

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Yale vs San Diego State

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena

San Diego State Aztecs

Brian Dutcher

Lamont Butler

Jaedon LeDee

Elijah Saunders

Media Conference

Q. Jaedon, can you talk a little bit about Danny Wolf and what that matchup is going to be like?

JAEDON LeDEE: From what I've seen on him on film thus far, he's seven-foot but he likes to play on the perimeter, so he's very unique in that way. So I think it's going to be a good matchup. I think we're going to have to game plan for him a little differently than a typical seven-footer, but yeah, he has a good game.

Q. Lamont, Yale is a balanced team with five players that average in double figures. How does that make it more challenging when you game plan for them?

LAMONT BUTLER: I mean, usually we kind of try to stop a couple players, but they have five players that can go. We're going to have to be locked in for everybody because everybody can get out there and score, so we can't just focus on one player, so that makes it tough. But we'll be locked in for it.

Q. Elijah, obviously going through the NCAA Tournament run a year ago, what was it like getting the opportunity on the floor yesterday?

ELIJAH SAUNDERS: It was super fun to go out there and be able to compete this time around. Last year pretty much watching our whole tournament run, definitely caught myself a couple of times in the middle of the game looking around going wow, this is crazy, I'm actually in a March Madness game.



Still comfortable out there because even though I didn't play last year, I was still around it.

Q. Jaedon, is there anything about Yale's film that you guys watched that stands out more than anything, rebounding, assisting, scoring?

JAEDON LeDEE: From what we've watched thus far, they've got two or three, maybe even four guys that can really shoot the ball at the guard spot and then the big man. And then Coach showed a stat, they're one of the best defensive rebounding teams. So us trying to get on the offensive glass is always -- and them being a good defensive rebounding team, that's kind of a challenge. So that kind of stood out.

Q. Lamont, what are some of the keys as a guard defensively when you're going up against really good shooters? What are some of the areas that you can have success when you're going up against good shooting guards?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, really try not to give them much space because any little space they see the rim, they're going to shoot it, and then contesting every shot and just staying locked in on pin-downs and stuff like that. It's really going to be a team effort.

But individually we just have to stay focused on them because they can get going any time of the game.

Q. Lamont, I think this is almost the exact same scenario as last year. You guys played the first game of the day and won, and then the 4 seed got upset after that. What do you feel like you guys did really well last year against Furman to not get caught against a lower-seeded team like that?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, we respect every team. Every team is good. They wouldn't be here for no reason. They're a really good team. They beat a really good team yesterday.

We take that and we don't take them lightly. We think they're a really good team, and we're going to go out there



and play like we're the best team out there and try to win the game.

BRIAN DUTCHER: I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long. Excited for our opportunity to have a chance to play to make it to a Sweet 16. Just really impressed with Yale. Coach Jones does a great job. Been there a long time. They're extremely dangerous. They have our full respect, and we will be ready to play tomorrow when we tip the game off.

Q. Can you talk a bit about the challenge of playing a team where all five guys average double-digit scoring in their starting lineup? Anyone can score the ball.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, they're dangerous at every level. That's what makes it a challenge. It's who can you help off and how committed are you to help? They make that challenging every time they step on the floor. They've got dynamic shooters. They have guys that can score with their backs to the basket. They have guys that can attack downhill to the basket. So they score at every level.

They're really good offensively, so it will be a real challenge for our half-court defense to be at its best tomorrow.

Q. Coach, after watching the film of Yale's game yesterday and seeing John Poulakidas score 28 points, what are the keys to slowing him down tomorrow?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, what Poulakidas did yesterday you tip your hat to. What are you gonna do? The guy gets it, you're guarding him on a play, you make the catch hard, and then he faces you up and shoots stepbacks, gets in the low post and shoots fadeaways. That's just a really good player making tough shots in March.

Then you've got Wolf who can face you up, you can shoot the ball, he can go off the bounce, cross over spin for a center. He can back you down in the low post to a jump hook. So he's dangerous.

Knowing in the low block scores, Mbeng is downhill, at the rim, threatening the rim all the time. Then Mahoney, if you lose him for a second, he'll make logo threes on you and if you're there, he'll drive you. So it's an ultimate challenge.

But we don't play one-on-five, we play five-on-one defensively, so we will help each other. We will be in our help positions and hopefully slow their offense down.

Q. Players like to make shots. Your team doesn't shoot the ball as a jump-shooting team at an extremely high level, and yet the success keeps coming the last

couple years. What do you do as a coaching staff to make sure that part of things doesn't affect everything else?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, our culture is defensive rebounding, and I tell them, we're one of the few teams in the country that when we don't make shots, we can still win games because our defense is that elite, our rebounding is that good, and then we'll give ourselves a chance down the stretch to make enough plays to win.

So obviously when we make shots, then we can create separation and we're really good. I've got good shooters, but the ball has to go in, and hopefully we have the kind of night -- we don't have all of a sudden, you look up and one guy is making shots and you can survive with that. Usually we're all missing or we're all making, and I don't know how that's even possible, but hopefully we run into a night where we're all making tomorrow.

Q. You've been through many tournaments over the years, and last year in particular. What do you feel like you guys did particularly well last year in terms of your prep and scout when you had the short turnaround between playing on Thursday, Saturday or in this case Friday, Sunday to get ready for that second opponent that you played on the weekend?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, there are a lot of good coaches in this tournament, and everybody preps hard. I guess the thing we're not afraid to do is we came out and had a hard practice today. We're not sitting there worrying about saving legs. That's part of your conference tournament. When you play three games in three days or four games in four days, then you're trying to desperately save whatever energy you can.

But with a day between games, we finished yesterday early, we don't play until 6:40 tomorrow, we went hard in practice today against all their actions, we went hard with our offenses what we thought would work. This was not a walkthrough today. We prepped hard on the floor and then we'll prep hard in the film room when we get back. So we will be fully prepared.

Now, that doesn't guarantee us a win, but it gives us a chance.

Q. You just said you've been through a lot of these tournaments. How different is the first game, where you have almost a week to prep, and then once you win in the tournament, it seems like it's much different with the media and the flow of it all, and is that an advantage to have been through that?

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BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, the extra day is good. Like you said, I'm only preparing for the game we're playing. So all my energy went into yesterday's game and UAB. But we have an assistant coach preparing for each team that we may face secondly, so they're ahead of the curve. As a head coach I'm trying to play catchup today.

Last night it was good to get the game over with in the afternoon because then I had all day to watch Yale, watch how they played, watch four or five full games of their conference tournament, then I back watched against Kansas, watched them again Gonzaga. So I watched games against different levels and sizes of competition. So I'm just impressed.

They're super dangerous, super well-coached, and we're going to have to play well to win tomorrow.

Q. These March Madness games often come down to making shots down the stretch. How do players grow in their capacity to be better in crunch time?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I mean, I say this, and I tell the team this, March is for players, and that's not to dismiss coaching. I have to put them in a position. I have to do my work. But players make plays to win in March. We all know that. Jaedon LeDee had 32 yesterday, Lamont Butler made an important 11 for us, Poulakidas made incredibly tough shots yesterday in order to beat a stubborn Auburn team.

So players make plays in March, and coaches have to put them in position to make those plays. Coach Jones and I are both hard at work trying to figure out what's the best way to defend and how to put our teams in a position to be successful.

Q. How do you approach foul trouble in a tournament like this? It seems like fouls and foul trouble matter so much more in March. Yesterday two UAB big men fouled out. Danny Wolf fouled out yesterday. How are you game planning around that on the fly?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's like well, who do we put Jaedon on? Do we put him on Knowling, who's 1-for-7 from three but scores inside? Do we put him on Wolf, who faces up, can drive him, have a risk of putting him in foul trouble? If we put him on Knowling, we're not as good a pressing team, so maybe we're not going to do that. So we'll switch our matchups up.

We practiced today with Jaedon guarding different guys, with Jay Pal and Elijah guarding different guys, different matchups on Poulakidas and Mahoney and Mbeng, so we're versatile. So we just worked at a lot of things today.

We'll watch practice tape and see what looked best and then set our matchups. They don't want Wolf in foul trouble, we don't want LeDee in foul trouble, but if it happens, both teams have faced it during the year.

There are no surprises during this time of year. We've dealt with it and we'll find a way to deal with it tomorrow, if it happens.

Q. One of the big things in the tournament is managing emotions of your team, and when you see a team like Furman last year against Virginia and Yale this year just have this huge outburst of emotion, it's sometimes hard for those teams to get it back two days later. How do you control your emotions of your team because they seemed even keeled all the way through last year's run and didn't get too high when there's a temptation to get too high?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I don't have a real emotional group. It's just in their nature, their personalities. Yale had a big win yesterday, but they're not surprised to be here. You don't schedule at Kansas, at Gonzaga, at Santa Clara unless you think you're going to be good. They were preparing for this moment by playing teams like that.

I know they were probably emotional with the win, but trust me, their focus changed immediately to San Diego State, and they expect to be in this game and so did we. This will be a great challenge tomorrow for both teams.

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