

NCAA Men's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Louisville

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Louisville, Kentucky



Tony Bennett
Kihei Clark
De'Andre Hunter
Ty Jerome
Kyle Guy
Virginia Cavaliers

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open up the floor.

Q. Ty, if I'm not mistaken, you and Ryan Cline grew up about 10, 15 -- or Kyle -- you grew up 10, 15 minutes away from each other. Sorry. Do you have much connection with him? How close are you guys and what's the connection there, if so? Sorry about the confusion.

KYLE GUY: No, that's fine. He went to Carmel, I went to Lawrence Central, which is about 20 minutes away. We played on the same AAU team, Indiana Elite, in high school. Got a lot of memories from that. We won the Adidas Tournament. So I know him pretty well. We keep in touch. He came over and hugged me before the game and said, Go get a win. So it's a little bit exciting that we get to play.

Q. Ty and De'Andre, can you just talk about your experience working with Mike Curtis, what's he like as a strength coach, what impact has he had on you. And as a follow-up to that, he says he would fit well in Coach Bennett's system as a player. Do you think he'd fit well in Coach Bennett's system as a player?

DE'ANDRE HUNTER: No. I mean, we have a different kind of relationship than the rest of the coaches. He's more laid back. You can talk to him about anything. He's more than just a strength coach to me. He talks to me about basketball a lot. During my redshirt year, he helped me a lot. He's just a great guy overall.

TY JEROME: To add on to what he said, he's a great guy. Minus the weight room stuff. To be honest, he's part of the reason I came here. A big reason I came here. Just when I sat down with him on my visit, he

was so detail oriented. His resume speaks for itself. And he gets everyone so much stronger, as long as you put the work in.

He's definitely changed my body since the day I stepped on campus or grounds, sorry.

Q. Kihei, I imagine you'll be tasked with guarding Carsen Edwards a little bit tomorrow. Your thoughts on that matchup and the challenges that he presents.

KIHEI CLARK: He's a great shooter, and he comes off a lot of off-ball screens. So I'm going to have to stay on his hip pocket and make sure I get a hand up and contest.

Q. Kyle, just to follow up on you and Ryan Cline, how much did you guys discuss where you might end up in college when you were teammates, AAU teammates? And did you ever have to guard him in a high school game? You probably will be facing each other at times tomorrow.

KYLE GUY: Yeah. We played a lot in high school. We played in the same conference, so we played each other twice a year. And when we were both being recruited by Purdue and IU and all those Indiana schools, obviously we talked about it. Grant Weatherford is on that team too, who went to Purdue for a year. So, you know, they recruited me hard. They just didn't do as good a job as Coach Bennett.

So, yeah. Actually, he's going to be mad I said this, but I made him fall. I crossed him over pretty bad when we played him in high school. So I remember that vividly.

Q. For Kyle and Ty, past players in this program have talked about how much it would mean to get UVA to a Final Four. They also talked about, as they went on in the tournament, it's sort of hard to block out the noise of that, the pressure of that. How do you think you guys are handling kind of being on the brink of what could be such a breakthrough moment for the program?

TY JEROME: I think it's as much as you have to block it out, because as soon as the ball is tipped, nothing else matters. But I'm embracing it. I think everyone's embracing it. Just being on this stage is an amazing

opportunity, and we're thankful to be here. I think you have to embrace it and let it fuel you.

KYLE GUY: Yeah, I think we're doing a good job of just taking it a moment at a time, trying to have fun with it and enjoy and cherish every moment. Obviously, when the ball is tipped, like you said, it's all business.

Anything that comes into your mind about the future has to go right out, because we take it one possession at a time.

Q. For Ty and De'Andre, beyond Carsen Edwards, what is the biggest challenge of really trying to stop Purdue's offense? What other kind of strengths do they pose?

DE'ANDRE HUNTER: They have a lot of offense. They have a lot of movement on their offense. They have a lot of guys who can come off screens and shoot. They have size, and they play defense as well.

So, I mean, it's going to be a tough battle, but we're going to be ready.

TY JEROME: To add to that, I think they're more complete than they get credit for. They offensive rebound really hard as well. Their bigs do a great good job of playing their roles. Their point guard, Eastern, he's physical, about 6'5".

So they possess -- they can, you know, give you matchup problems in that sense. They're just really complete and, like you said, they have two guys who can really fill it up.

Q. We were here early this morning, talking to you guys, what, 13 hours, 14 hours ago. How long does it take to come down from a game like that? What time did you guys get to sleep last night? And it's another late game tomorrow. So what is the process of waiting all day long? Do you change up your routine from, say, a 7:00 game or an afternoon game?

KIHEI CLARK: I went to sleep around 3:00. But now everything is pretty much the same. A couple things get pushed back. But just coming out and being ready to play at whatever time.

THE MODERATOR: Anybody else want to add to that? We're good. Next question.

Q. Ty, could you talk about Mamadi's presence on the team and what he brings maybe on or off the court?

TY JEROME: He's been so huge for us in this tournament. Just being locked in defensively. I tell him all the time, when he's locked in on the defensive side

of the ball, he brings so much to this team, whether he scores or not.

And then the added offense he's been giving us in the tournament has been huge for us. We've needed every bit of it.

Off the court, he's an awesome teammate. He doesn't care about scoring. He doesn't care who gets the credit. He just really embodies what this program is about.

Q. Kyle, you look back on last night's game, did you expect that kind of grind-it-out, defensive battle? And I guess nationwide -- well, I'll say in the ACC, a lot of people might be used to seeing that style of defensive play.

But for those that haven't seen you, how do you, I guess -- is that just kind of typical for how you all want to play in this tournament?

KYLE GUY: I think we'll take a win no matter how it happens. I think we knew it was going to be a battle, and both teams took pride in their defense, which obviously was on full display last night.

So they played hard, and they had a good scheme for the game, and they're long and athletic which bothered us in some ways, but we were fantastic on the defensive end as well.

Again, like I said, I think if we're scoring 80 points, 50 points, doesn't matter, as long as we win.

Q. Kyle, what is the Purdue fan base like? And how much is the fact that you played at Notre Dame and Louisville help you when you come into this setting, maybe a hostile setting?

KYLE GUY: I think everybody knows that, you know, any school from Indiana is going to have a good fan base, and they're crazy around West Lafayette. So I don't know exactly how far it is, but I know it's a lot closer than Virginia is.

So, you know, we're expecting them to have more fans and them to come out with a lot of energy so we're going to try to match that.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you. Good luck tomorrow.

Start with questions for Coach.

Q. Tony, the same thing I asked the guys. If you could speak to --

COACH BENNETT: 5:00 in the morning. Was that you?

Q. That's good too.

COACH BENNETT: All right.

Q. How do you think Mike Curtis would have fared as a player for you, and a little more on what the guys said about him?

COACH BENNETT: Mike is terrific. I'll tell you a quick story about Mike. When I was the head coach at Washington State, my father had retired from Washington State and Coach Beilein asked him to come and speak at the Michigan coach's clinic, and Mike was the strength coach. And my dad just happened to -- it was before he went on to give the clinic.

And Mike was presenting to all the Michigan state high school coaches. My dad came back, and he said, you know, he said, Son, I don't usually watch those. I don't even get into that. He said, I was enthralled. He said, That is one of the best presentations and a guy who gets it about the game of basketball.

He said, do everything in your power to send out your strength coach, Dave Lang, who passed away, a wonderful man when he was at Washington State -- but he said send him out, learn from this guy. He's one of the best.

So ironically, when I got the job at Virginia, I didn't really think about it. And then I said, all right, we've got to hire a strength coach. I'm like, the guy that my father mentioned, didn't know he was a UVA alum, didn't know he played with Jason Williford, didn't know his grandparents lived in Charlottesville. So that's kind of how it happened. He's unique. I had played in the NBA. I had been around some of the best strength coaches. He has six years of experience in that. He gets offered jobs all the time. He as a unique way, a different kind of system that's as cutting edge as I've seen.

There's so many great coaches in college basketball. I can't say we've got the best coaching staff. I would never say that. We have one of the best, if not the best, strength and conditioning coach. He's that good.

As far as his game, I never saw it. He's tough, so I think he could have worked out, and he's very serious. But I need to see some film before I can really comment on that. You have to ask Coach Williford. He played with him.

Q. Tony, what would be your message to Kihei in terms of guarding Carsen Edwards tomorrow? What does he have to do to kind of slow him down a little bit?

COACH BENNETT: They have Cline and Edwards. They're terrific shooters, among other players.

Kihei or whoever is on him, when you play players that are that special, that can shoot from unlimited range, you just do your best as a team to make it hard for him, and then individually to make him hit tough, contested shots. That's always the goal of the defense.

He can get loose, and he can shoot off the bounce, off the ball screen. He at all levels can score and he's explosive and strong. You've got to be so locked in, so alert, because they're offense is so good.

It's not just iso ball for him. It's a whole lot of everything. So it's just being continuous and making him work and trying to accept the challenge as a team. But it's not just Carsen, it's the other stuff. Matt does a great job of layering their offenses and a quick turnaround. You better play your principals well, because you can't know everything they're going to do.

Q. In light of how well they shot, Kyle Guy, career 43 percent 3-point shooter. In this tournament alone, he's had 12 percent. In fact, in the NCAA tournament, over the course of his career, he's been aberrationally bad. So sticking to the principles, how key will he be to have the kind of game he normally has, given the opponent and you know what Purdue is going to want to do. How often he shoots the three, are you expecting him to have a good game, him playing well from distance being key to you guys getting on to the Final Four?

COACH BENNETT: Kyle, the one thing I'm really proud about with Kyle is there's maybe -- you've got to give Kyle freedom, because he's a moment away from getting it rolling. But he has stepped up his game defensively. He's competing at a high level.

He's so keyed upon, but he's passing and making some plays. The rest of his game has been strong and it's always noticeable for a guy, a shooter of his reputation when it's not going. And, of course, that's helpful for us in a major way.

But he has -- as long as he's taking good shots and you give him that freedom for the most part to do what he does -- he took a shot yesterday and he said, My fault, Coach. It was a quick one in transition. He understands that.

He was talking to Mamadi when there was that little exchange. So that's what a good player does. Their value is not just if the ball's going in the hole. That's something young players have a hard time with. But we're going to need it all tomorrow. Not perfection, but we're going to need a high level performance because

Purdue is good defensively and good offensively. They didn't win the Big Ten because they snuck up on people.

So I think we're going to need a complete performance from everyone, and that was unique yesterday, where, you know, Dre and Kyle, from an offensive standpoint, weren't as efficient as they have been all year. But our defense, it just kept us in there. And Kihei and Kyle made enough big plays and Mamadi and the other guys. That's what you have to do.

Q. Tony, when you told De'Andre that he's redshirt, was that a difficult conversation? In what ways did that year benefit him?

COACH BENNETT: It was huge. First, when I saw De'Andre in high school, there's some guys you just watch and you say, they have a chance to touch greatness. There's something in them.

I saw him, he was hurt for some of his high school career. And I saw him and thought, boy, he could be a guy that could really keep taking this program to a good spot.

He had a high ankle sprain right when we were getting ready to start playing. We'd practiced. And so it was, he was going to miss I don't know how long. And what I told him -- and you could see the potential was there. But what I said is if you redshirt, you can go to work on your body and your skills. And I can't guarantee you how much time is going to be there if you don't redshirt. It's always the player's decision. I always do that.

I'm sure he was expecting to come in and play a lot. I thought if he would use that year correctly, as he did, it could be huge. Malcolm Brogdon did that for us, Anthony Gill. I could down the list, Mike Scott, where it served him well because of an injury or transfer or whatever.

I thought it was significant. And then even in his first year, he wasn't playing a whole lot consistently early on. And then he just -- but he stayed patient and it was hard. That's hard for every player. That's the hardest thing as a coach. I understand that. I know it's hard when Braxton and Jay and Jack, you know, they didn't get to play much yesterday. They're desperately wanting to play.

But those who will stay patient and work and work, as he did, you could just see it was coming. But it was just fine tuning. He's still got room to grow, which is, I think, very exciting.

But it was more presented to him and saying it's not a sprint, it's a marathon. And if you're willing to wait, I think it can be a positive. But if you don't want to, then

we'll go after it the way you want. That was the conversation.

Q. Coach, do you allow yourself -- any win is a good one, especially at this point in the season. Do you allow yourself to revel a little bit in a defensive battle like last night? How has the quick turns in the ACC provided the opportunity to prepare for the dramatic changes in style, whether it's the top 15 defense against Oregon, now a top 5 offense in Purdue?

COACH BENNETT: Yeah. I think, yeah, when you maybe don't play your best offensively and you find ways to win, I think you do revel or you're thankful for that, and you look at that, because it has to be that way. That's the game.

Certain things have to be constants. Offense can sometimes go in and out. We've been efficient most of the year offensively, but not yesterday. A large part due to the Oregon defense and some of it was us not being as good as we've been. But we found enough ways, and the defense was there. So, yes, that part was -- that's important. To advance to this point and do what these guys have done in the face of everything this year, for sure.

And then the second part of the question was, oh, the turnaround. Yeah, Ty said last night on the podium. We had three Saturday/Monday games. At Washington State, it was always a Thursday/Saturday league most of the time. It was always that one day in between. It's the Pac-12 now. It was the Pac-10 when I was there.

But the ability to have those turnarounds and play different styles is important. And so it's how you prepare this day. Unique how late we got done last night. Like you asked those guys when they got to bed. Those are the challenges. But you rest.

And I told the guys, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. I said, probably tired, didn't sleep great. I said, legs are probably a little fatigued. I said, you know what? Everybody is like that at this stage. It's worth it.

So you've just got to fight through that. Again, turning it quick, having a good practice, good film, and understanding, again, what Purdue does.

So I think there are some advantages of doing it. I'm sure Purdue did it in the Big Ten. But you have to rely on those experiences to sharpen you. We talked about that when those games were there. I can remember after we played Duke and got beat, and I said to our guys before the game in the North Carolina locker room, I said, okay. I said, if you're fortunate enough to

advance in the NCAA tournament, let's assume you had a good win against Duke, you had a good win. I said, you're going to have to play a big-time opponent on one-day's prep. You'll have to go in in a tough environment and do it.

I said, in a way, set your mind to that. That's what we tried to do Gardner-Webb to Oklahoma. That kind of way. So I know I'm being long-winded, but it cuts down your questions so that's why I'm doing it so I can get out of here. My time's almost up, right? I know what I'm doing. I've been here ten years at Virginia.

No, but does that answer it? Okay.

Q. Tony, obviously, your father, I know, has been a huge influence on your life. As you get older, as we all do, do you hear his voice in your head and maybe even sometimes coming out of your mouth occasionally, you're parroting things he said? If so, how grateful are you to channel all that into what you're doing?

COACH BENNETT: I was so fortunate. I did a Westwood One with Will Perdue. He asked me questions. To be under my father when he had to do some major rebuilding of programs when I played for him at Green Bay and I watched him rebuild and was with him at Wisconsin and then at Washington State, that's huge, to watch that up close and personal, to see someone who is willing to be patient and not be distracted and watch them go through it and what it takes to build and how they stay true to who they are and what they know will work with little adjustments. Invaluable.

And then to know that when he instructed me as a player, a coach, even when he speaks to me now over the years, it's changed a little bit. It comes from a place of love. And when you can trust that, he would always quote a proverb to me. He'd say, son, wounds from a friend are better than kisses from an enemy. So that meant I was going to either be told I'm doing a crappy job or something.

He'd speak the truth. He'd say, you need to hear these things. He'd say to me, learn from my mistakes as a coach. That stuff's invaluable. He said, I screwed up in this part or I didn't spend enough time talking to the players. I got so tunnel vision.

So when someone can speak to you like that -- whenever I've had head coaches on my staff, Coach McKay, Coach Soderberg, said hey, look, this is where I maybe missed it and I listened as closely as I can. Yes, definitely, there's things if I could be half the coach he is, I'd be thankful.

The reason why I got into this profession, I don't think I was gonna, is I wanted to be with him at the end of his career. I was a volunteer manager, and I just wanted to -- I knew he was getting close to retiring. I had played a little bit in the NBA. I just wanted to be by his side and enjoy that. I didn't know what I was going to do.

Bang, that first year I'm a volunteer manager, he goes to the Final Four. I'm like, that seems pretty easy and pretty fun. Maybe I'll get into this coaching thing. I didn't realize that, how tough it was.

But that, it was a joy playing for him, coaching with him. I told Coach Kruger's son, I said, don't ever take it for granted. It's one of the greatest blessings you'll ever have.

Q. Tony, yesterday, Mamadi was saying how him and Coach Williford have grown really close this year, and Coach Williford has actually helped him a lot with his post moves. How has the relationship evolved and how important has Coach Williford been in Mamadi's involvement?

COACH BENNETT: Coach Williford, again, being an associate head coach has done a terrific job. His mind for the game, his ability to recruit. When he wants, he'll be a terrific head coach, he's that good. Again, ten years, continuity has been important.

I've seen him grow -- Coach Sanchez was close with Mamadi, as the whole staff was. But I've seen Coach works with our bigger guys, Jay does, and I've seen him, you know, speak to Mamadi in the right way, and he's been huge.

So they have -- Mamadi is a unique -- no question about him, he's a unique young man and has such joy on the court, off the court. I've seen Jay challenge him but also encourage him. I think that's the balance that you have to have with young men today.

Q. In terms of talking about not taking anything for granted, with the success you've had here, have you thought about the significance, the personal significance of getting to the Final Four should you win tomorrow?

I guess the second question is, is there a player like Carsen Edwards that reminds you -- that he reminds you of, rather?

COACH BENNETT: Oh, man. He's pretty unique. He's so aggressive. I mean, there's been so many great guards in the ACC and he's up there with them, how he can score and do things. No one comes to mind particularly right now.

But, yeah. The significance, I'd love it if it happened. But I decided, you know, after last year, I told our guys, I said, what did that experience teach me?

Going through what we did, losing and all those things, and I said, I told the team this, and you've heard me say it before, it created a fire in me that wanted to become a better coach and pursue trying to get these guys to as far as they can, a Final Four, National Championship.

It's burning hot, but it did something I think maybe as significant or greater. It made me realize that if that never does happen, I'll still be okay. Because I've been blessed beyond what I deserve. And I think it's freed me up to go after this as hard as I can, as hard as we can.

You use the word, you hold it with open hands. I think you have to have that. And do these guys want this? Does Purdue want this? Do I want that? Would I love to be a son and father who coached in a Final Four? Be great.

But if it doesn't happen, you have to say, hey, are you going to be okay. And that's what I learned. And that's invaluable. So I'm at peace but I'm very hungry.

Q. Obviously, there's a history with the Bennetts and Purdue. Do you have a favorite Dick Bennett, Gene Keady story?

COACH BENNETT: I played for Coach Keady, the 1991 Pan American team. I was the point guard for that team with Jimmy Jackson, Christian Laettner, Grant Hill, Walt Williams. The list goes on and on. But I played for Coach Keady. I loved it. It was a phenomenal experience in Havana, Cuba. We won the bronze medal. Jimmy Jackson got hurt in the semifinals. I can go on and on about that. But such respect for Coach Keady, that program.

When I was a senior in college, Matt was on the team at Purdue when I was a senior at Green Bay. We played in their Christmas tournament. I remember two great coaches played in the Elite Eight in 2000, the year I was a volunteer manager. The only way I got to be on the bench is I got to give the water bottles and put the stools down. That was my role. You can only have so many. There's a picture floating around of me in that game. Coach Soderberg was the assistant; and his sister, Megan, and I were the managers. That was our job. Kind of ironic.

Watching Coach Keady and my father, two coaches you say I hope they get to coach in a Final Four. That's a dream of theirs. That was -- it was special for me as a son. That is my greatest memory watching my father achieve that because I knew that was a dream of his.

Seeing that battle, seeing those battles over the years and fine men who are tough as nails, both of them. Those are old school, blue collar guys that you certainly learn a lot from.

Q. Tony, there was a moment last night toward the end of the game, I can't remember if you had a one-and-one or two shots. You were telling Mamadi to get on the line to offensive rebound Kyle sort of said no, no, no, keep him back.

COACH BENNETT: I want him there for the first one in case they missed. And then at the time it was too late. Then if he made it, we were going to get him off for the second one.

Q. Do you feel like your guys are -- you empower or enable your guys enough to say if they have a different read, once they know, empower and enable them to call an audible basically on what you're saying?

COACH BENNETT: Absolutely. Well, I mean, depends. But London, I always ask London, Malcolm, those guys, Ty, in the game. You say, what are you seeing, what are you feeling? I remember as a player, sometimes you experience things and see things a little different than as a coach.

I mean, I'm not too proud to say. They can sometimes give advice and they might have a suggestion. That's been a key this year. Isaiah was like that. I can go down the list.

So for sure, it's not like they just do it all the time, but if there's something there. That situation was just kind of a broken situation. But absolutely. You seek their advice, you listen, we talk at halftime, and it is give and take.

You obviously have to make the decisions. But I'd say that's accurate.

Q. Tony, one more on Kihei. You mentioned earlier about him making big plays last night. Have you found him more willing and eager in those moments from as a freshman to where he is now?

COACH BENNETT: He's so competitive. He's a winner. He's shown that. I think he did that -- I never saw him in junior high. But in high school, the AAU circuit, he did it at times earlier in the year. Go back to the tournament in the Atlantis, he makes big plays.

Yeah, we needed all those, and so probably getting more comfortable, he seems to seize the opportunity. But he's got something in him. He did something against Oklahoma too.

Q. Tony, piggybacking on that, can you address Kihei's mental toughness and physical toughness? He just seems like he's full of that.

COACH BENNETT: Unique. There's just something about -- I was fortunate to watch Muggsy Bogues the three years I was his backup in Charlotte. I think it was a video or a book and the title was, Don't Tell Me No. I think that was it. I watched that heart and that perseverance. That's something that you have to have. I think that's, as a player, I tried to identify with that. I understood that.

When you see it, you know it. And I think I know it, and I think others know it when I watched him and not a lot of people -- he'd verbally committed to UC Davis. Jimmy Les did an unbelievable job of getting him.

He de-committed. I called Coach Les and I said, first, I want to make sure, is this legit, you know, what's going on. And we talked. I said to him, am I seeing this right?

He said, yes, you are. He said, he's special. And so he's got it that way, and he's got to keep improving, as they all do. But in these settings, to have that kind of mettle and that kind of stuff, that's a good sign.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.