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An interview with:

**AKRON COACH KEITH
DAMBROT**



MODERATOR: We have Akron Head Coach Keith Dambrot. Coach, start with an opening statement.

KEITH DAMBROT: We're excited to be here obviously. We've had a long road to get here. We struggled early, and probably most proud of this team of any team I've had as far as their resiliency to play better as the season went on.

So as most of you know me knows we're not happy to be here just to be here. We're going to compete as hard as we can, and we're going to try to win the game.

Q. Just a little bit, when we talked the other day about like compare it a little bit to the world series or the NBA finals, it's not a seven-game thing. It's a one game. Can you expound on that a little bit.

KEITH DAMBROT: Most likely, if we play Notre Dame seven times, they would probably win the series, but we only have to win one game. And that's the beauty of sports. We have to play one great game. They have to be average, or we have to be good, and they have to be below average.

This team has been in enough ball games, two NITs, a CBI, and another NCAA Tournament. We've been in enough games that, if we play well and they're average, we're going to win.

Q. Can you tell the kids are more relaxed than they were in Portland, you think? What are you thinking?

KEITH DAMBROT: Tom, I've coached so long, I can't even remember Portland. I'm sure we're going to be relaxed. I mean, we just -- again, you can't go through what we've been through.

They're excited. I thought Alex (Abreu) was about 100 miles an hour today, which was not surprising. But overall, our older guys have been here before.

Q. What concerns you most about Notre Dame then?

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, they're a terrific offensive team. There's no doubt about that. Probably one of the most skilled teams in the country, if not the most skilled team in the country. They're long in all areas. You know, they're going to be hard for us to score on because they're so big at those length spots. They can contest jump shots and make it difficult for us. I think the biggest thing is can we score enough points to beat them?

The games they've lost, they've been below 60 mostly. I don't know if we can hold them below 60. But I don't know if we could score more than 75 either. So that's probably the biggest dilemma.

Q. Last one. Just Shaka Smart, I don't know if everyone knows it, you worked with him in the VCU. What does it mean to have him here?

KEITH DAMBROT: These guys are putting a lot of pressure on me. I've got Shaka, who's the head coach of VCU, who wins an NCAA Tournament game. And Jeff Boals of Ohio State, they're number one in the country. And Lamont Paris is the assistant at Wisconsin and they're probably going to win their first tournament game. If I don't win, they're going to say it's me.

So we're proud of those guys. Shaka particularly, at 33 years old, he's one of the best coaches, maybe one of the best coaches in the

country. But we knew that when he was here.

Q. Will you see him at all?

KEITH DAMBROT: Absolutely.

Q. Coach, in terms of a scouting report, where does it start? Where does your scouting report on Notre Dame start?

KEITH DAMBROT: You mean, individually or as a team?

Q. As a team first and then maybe a couple individuals.

KEITH DAMBROT: It's not a difficult scout. They're going to run motion, and at the end of the motion, they're going to run a quick-hitting play. The head of the whole thing is (Ben) Hansbrough, obviously, and the rest of them are good shooters, good drivers, good length.

They're a simplistic team, which most good teams are. Terrific coach. There's not many motion teams anymore in the country. So that's probably the biggest adjustment for us is we haven't really guarded a motion team all year long. We had to get ready quickly in a four-day period.

So is it an easy game? No. I think any time you play a team that has that kind of offensive capabilities, it's a difficult game. For instance, last night Shaka at VCU, they played USC, which is a great defensive team but kind of lacked a little pop offensively. For us in our two NCAA trips, we've got Gonzaga and Notre Dame, which are two of the best defensive teams in the country.

We're going to have to play terrific defensively and scrap and really work hard to do a great job in the game.

Q. What have you learned about Hansbrough and watching the film and everything else and trying to dissect his play, about how you deal with him?

KEITH DAMBROT: Well, I think first and foremost, he's a guy that's built on intangibles, which is probably the biggest compliment you can give a player. Here's a guy that probably most people thought would be a role player in the Big East when he went to Notre Dame, and when he got there, he turned into one of the best players in the league, which shouldn't really surprise a lot of people because, if you saw the way his brother played, he kind of plays just like his brother only in a different position.

So, you know, we've got to keep him off his right hand. He's terrific passing when he goes to his right. He's got a quick release on his jump shot. He's strong. He's tough. He gets into the passing lanes. He's just a good player.

Q. Was there a team that you've looked at, while you're watching the Notre Dame games, that you kind of might compare to -- your talent might compare to theirs and see how they approach Notre Dame? Were you able to find somebody like that?

KEITH DAMBROT: No, I'm an old school coach really. We have to do the things that we do. And we need to attack to our strengths really and believe in what we have. You know, really. I mean, we have to do the same things we've done all year regardless of the opponent really.

We're not good enough to play away from our strengths. We have to play to our strengths. So in comparing Notre Dame, I would say the closest team that we've ever played to them is Gonzaga. That would be the closest comparison. Gonzaga doesn't shoot the ball like them, but they were an offensive juggernaut really.

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