



## **Head Coach Wes Miller Press Conference Oct. 18, 2022**

### ***On the state of the preseason and its adjusted length***

"It's interesting that when they moved the preseason back to I think 40-42 days before the season starts. Years ago, you would go, 'man, the preseason is long,' and there's certain days you go, 'man, we got five weeks left.' Then there are certain days you look up and go, 'oh my gosh, we don't have enough time, because we have to get better at these three or four things that are incredibly important to our foundation, our success, and we haven't gotten to these details,' but relative to last year, it's completely different."

### ***On the defense changing due to Abdul Ado and Hayden Koval graduating***

"Yeah, it's a lot different. Certainly, there are adjustments you're making, to your strategy defensively to compensate for that. I will say we lost that shot-blocking rim protection at that position, but we did gain a ton of length and athleticism on the perimeter. So, you sacrifice one for the other, but how you utilize that is different than how we utilized Hayden and Abdul last year. I think we have a really good plan of what we're doing defensively, it's not so new, a lot of the foundational things from last year for those returning guys they are able to carry over, but some of those adjustments are a little bit different. One thing I'm trying to get our returning guys and our older guys to understand is we could get away with that play last year on the ball or that kind of a help. We didn't want it like that, but we got away with it because Abdul's behind you, or Hayden's behind you. That's not the case now, our strengths are in other areas. So, there's certainly an adjustment. We've been thinking about that all offseason since the roster was complete. It's going to be for the returning guys a little bit of an adjustment early. But, I think the things we're doing will help us."

### ***Miller on taking charges on defense***

"When you don't have shot blocking up top, like Hayden and Abdul gave you not just the ability to block shots, but alter shots, or alter people from even driving to the basket because of their presence. Now you have to be better positionally on the ground...those things around the basket become so much more important. Obviously, when the ball does get there, you're positioning, even if it's not a charge, but to make shots go over you without committing undisciplined fouls. Those are things that we're emphasizing like crazy, and trying to convince these guys that we're here. I understand you got away with not doing some of these things to the standard that we want last year. That will not be the case this year because of how much the rosters changed."

***On Kalu Ezikpe and his exact position within the team***

"I mean, we all want to talk about positions in our sport, the way we talked about them when we were born. I was born in the 80s. You had Kareem, Hakeem Olajuwon and Shaq in the 90s. Those are centers, right? Look in the NBA now, you can turn on any NBA game, and it'd be hard to tell you who any position is, it's multi positional players. That's how the college game has really evolved to that too. Obviously, Abdul and Hayden are true centers. So, you could say that last year that we were maybe more traditional. This team's more modern and they were very positionless so again, you can't compare Kalu to Hayden or Abdul because they're very different players. So even if the way that you guys want to evaluate our team says well Kalu's at the same position that Abdul was in last year, but it's not the same. So how we utilize that is totally different, Kalu's more of a true forward. He's got perimeter skills, he can really handle the ball, he can really pass. He's got great athleticism. I'm trying to get him to figure out how to unlock that athleticism with how he plays to get his motor running, to do some little things to take advantage of that combination of width, strength, power, quickness, feel. We're going to use him completely different than we used Hayden and Abdul, because even though that might be the biggest guy on the floor, it's not the same position."

***On how he feels about the upcoming season from this moment***

"I think it's just about getting better today. Honestly, I'm obsessed with it and when you do play against somebody else, you'll learn things, things that you can't see in practice against yourself. So, it's exciting to kind of learn some things and then have the opportunity to go and address them on the practice court, which is why I'd like to do the super-secret closed door scrimmage. I'd like to do one of them early. So we can just try different combinations, play everybody. And then address some things over a couple of weeks practice that we made, we weren't able to figure it out playing against each other."

***On how the offense looks different this year***

"I think in our transition offense, it's very different. We're playing four true perimeter players in most lineups. We're really trying to keep the middle of the floor open. And then we're letting that forward that's in the game look to run for some dunks or layups, but also trail the play, you just see so much more space in the middle of the floor. I think you try to have some very organized structure and how you're coming down the floor, but then you try to also allow different players to play to their strengths. Kalu's a really good ball handler. He's a really good passer. So, we might let him push the ball and push the brake a little bit. We might try to play through him on reversal in different ways than we played through the guys."

***On where the defense may differ from last year***

"Last year, I would have loved to play defense with Abdul behind me. If you get beat, a lot of times they guy who beats you won't wanna keep going because he looks down there and doesn't wanna mess with him. It's not the same this year, but the positive is we have four guys on the floor who are over 6'5. The wingspan is different and we can cover more ground, so there are some neat things you can do there like denying more passes and double-team a little bit more and some of the pressing stuff we've done in years past. It's not all bad or all good, but

you have to learn how to utilize the gifts that you do have. I do think we are trending to more positional size across the board even though we lost some of it in the interior.”

***On Rob Phinisee and his potential on the offensive and defensive ends***

“He's a really gifted defensive player. I don't think I'm saying anything that anyone doesn't know, because he's proven it over his career at a high level. There's some adjustment to learning our defensive principles compared to what he's had before. He's really steady with the ball and doesn't turn it over. He makes good decisions. I've been really surprised at his ability to get his shoulders down and by his guy, make a good decision and get to the paint. He's made big shots in his career with some game-winners and 20-point games. I think he will be a more consistent shooter because he's worked on his game this offseason. I think he'll have some prolific offensive games. I value this as in him playing the elite guard position, but he's not a guy coming down to hunt his own offense; he's coming down and running the team and playing the right way.”

***On the size and length of the guards, particularly at the wing***

“Having all that versatility and length is fun for a coach. It was a fun offseason for me to call buddies and talk to different people in basketball. It's a uniquely-built roster relative to the teams I've coached. That's fun, right? We can dive in and take advantage of things we didn't before. That part's been enjoyable, and we've found some cool ways through half-court actions or adjustments in how we come down the floor, our breakdown offense and defensive stuff to take advantage of, and we've explored that in every way since the roster has changed. We're gonna run every possession. We're gonna really value being ready to play and being in great position early. We want to play Cincinnati-style basketball that's tough, gritty, edgy and getting our hands on every ball. That stuff doesn't change, but maybe the nature you do it adjusts a little bit as your personnel does.”

***On Ody Oguama and his second year in the program***

“One of the greatest things about Ody is that you know what you're gonna get when he walks into the gym every day. You're gonna get a great approach, work ethic and motor. He's spent a lot of time individually working on his skillset. He's worked a lot on his jumpshot. I hope the first way we see that is on the free-throw line. We had a lot of trouble last year getting him there, and that won't be the case this year from what I've seen so far. Ody is one of those guys that can mix it up, get the offensive boards and get fouled because he's a live body. He didn't shoot well from the free-throw line, but I think a lot of the work on his shot will benefit in his free-throw percentage. I think he's worked hard on his body, versatility and technique, and his ability to guard multiple positions may have him matched up against a guard this year. He's certainly been athletic enough to do that, and hopefully he has the technique too. He's had a great preseason so far.”