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An interview with:



Q. Josh, I just want to ask you about their big man and what you think about their post presence and maybe other guys that you've faced this year that might compare to Talib.

JOSH SCOTT: Well, we've done some film on them, and Zanna is an energetic, athletic, hard-nosed big man. If I could compare him to anybody we've seen, he's a little bit like Aaron Gordon a little bit. He's a good player.

Q. Just how exciting is it to be here, actually be in the arena and get the atmosphere of being back here?

JOSH SCOTT: We're excited to be back here, and we're not trying to lose in the first round like last year. Zanna.

ASKIA BOOKER: I mean, it's great. This is my third year here. Ever since I came to this school we've made the NCAA Tournament. It's nothing new at this point, it's just we're going to have to try to win games and advance.

Q. What does it mean, what's the value of having been here? You talked about being here three years in a row, the value of knowing what this experience is about leading into a ballgame like this.

ASKIA BOOKER: I mean, me myself, these are very important games. It's one-and-done now. I think that's the value of it. You have to cherish these moments, and you have to put -- you put your all into these games. Me being a veteran on this team, I have to let these young guys know how important it is and that they can't have

slip-ups, including myself, that we're going to have to go out there and play for 40 minutes and compete.

Q. Josh, coach always emphasizes rebounding and defense. Particularly on rebounding, can you talk about how he discusses that with you guys, maybe some drills he works on? How does he impress on you that rebounding is a very important thing?

JOSH SCOTT: First he just talks about it over and over. It's kind of our standard. It's up in our locker room. Ever since we've stepped on campus, it's pretty much defense and rebounding that's drilled into your head. And then in terms of drills and practice, we do bubble drills, we put a bubble over the basket, you have to rebound it and try to win the game. You have circle drill, fighting for rebounds. I can't remember one, but there's one where we particularly get after it. Ski loves it. I don't know if Ski remembers the name of it. There's a huge emphasis, and so if we don't do it, he's not very happy with us.

Q. Ski, you guys have struggled recently offensively. Your numbers, point totals have been down. What do you have to do to get some more efficiency on offense in this game?

ASKIA BOOKER: I think the reason behind that is we have two-to-five-minute droughts where we can't put the ball in the basket, and maybe we're taking too quick a shots. Maybe we're rushing a shot, or that's equivalent to turnovers. We turn the ball over sometimes too much, and maybe we have to slow down and feed the ball to Josh or Wesley or Xavier, get in the post a little bit and let them get a close shot to the basket, or the guards have to penetrate and get in the lane and find shooters if that's the case. That's been an emphasis these past couple days, and we're going to try to do that tomorrow.

Q. Ski, what do you see of their



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guards? Looks like they have a pretty big backcourt.

ASKIA BOOKER: Yeah, you said it best. They're very big, they're very athletic. They're tough. They're not great shooters. They have one really good shooter, which is their 3 man, and he's going to shoot it in transition, and we're going to have to try to contain him, keep somebody bigger on him at all times. We're just going to have to try to not let him get to the lane, either, because if they get the ball to their big men close to the rim, they're very good finishers. Their guards are good at penetrating and knocking down open shots, so we're just going to have to try to contain them.

Q. Josh, I wonder, the three games in Las Vegas last week, the way the teams were defending you, what did you learn about your game and what do you need to adjust moving into this tournament?

JOSH SCOTT: What I learned is I've just got to put the ball in the basket. You know, I didn't have my best shooting week last weekend. Those happen. But what I took is that it doesn't matter how I feel about calls or anything like that. I've got to just put the ball in the basket, and I guess that's what I took from last week.

TAD BOYLE: Obviously it's great to be in Orlando, sunny, warm Orlando, relative to where we came from in the snow yesterday. But we're excited to be in the NCAA Tournament once again, and our players are excited. This never gets old. That's about it.

Q. Tad, you mentioned again the fact that it's three times in a row. How much of an advantage do you think that gives these guys that are used to this and not in awe of everything around them?

TAD BOYLE: Well, I don't know if it's an advantage because Pitt has been here a lot, too, before a lot. It definitely helps, our veteran guy. Obviously our freshmen, this is new to them. Every year is a different opponent, a different year. But having guys like Askia Booker, who this is his third year, and Josh Scott and Xavier Johnson, Xavier Talton, year two, they're not in awe of the stage. They're not in awe of the process, and they understand that a bad game or a bad stretch in a game can cost you the game, and you're going home.

I think once you've been here, you want to advance the next time you come, and that's

especially coming off the loss to Illinois last year. It left a little sour taste in our mouth.

It helps us, there's no doubt, but every year is a new year.

Q. You've talked about rebounding as being a big key along with defense, your philosophy. Jaime Dixon told us a few minutes ago that he thought rebounding was going to be the key to the game. I wonder if you concur, and also, where did the genesis come from with your emphasis on rebounding.

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, I would agree with Jaime. I think when I look at Pitt, I look at a team a lot like ours in terms of what they emphasize and what they want to be good at and what they are good at, and that's defense and rebounding. Where it came from for me was my high school coach Larry Hicks. I mean, defense, defense, defense, and then obviously my college coach Larry Brown. When I got into coaching, I became a head coach, he always told me if your teams defend and they rebound at a high level consistently, you give yourself a chance to win every game. That's pretty much the case.

Our players understand that, and they understand that when they do it and they do it at a high level that it takes -- winning and losing takes care of itself. When we don't do it, it takes care of itself, as well.

Q. In a game like this, does it benefit you guys to keep the scoring low, or would you like to keep it a high-paced, high-scoring game?

TAD BOYLE: Well, I don't know if one thing benefits us more than the rest. One of the things we try to do with our teams year in and year out, obviously we want to play fast, so we want to be able to play in a high-possession game, but we also understand when you get into tournament play, a lot of times the scores go down. You look at the way -- I look at the way the officiating was handled in the Pac-12 tournament relative to the way it was handled in November and December, and it's two totally different games. I know the rule changes early this year were intended to try to increase scoring in college basketball, and I think it did early, but you saw the games in Las Vegas were in the 50s and the 60s, at least ours were.

I think we have to get a feel for that when we're on the floor tomorrow and we see how the

game is being called. But high-possession game, low-possession game, we have got to be able to execute in either one, and we're ready to play either way. I don't think it benefits us one way or another, but we'd like to see a high-possession game, we'd like to see an up-and-down game. Whether that happens or not is yet to be seen.

We're not a pressing team. It's not like we're going to be trapping all over the court and extending our defense, but we've got to be able to execute either way.

Q. In regards to the officiating you're talking about, and more specific to Josh, and we asked him just a moment ago, I want to get your take on it, the way he was played, as well as they got with him, what has Josh learned do you think from that that he can take forward into this tournament?

TAD BOYLE: One of the things we talked to our guys about is you have to put the ball in the basket. You can't play for the whistle or play to get the whistle. You have to put the ball in the basket. You have to attack the rim and put the ball in the basket. If the whistle blows, the whistle blows. If it doesn't blow, we can't use that as an excuse. We've got to match the other team's physicality.

When I look at Pitt's team, they're a very physical team. They come from the Big East Conference, which was a rock 'em sock 'em league, so putting the ball in the basket is number one. The second thing is making the extra pass, and when there's two guys on you hitting the open man. And I think in Josh's case, scoring over. He wants to be aggressive and try to score through people sometimes and get the ball to the rim. Sometimes he needs to maybe score over somebody with his jump hook or his eight-to-10-foot jump shot rather than always trying to force it through contact.

Q. Back to rebounding, how do you teach it and make sure your team is a good rebounding team? Is it part recruiting, part teaching?

TAD BOYLE: That's a good question. I'm not sure it's a combination of both. I look at Andre Roberson who was one of the best rebounders in the country last year. That wasn't coaching, that was recruiting. But there's not many guys like that around.

So what it comes down to is what you emphasize every day. When you watch film, offensively putting in place, whether it's an

assistant coach that's in charge of it, if your responsibility is to go to the boards when the shot goes up, that's what you do. Defensively we want all five guys to box out and rebound. That's a team thing. But I think it's what you emphasize, watching film, rewarding guys or punishing guys that don't do it on a consistent basis, and at the end of the day, your team has to buy in, your team has to have pride in it. Hopefully we're to that point. I think our guys know what needs to be done.

This team has been pretty good throughout the year. We've been a good rebounding team, second best in the conference, but it's going to be tested tomorrow against Pitt because they're a good rebounding team, as well.

Q. On Sunday you didn't know as much about Pitt, you knew plenty about their coach but not the team. What now has jumped out at you when you've looked at this team?

TAD BOYLE: Well, number one is how well they pass the ball. They're a team that has multiple options. Obviously the two guys that get the most attention are Lamar Patterson and Talib Zanna, with good reason. Patterson is a 6'5" guard who can do so many things for their team. He can pass it, he can make an open three, he can get the ball in the lane and create for others, he can get the ball to the rim. He's a good player. There's not a lot of weaknesses in his game.

And then the Zanna kid is just a beast. The way he played in the ACC Tournament, watching those tapes on film, he's a cross between probably Aaron Gordon in terms of his motor and Richard Solomon in terms of the numbers he put up. Richard Solomon averaged a double-double for Cal in our league. He's a combination of those two guys, and he's a force to be reckoned with. But they've got other guys. Wright and Robinson are good players in their own right and can make open shots.

But I think the balance of their team and the toughness of their team is what makes Pitt so good.

Q. I asked you about Josh and the players' experience. How about your experience being here three years in a row. What's changed for you and how do you approach things differently than say three seasons ago?

TAD BOYLE: I don't know if I approach anything different. I never want to get to the point where you take this experience for granted. I want to be able to relish this opportunity and to take advantage of it. For this program to get national respect, we have to play well on a national stage, and the stage doesn't get any bigger in basketball than the one we're on right now, the NCAA Tournament.

For us to gain respect and gain credibility as a program on a national level, we've got to play well and we have to win games and we have to advance in this tournament at some point. You hope every year you're here, you hope this is the year that that happens. But every year you look at your opponent, and you think, oh, boy, we've got our hands full, and that's the case with Pitt.

Q. Going back to last season, the Charleston Classic, Ski has been very good in tournament play. Do you see something different out of him? Last week you talked about his maturity and leadership. Do you see something different out of him when he gets to a tournament?

TAD BOYLE: Ski loves big opportunities. He loves challenges. He loves playing when the spotlight is the biggest. He's got a competitive streak about him and a confidence about him, I think, that allows him to play well against the best competition.

As long as Ski plays within himself, he's pretty darned good. When he struggles a little bit is when he tries to do a little bit too much, whether that's over-dribbling or over-penetrating or whatever the case may be. Since Spencer has gone down for us, Ski has really handled the ball well. His assist numbers have been good, and when he can get his teammates involved as well as being Ski and being aggressive offensively and making good decisions with the ball, I think that's really what it comes down to with Ski is making good decisions with the basketball.

It's nice to have a player that has the confidence he has, again, when you're in a place like this or when you're in a tournament in Charleston or wherever you are like Ski. I'm glad he's on our team, and we need him to play well.

Q. What are a couple of player match-ups you're going to be paying close attention to?

TAD BOYLE: Well, again, I think Patterson is the guy that we're going to be really

concerned with. We'll start Xavier Johnson on him and try to keep size on him as best we can. But Xavier Talton has done a great great job, I think, over the last three, four weeks of the season defensively. He'll get a crack at him at times. Jaron Hopkins when he comes off the bench, a 6'5" guard, so we're going to have multiple people match up with him. But that's a key match-up for us, contain him as best we can and make everything that he gets, he has to work for it.

And then Zanna is a guy, again, kind of by committee. We'll start Josh on him, but Wesley will have a crack at him. I know Dustin Thomas is a guy who comes in off the bench on the front line for us and just battles. He's a competitor. Again, multiple guys on him.

But those are the two guys, I think. Not that we can't forget about Wright and can't forget about Robinson, but those are the two guys. We've got to keep Zanna off the boards and not let him get 21 rebounds like he did against Carolina, and we've got to keep Patterson under wraps as best we can.

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