIGHS

Points: Jaxson Robinson (23)

Field Goals: Jaxson Robinson (7)

3-pointers: Trey Stewart (1)

Free Throws: Jaxson Robinson (2)

Rebounds: Trevin Knell (5)

Minutes Played: Townsend Tripple (5)

SEASON HIGHS

Points: Aly Khalifa (5)

Field Goals: Aly Khalifa (2)

3-pointers: Richie Saunders (2)

Free Throws: Aly Khalifa (1)

Rebounds: Aly Khalifa (9)

Assists: Jaxson Robinson (2), Aly Khalifa (5)

Steals: Aly Khalifa (1)

Blocks: Jaxson Robinson (1)

Minutes Played: Aly Khalifa (27), Noah Waterman (28), Jaxson Robinson (29)



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Head Coach Mark Pope

Winning the Vegas Showdown

"What a fun night. So many great things to talk about."

Jaxson Robinson's performance

"He was incredible. I am so proud of him. He is our leading scorer and he is like 'bring me off the bench, I don't care. I just want to help this team'. He knows that he has a massive role and responsibility on his shoulders and the minutes he plays. Boy did he deliver in epic fashion. I thought he was incredible tonight."

Getting more comfortable with NC State's press

"We had nine turnovers in the first nine minutes. They were ugly turnovers too. Our guys confidence is growing. They were making aggressive plays. We went the second half of the first half without a turnover. When our guys were aggressive and confident, trusting themselves to make plays we were good. Our guys now have some real experience that is positive about believing in their ability to go put yourself in harms way, bring on a power play and get it out. I thought our guys responded in an epic way tonight."

Adjustments to the game plan

"We were really fortunate that Aly was able to step in. That was a game-time decision actually, we put him through shootaround and he has actually been working so hard. We have tried to be as patient as we can for him to be injury-free. He comes out without a live practice and plays 27 minutes in a high-level game and has a massive impact on the game. Not having Atiki, we knew we had our backs against the wall and then losing Fouss early in the first half, a lesser group of guys might have added up to a tough night. These guys are believers and just want to fight, move onto the next play. They are growing before our eyes."

What sparked the team's momentum late in the second half

"Every guy on this team is so valuable. How about Trey Stewart's corner three, it was such an epic moment for us. We had been banging our head against the wall for about 15 minutes of game time, kind of like down three, six and eight and couldn't get over the hump. Those guys finally did it and it's a credit to the fact that they were willing to stay in it. They don't know quit. They don't know fatigue. It was really inspiring to be a part of that."

Jaxson Robinson

How does it feel to win the Vegas Showdown?

"It was a great experience for the whole team. It was a dog fight on the court, it was back-and-forth the entire game. I am pretty sure we were down most of the game so just making sure we didn't lose our fight or toughness and stay locked into the game plan."

What does tonight's comeback tell you about BYU?

"It is nothing new for us. We know what we are capable of. We know what we can do and it's just showing the world what we got. We have been saying that we are going to go out and show the world that we are a real team and can do this. Tonight was a step in the right direction."

Noah Waterman's play of late

"Noah has been playing amazing. It's actually crazy. We had to put him at the five and I am pretty sure he hasn't done that much this season. Him coming in and being versatile, playing different positions is helpful. On the offensive end he has been amazing, knocking down shots and getting offensive rebounds. He is doing all the dirty stuff that no one looks at. We need him big time."

Ali Khalifa's performance

"We all knew that Ali was going to play tonight, it was more of a matter of how much he was going to play. Looking at the statsheet, he played 27 minutes which I don't think anyone saw coming. He came in and was big for us, plus/minus 18, nine rebounds and five assists. We knew we had to cut to the basket because he would find us. He was great defensively guarding D.J. Burns Jr. He helped us tremendously with Fouss and Atiki out."

Do you feel a responsibility to step up and take over games?

"I wouldn't say that. I just let the game come to me, let it come naturally and try not to force anything. I know my teammates will find me when I am open. Just staying focused on the task at hand and all I care about is winning. No matter what the statsheet says as long as it's a win for us, that's all that matters."