

March 19, 2014



An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll go head and get started with questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For any of you guys. Your impressions of Cincinnati and what you think you're up against when you play them.

LAURENT RIVARD: They're a tough team. Really aggressive rebounding wise. So we'll have to be physical with them and limit them to one shot every possession.

SIYANI CHAMBERS: They're a tough defensive team, probably one of the best in the country, so we got to take our time, be patient on offense.

BRANDYN CURRY: They have had a terrific year, they're an outstanding team, and we're looking forward to a great matchup. We know that they're a great defensive team and a great rebounding team. So that's two areas we're going to focus on. So we pride ourselves on being a defensive team as well. So it will be a battle.

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Definitely a team that likes to get up and pressure, try to cause turnovers and then capitalize on the other end in transition. So we know that they're going to come out with a lot of energy and we just have to match their intensity and be ready for a battle.

Q. Does it give you any encouragement that you played UCONN to within five points

and they lost two out of three games to UCONN? Do you care about that? Does that mean anything to you?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: No, it's obviously different personnel and different matchups on the court. I don't think that them losing to UCONN two out of three games really affects our matchup with them. So I think we're just going into it like it's a first time playing them, like it is.

Q. With the way they play defense they pressure the ball, how important is it for you guys to make sure that you take care of it and don't turn it over.

SIYANI CHAMBERS: It's very important. Not just for myself and Brandon but for everybody. Ball security is of major concern in this game, so we got to make sure we're very sure of our passes, keep everything tight. Ball fake when we need to. Just try not to give them any easy run outs on our turnovers.

BRANDYN CURRY: It's tremendously important. We all talk about road games, we know this is technically is kind of a road game. A neutral site, whatever, but one of the biggest focus is always take care of the ball. And Cincinnati is really good at making teams turn the ball over and then capitalizing on that. So we have to minimize the turnovers and that will give us a better shot of winning the game.

Q. Laurent, what's it been like to be part of the rise of Harvard basketball and what do you attribute that to and do you think it's sustainable?

LAURENT RIVARD: It's been great. Even before I was part of Harvard it was -- we did Jeremy Lin, the program was starting to rise and that was one of the main points that coach was making when he was recruiting me, just his vision of where Harvard basketball could go. It's been a great ride. We come into the tournament for the third straight year now, it's been a lot of fun. And we just want to keep it going for this year.

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BRANDYN CURRY: Yeah, it's been terrific. Like he was saying, when Coach Amaker was recruiting all of us and when we met each other, that's what we talked about was building Harvard to a championship team. And we, it's great to see it happening. Coach Amaker is continuing to bring in great players. And we have some more great players coming in. So I'm confident that we will be able to sustain it. But it's been great to be able to be a part of this whole thing.

Q. Whoever is open to it, you guys talk a lot about Tommy and his vision and how it has come to fruition, was it odd to hear yesterday when the BC job open up it's because of the job he's done here because of you guys and how do you take that news or do you take it with a grain of salt?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: I think we don't really focus too much on that stuff during the season. I think that -- just kind of we're just focused on this game and playing a good game and trying to just come out victorious the next game.

Q. You guys have a tight relationship with Tommy and he sold you on the program. And now his name comes up when something like BC happens. Were you surprised when you heard the news about the job and do you try to tune it out so it's not a distraction?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: To be honest, I didn't really hear anything about that. And in that situation, we're just trying to focus on this game and I think that if a situation like that ever occurred, coach would come to all of us first before making a decision. But, I really didn't know anything about it and we're not really focused on that, we're focused on this game.

Q. For any of you guys, when you guys were getting ready for Vanderbilt, Harvard was a curiosity, kind of a novelty, a trendy thing. Have you guys grown beyond that right now?

LAURENT RIVARD: Coming to the tournament is always really exciting. But what's different now is that we have the tournament experience and like you mentioned, playing Vanderbilt, it was everyone's first time and in the big dance, and we're really excited. But now especially with last year, we have some more experience in the tournament, so we're really

excited for this year. But it's still more familiar to us.

BRANDYN CURRY: Like he said, definitely the difference between two years ago is the experience. With us getting a win last year, that definitely helped a lot too. And so, yeah, that's pretty much it. Just like Laurent said, that's the difference.

Q. Wesley, was there a noticeable change about the program or within the program after you guys beat New Mexico last year, whether it was tension or just attitude, confidence?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Yeah, definitely I think there was a noticeable change. People -- everybody was talking about it around campus and I think people really took notice across the country of Harvard basketball and kind of what we can do. So, I think that ever since that win, every time we stepped on the court we have had to bring our A game because everybody's giving us their best shot because of what we were able to do in the tournament.

So I think it kind of just put a little bit of a target on our back. But I think that we have been able to step up to the challenge and embrace it.

Q. Siyani, you said a week or two ago after you guys clenched the conference championship, that what you felt was a sense of relief after you guys had taken care of business. Now that that's out of the way, what does that relief replaced by?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: I would say it's replaced by a newly found hunger. We're trying to go out here and get a victory. So we have to go like we were chasing the title in the Ivy League, we have to go with the same mentality, the same effort towards getting this victory.

Q. Laurent, what do you guys think when you hear everybody picking you to beat Cincinnati?

LAURENT RIVARD: I actually wasn't really aware of that. But I know every year there's always at least one 12-5 upset, I mean I'm kind of happy they're picking us, that means that they have confidence in us, but we don't really pay attention to that outside expectations and stuff like that.

Q. Brandon, what's this like being back in the tournament after you weren't able to do it last year? How, what's your experience like for you? Do you safer it more?

BRANDYN CURRY: Yeah, definitely. The thing I learned from last year is that you just got to appreciate everything. I appreciate everything so much more, just being -- having the opportunity to play again in the NCAA tournament. That's everything I could ask for.

It's great watching these guys getting the win last year and I was at home with my family, doing that, and that was a great moment. But it's definitely a lot better when you're actually here a part of it. So I'm just grateful to have the opportunity to come back and enjoy every moment.

Q. Laurent, as a follow-up to everyone picking you. The President picked you guys to upset Cincinnati. Does that mean anything extra special?

LAURENT RIVARD: Actually, I didn't know that. But, yeah, I think that's pretty cool that he picked us. He probably took notice last year, he probably didn't pick us last year, so that's pretty cool, I guess.

Q. Siyani, you said you were unaware of any rumors or reports of your coach going to Boston College. Does that go for everybody? No one knew that? It wasn't discussed?

BRANDYN CURRY: No, I mean never -- I didn't hear it. I don't think anybody else did. It certainly wasn't discussed. But I'm not -- we're not surprised, obviously when the job opened up before I think he was one of the candidates. And he's a terrific coach so of course people are going to want him. It comes as no shock, but we don't pay attention to any of that.

Q. Is it at all awkward to play this game with that out there?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: No, not really. We're just focusing on the next game, Cincinnati.

Q. And lastly he has not talked to you guys about this. We'll ask him, but.

BRANDYN CURRY: No, we're all completely focused on tomorrow's game, not talking about anything else besides that.

Q. You talked about how you're not paying attention to outside expectations. But

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after the win last year, like within -- forget being confident or hoping you're going to win, do you guys expect to win?

BRANDYN CURRY: We all feel that as long as we come and play our game that we can beat anybody. Anybody we go up against. So we'll have a great workout today, get our game plan ready and when we tip it off tomorrow, we're definitely going to come ready to win. When we get out the floor, we expect to beat our opponent. And our next Opponent is Cincinnati. So that's our focus, beating them.

Q. Wesley, does Cincinnati remind you of any team you guys have played this year and if so, is there anything you can take away from how to play them?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: They're a little different than a lot of the teams that we played. But I would say they're kind of similar to UCONN, I guess. They're just a big, big team that likes to crash the boards and get out in transition. But I would say they're not really too similar to anybody that we have played, but I definitely think that if we just come out and play our game, then we should be good.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and now open it up for questions for coach.

Q. The timing couldn't be more awkward, but I figure I would ask you to get it out of the way. But you got to the tournament, you got your players all settled and news breaks that the BC job opens up and your name is the first one to come up. Are you surprised, is there any sort of comment about it or do you want to comment on this?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, one, I certainly can appreciate the question and being from the Boston area, but our focus certainly is on our team and that's only fair for our kid and our program and our school. I don't ever comment on other jobs or positions.

I'm fortunate to have the one that I have. I've been on the other side of not having a job and having lost a job, so I'm sensitive to coaches and people and programs that go through those unfortunate circumstances and certainly I know Steve and their staff, his family are dealing with that. But I'll only comment on the job that I have and I'm very proud to have the one representing

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Harvard.

Q. So is the situation something you will address with your players?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I have not. I've always been -- there's nothing to address. There's nothing for me to talk about, to comment on. I can't address speculation about so many things all the time. But I understand the question, and I certainly appreciate obviously, again for the Boston and greater Boston area to wanting some type of maybe comment from me, but my comment is exactly what I mentioned before, that I don't like to comment on other situations or jobs.

You think that's -- I've been there and have been a part of that in the past and I certainly feel like what we have in front of us is the most important and I do think that's the right thing for our school and for our kids and in all honesty, for me. And the health of all those things that go into that.

So we're focused on Cincinnati, we're focused on our workouts today and that's how we should leave it.

Q. Lastly on that, does it sadden you that the timing of this -- that you have to answer these questions because of the timing of it?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yeah, again, I do understand and I certainly appreciate the position you're in, of asking that and you're right, but the one thing we have all learned is that you can't control timing. So, you deal with what you have in front of you, and that's what we're doing with our program, our kids, and again, I'm pleased and proud to have the job that I have and to be a part of an amazing institution and representing our school and our conference.

Q. Just your general assessment of what you're going to face when you play Cincinnati.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: We have a great deal of respect for their ball club and for Mick and what he's accomplished. You look at their team through the years. They have always been known, in my opinion, for blue collar, tough hard nosed brand of basketball. So we anticipate that, that's what we have seen on film and what they have done in my opinion all season. That's why they have been successful.

They're incredibly well coached, they play very hard defensively, obviously, and they have a dynamic scorer in Kilpatrick and then Justin

Jackson is relentless in the paint, on the glass. So to me they're a team that -- what you have traditionally have seen out of the Cincinnati basketball, blue collar action tough, hard nosed team that's going to play very hard. And it's going to be a great challenge for us.

Q. How much focus do you put on stopping Kilpatrick?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, I don't know that you can stop him, so we'll do our best, obviously, to see how well we can guard him and defend him. It's going to take a team effort. There's not one matchup or one person that can be, or will be, responsible for that. But, certainly, we know how talented he is and how dynamic of a scorer he has been. So, I'm not sure that you can stop him. Can we make it tough? Can we hope that he doesn't play? Yeah, we'll do those things. But he's very, very tough to guard.

Q. When you scout this team, do you look at it like if we can stop Kilpatrick or slow him or contain him, that you can beat them, they're susceptible?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I'm not sure that that's a healthy or wise formula. At this point, in having the kind of record and the year that they have had, you're not there by being a one person or one player team. They are a complete basketball team, and I think that that will be doing a disservice to a lot of other players that they have that are very, very good basketball players.

Q. When you took this job at Harvard, with all the challenges you knew lay ahead, did you believe in your heart of hearts that you could get it to this point, where NCAA tournaments and success in three years in a row? And what led to you that belief, if that's the case?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Thank you for that question, because we are very proud of the journey we have been on at Harvard and in all honesty, to answer that question directly, we did believe in that. We had a vision for what we thought was possible.

I think one of the neat things about being at Harvard and it's a part of our admissions video right now, we have that for all students who are, or people who are interested in looking at the possibility of attending Harvard or a playing to

Harvard. It's a great video. And part of the theme and the music in that video is "anything can happen".

And one of the things that you think about an at Harvard is that dreams are possible. We have seen it happen through the years with so many other areas, departments and certainly with students who have gone to Harvard, incredible faculty that happen to be at Harvard. We thought that why not with our basketball program, as well.

So the vision was there, the -- but you got to be a little lucky, you need to have an amazing group of supporters and in terms of our alumni, you need to have an administration that certainly feels that this is something that's worthy for us to have that kind of dream. To be proud of it when we do it or if we get a chance to do it. And we have had all of that. But that doesn't surprise me, because of the brand of Harvard.

We really believe in the potential and the possibilities and we have seen it happen, we have seen greatness happen. And not that we're great, but we certainly like the path that we're on right now and what we have been able to build and be a part of on our campus to energize our school and become relevant. To have basketball to connect Harvard in some ways, that's all been a part of the dream that we have had and the vision we have had. So, we're very proud to see it actually happen.

Q. You've likened Harvard basketball to an undervalued stock. Is it undervalued any longer and has your recruiting pitch changed with success?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: That was part of our presentation, and not our sell. We like to present Harvard. We thought of this as an opportunity to present something that we knew that in our hearts of hearts that would somehow could take off one day. And we have all been a part of things in the past, at least I have, where I look back and wish I had been able to see something before everyone else saw it or before it actually happened, and it was right there in front of me. Whether that's investing in something or whatever it may be. We have all had, probably, those experiences and we presented that as an option for the Harvard option, as we say.

And I'm not sure that that's still undervalued, I think it's getting recognition, I think we have been able to attain a level of credibility with our basketball program. But, we still have a long way to go and we still have bigger and more

dreams and we're very hopeful that we can achieve them.

Q. Between the maybe the recognition that Jeremy's gotten for his professional play, and then what you guys were able to do winning a game in the tournament last year, has Harvard basketball potentially become its own separate brand from Harvard itself?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: No. We're -- I'm not sure we ever can be separate from the brand of Harvard. Nor do we want to be. We want to be a part of the Harvard brand. And that's what we have talked about from day one, of having a program that was worthy of the Harvard brand. We're very hopeful that that has happened and will we ever want to separate? Absolutely not. What we're trying to do is connect.

And if we could ever feel like we're certainly a part of the Harvard brand in ways that we recognize and believe in the Harvard brand, that's more than I can ever ask for.

Q. I know you've talked all year about the only expectations that matter being internal. But, this time of year with all the sentiment going around like the President picking you guys to win --

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Really? He picked us?

Q. Yeah.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Good.

Q. Does that stuff become harder to keep from getting into the locker room?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I don't know that you can and I don't try to keep things, this day and time, with the way information travels and social media and everything else with technology. I think it's probably silly for me to think I'm going to keep things away from them or keep things out of there. What we try to do is trust them on the things that we know that we hold dear and important to us.

And we try to differentiate from things like that, versus things that we think are internal. And you mentioned expectations. We have always talked about that being an external word and we are trusting our guys that we're always going to focus on our internal word, which is the word standards. And that's what we have done. I think

that's why we're in the position we're in right now, why we are here today and because our kids have done that.

And I'm very hopeful that they will stay true to that, because that's part of the reason that we are here having an opportunity to participate in this great tournament this season.

Q. When it comes to building a basketball program, are there challenges unique to Harvard in doing that, and if so, what are they?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I think that there are challenges that are unique to every institution. And I've been a part of a few of them now. So I think I'm qualified to honestly say that. That they're unique situations, unique challenges, and we're very proud of who we are and we're not trying to be someone that we're not.

Our philosophy and our mission -- and that goes in line with our conference, our Ivy League, so we have a group of eight schools that we have a way that we feel academics and athletics should co-exist. But we have challenges, we don't give scholarships, there's nothing in terms of scholarship for anything at Harvard. Not just for basketball or athletics, for any other, everything is need based, financial aid. We have a saying at Harvard is that if you need the money to come to Harvard, we'll give it to you. That's somewhat of an arrogant thing, because we do have an enormous amount of money for financial aid and we're proud of that. But are there challenges? Sometimes we look at it that we're, this is how we, this is who we are, I don't know that they always are considered challenges, but are we different? Yeah, I think we are. But we certainly are proud of it too.

Q. In recruiting Steve, did you cross paths with Justin Jackson at all?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I did see when they were on the same high school team. And so to answer that question, yes. To see Justin and recognize how talented he was as a high school kid and what he obviously what he's gone on to do in college and he's exactly what people envisioned him being, which is an active, athletic, relentless kind of energy kind of player that gives his heart and soul. And that's how I described him, I thought of him like that back then and certainly that's what we think of him today and he's an outstanding player.

Q. Was that one of those situations where you got one kid you were looking at, but another one catches your eye?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: We went in looking for the guy that we have. We're thrilled that we were able to get him, which is Steve. But you certainly see the talent that is on a certain team or opposing teams when you go see a kid play a game. So you see other kids and that's when I saw Justin and recognized his enormous ability.

Q. Talk about the keys to scoring against Cincinnati defense.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I think the defense is very tough, very physical, one that we need to see if we can, which we always talk about when we're on the road, if we're playing away from our home, how can we take care of and value the basketball. Can we limit silly turnovers as we refer to them. We're going to turn it over, we play a style that you're going to have some turnovers. But can we take care of it enough where we feel like we didn't have the silly ones. That's first and foremost. It gives us a better chance of having an offensive possession that we can get a shot. And certainly we'll try to see if we can execute our offense we have been a fairly balanced team, if you look at our ball club and our stats, that it's been one of the strength of our team, the balance that we can bring. I'm hopeful that that will serve us well tomorrow when we can suit up and pitch it up against Cincinnati. You're going to need to be balanced, because can certainly get after you and maybe cut off a few options, but balance is one of the keys that we are very hopeful that will serve us well.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Thank you.

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