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An interview with:



MODERATOR: Our first press conference this afternoon, we have Notre Dame student-athletes Tim Abromaitis, Ben Hansbrough, Tyrone Nash, and Carleton Scott. We'll go ahead and start with questions.

Q. Ben, obviously the matchup with Florida State, their strength is defense. What exactly do they do that makes it so tough?

BEN HANSBROUGH: I think a lot of that is their coaching and physicality and length. I think they're one of the best defensive teams in the country. It's going to be a great challenge for us, and we're looking forward to it.

Q. This is for any of you. Is Florida State about as tough of a 10 seed this year as you're going to see? How do you feel like you match up against them?

TIM ABROMAITIS: I think they're as tough as any 10 seed that I've seen. They're as big and physical as pretty much any team in the country. Obviously, that's going to pose a lot of issues for us. But I think we have size, and if we gain rebounds, as coach says, that's how we'll try to neutralize that.

Q. Chris Singleton did play in the last game although kind of limited minutes. Tell me how much of a factor you expect him to be and how you're preparing for him.

CARLETON SCOTT: Another big guy, another guy who's long and athletic coming back into the lineup. It's just adding to their arsenal of length and big guys. So we've got to be prepared for that.

Q. Ty, against Texas A&M, (Florida State) strategy was kind of pound it down low. Do you expect the same against you guys? How are you preparing for that?

TYRONE NASH: They're probably going to pound it down low against us, try to use their length and size over us. It's not like we haven't faced it before in the Big East against the big guys and try to do their work over us. We're used to it, and we're ready for it. It's nothing we've never seen before.

Q. Ben, who's playing better right now, you or Tyler (Hansbrough)? Tyler had one hell of a game yesterday.

BEN HANSBROUGH: He had a heck of a game. Couldn't be happier for him.

Q. Did you get to see it? Have you talked to him lately?

BEN HANSBROUGH: I talked to him this morning. He's been playing really well. I have to go with Tyler right now because the level he's doing it at, couldn't be happier for him. He worked so hard. This is his first true season in the NBA because of all the injuries he went through last year. He's been playing really well. He works his butt off in the off-season. I'm glad to see he's having success like he is. Couldn't be happier for him.

Q. Tyrone, you mentioned this is not something you guys have not seen before. Who does Florida State most remind you of in the Big East and how much does that help you knowing that you can look back at that tape.

TYRONE NASH: As far as frontline, I would say it reminds me a little bit of Connecticut

and South Florida, where they have bigs that are 6'10", 6'11" big guys that turn and face up and really pound on the glass.

We're definitely going to have to come tomorrow night ready to work because, especially on the backboards, because they're all over the boards. It's just another challenge for us. And this group has responded to challenges throughout the whole year. We're up for it. We're ready for it. I expect nothing less than we're going to give tomorrow.

Q. After getting that kind of monkey off your back yesterday, how is the feeling in the locker room today? Is it a little bit looser? You guys seemed a little uptight when you started yesterday.

BEN HANSBROUGH: I think you look around the entire tournament, like that's just -- that's kind of like a -- yeah, I would definitely say we're a lot more loose. In practice today we were a lot more loose. Got the nerves out. Got the first game in the NCAA Tournament out of the way.

It's kind of good to go through that process. I think we showed that the second half. You look at the way we played in the first half compared to the way we played in the second half for sure. It's good to get the first NCAA Tournament -- like we were kind of stale a little bit. But it's good to get it out of the way.

Q. Game time, I think, is 9:40, 9:45. Last night Syracuse played in Cleveland. It didn't start until about 10:30. Playing this late, I mean, 9:45 isn't incredibly late, but the way the schedule's gone this year because of TV, it seems the games are going later. What are your thoughts on the matter?

CARLETON SCOTT: Just got to be prepared. You've got to go through the day and stay alert and stay active. Not get too relaxed. Just stay focused when the time comes. When that horn goes off, we're going to be ready to play no matter what time it is.

MODERATOR: We have Notre Dame head coach Mike Brey. Coach, start with an opening statement, and then we'll take some questions.

COACH BREY: Thrilled to be still playing in this thing. As you see teams, after we got out of here with a win, you're watching games last night, and you're seeing people's season's end. So

thrilled to be playing and know we have a great challenge against a Florida State team that really defends you with athletic ability and length.

When I glanced at them yesterday, I got out for the first 12 minutes of the first half. I looked down, and when they were in an open stance in their zone, it looked Syracuse-like to me. I had a flashback to New Year's Day with those big bodies in there.

Rebounding the basketball will be a key for us. Moving them around a little bit to get a good shot. And we're going to have to be really efficient offensively like I thought we were in the second half yesterday. But they're good. They're confident.

And Singleton being back has given them a left, in my opinion. I'm impressed with his basketball IQ. I watched them play, but you don't get a feel. He was telling guys where to go. It was almost like having a coach back on the court yesterday. I'm really impressed with his leadership as well as being a great talent.

Q. Mike, how do you keep from putting too much on this game? In terms of expectations, you erased all the numbers. Expectations from the fans are that you should be in San Antonio. How do you keep your players from getting too much of that?

COACH BREY: I think we've -- this group has been, because of their maturity and their experience, I don't think they've ever felt anything from the outside and have wanted to make a mark. I think they went and did that in Orlando, and that kind of was their calling card.

We need to play loose and kind of go for it, and that's the frame of mind you want to be in. And we really haven't talked about San Antonio. We've talked about trying to win two games here. We're halfway there. We've not tried to bite off too much even though every time they turn the TV on they see projections and predictions.

They've been pretty good about concentrating on the moment.

Q. You mentioned rebounding, and Akron was pretty successful in the first half on the offensive side. Is that something you need to change strategically, or is that just a matter of settling in?

COACH BREY: I think it's position, body positioning. I am concerned about that. Florida

State especially, even their guard, goes up and rebounds. But we've played against bodies like this before that really run to the backboard.

One of the things that -- the reason why we are where we are is we've rebounded the first miss very consistently this year. We didn't for 40 minutes, but eventually we did.

I think for Florida State, though, you're going to have to do it closer to 40 minutes to beat them because they just get so much on missed shots, and they have so many guys that can chase it down. I think we're able to maybe jam the lane a little bit more because there's not as many shooters to spread you out. So our bigger bodies are a little closer to the basket to rebound than, say, yesterday where you were so worried about hugging (Akron's Brett) McClanahan and guys getting going from the three-point line.

Q. At what point in the season did you feel like Scott Martin started to look like the player that you knew you were getting a couple of years ago?

COACH BREY: Bob, I thought end of January I thought he was starting to really feel comfortable. We went to Orlando, and we still had him playing in the knee brace, as I remember, but he wanted out of it. But we were really being smart. Our medical staff did a great job of bringing him back patiently.

But I thought the end of January, you know, he started to really feel comfortable physically, like he could go five straight days without soreness or tenderness and was starting to feel a little more aggressive with the help of Hansbrough and Scott prodding him to be aggressive.

Q. You mentioned Singleton earlier. He obviously came back yesterday. How much does he change your game plan, or how do you prepare and what difference does he make?

COACH BREY: I don't think you can over analyze that. We obviously included him in the scouting report. He played 16 minutes yesterday. He averages 30 minutes a game. Will he play 30 tomorrow? I expect him to play 30 tomorrow.

What was interesting was how he ball screened and flipped for jump shots yesterday. I think we have to be aware of that. But he is a force defensively. He loves to rebound the basketball.

I guess I'm more aware that their leader is back. I thought he was a lift to them talking in huddles and having him on the court. So they're better. They're really good with him.

Q. Getting back to Scott Martin, how did that whole process work when he transferred? Obviously, he reached out to you.

COACH BREY: We've had guys transfer, Bob. I think what happens is guys look to reinvent themselves. I like the fact that we've been able to reinvent some guys and we get a lot of calls because we've had a track record. Before Scott and Ben, Dan Miller, Dennis Latimore, and Ryan Humphrey all come to us, and we kind of reinvented them.

But I think location was certainly a play. His dad was having some health issues as well. He's doing much better now. And we -- I didn't want to lose him twice. You know, I'm 1 for 2 in recruiting Scott Martin. We recruited the heck out of him in high school.

But I think timing, location, the age of guys graduating.

Luke Harangody was a big help. They were buddies and played together. I've never seen Luke Harangody cry. Probably everyone is saying, that guy doesn't cry. When Scott went down in practice and looked like he wasn't going to play with him, he was hurt. He really looked forward to it. Going back, I wish I could have seen what it looked like. I never got to experience Martin and Harangody playing together.

He looked at Butler. He looked at Valpo. But he was staying close, and Luke in our previous relationship of recruiting him hard in high school helped us.

Q. Mike, you said they remind you a lot of Syracuse. What lessons do you take from the Syracuse game, and how can you apply them tomorrow night?

COACH BREY: I think you really have to pass fake and test your passes because they're in passing lanes so much. We turned the ball over against their zone on New Year's Day the last -- it was a good game for probably about 30 minutes, maybe 34 minutes, and then we had some turnovers, and we were careless with it.

I think it's the same thing with Florida State. You can't just get to the basket all the time because they block shots. I think we're much

improved since then. They rotate their zone in the game. Still have to drive at times, but you can't drive initially. Eventually, you've got to make some shots.

Q. Back in the '90s when you were at Duke and Delaware, what was the perception in the coaching community of Notre Dame basketball and the Notre Dame job?

COACH BREY: You know, when you look at our decade of the '90s, we joined the Big East too late. We stayed independent too long. Our local people, I've said this, and we really lost some momentum joining in '95, and it kind of cost us 10 years there.

I did not know, when I took the job, we hadn't been in the NCAA Tournament ten years now. I knew we were out of it for a while, but I didn't know it was that long.

But John MacLeod and Matt Doherty left some guys there. There were some really good players. I came at a good time with a veteran group. They did a really good job. When you think about us, we've only been in the league 15 years. That's not long to establish a league identity, and I still think our fans are getting accustomed to Big East basketball out here in the middle of Big Ten country.

And we haven't done our fans any favors because we keep changing the Big East. Now you guys are in and you guys are out and TCU's coming in. So we're -- I love the fact that we have an identity in the league now. It was probably a job -- could be a good job but struggling right now. I love the fact that it was in the Big East. I was an east coast guy, and I felt, even though I was coming out here to South Bend, Indiana, that you played in D.C. and played in New York and played in New Jersey, and you could recruit down there. I was confident coming out.

If they were in the Big Ten, I don't know it would be a great fit for me, but it was great in the Big East. Potential, I guess, was potential to get it going again, you thought.

Q. Singleton has a rep, and deservedly so, of being a shut-down guy, taking out whoever he's guarding. What if they put him on Hansbrough?

COACH BREY: Well, you know, one thing that -- and I thought of that last night. One thing is Ben's been pretty good about being a distributor at times, and I thought in the second half yesterday

we got effective because he didn't force plays at the basket like he did in the first half.

And so if he can just make plays for his other teammates, I think we'll have to do that. But certainly, you know, if he's got to chase a guard around for a while and he hasn't played a whole lot of lengthy basketball, that could be an interesting matchup.

I think for Ben mentally, I talked to him a little bit in practice, to be ready for that. He's not had a big guy like that chasing him around. I think Ben's been a good decision-maker, and he's been better about playing within our system and letting other guys score.

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