

**October 23, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH SEAN MILLER BRANDON ASHLEY**

THE MODERATOR: Introducing Arizona head coach Sean Miller and junior forward Brandon Ashley.

Opening remark.

COACH MILLER: Brandon and I are very excited to be here. Choosing him to come alongside me was an easy choice. I'll start with the fact that Brandon is from here. Always nice to bring a guy home.

I think that everybody out here, if you followed us closely a year ago, recognized the importance that he had while he was playing. Keep in mind we were 21-0 last year. Brandon never lost. Then he got injured. We worked hard to reinvent ourselves. But I think when it all ended, we wished that he was with us from start to finish.

Having him back is a real gift for this year's team. I'll let Brandon answer the questions himself. But I think anytime you're faced with a season-ending injury of the magnitude it was, it allows you to have a maturity and perspective that you maybe couldn't otherwise have.

Not only do we welcome him back as a basketball player, but I think we welcome him back at one of our team's leaders, most experienced players. It's nice to be here with him.

We're excited about our season. We've been together a brief period of time, but I think we have the makings of a team that can go on and do some great things as we move forward.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions.

**Q. Brandon, how is your foot holding up so far?**

BRANDON ASHLEY: At this point I'm 100% cleared. I'm out there doing everything with the team. I'm feeling pretty good at this point.

**Q. This is the first time you'll have a point guard for two consecutive seasons since you came to Arizona. What does that mean for you as a coach? Brandon, what does that mean for you as a player?**

COACH MILLER: Well, it's a great feeling as a coach, not because we're welcoming back our returning starter from that position, but actually who he is. That's T.J. McConnell. He's off to a great start. He's one of the most experienced players that's playing this game.

T.J. has played three seasons of college basketball, two at Duquesne and one at Arizona. He's been an all-conference player in all three years that he's been a part of the game.

To have that experience at that position is something that I think any coach would love to have.

I'll let Brandon speak on behalf of how it is playing with him. If you watched us practice, I think you would sense that he has a lot to do with our team. He's an important piece, really important piece. The biggest compliment you can give T.J. McConnell is he makes guys like Brandon better, makes the game easier for them. That's what a true point guard does.

BRANDON ASHLEY: He definitely makes the game easier for you out there on the court. It's nice to play with somebody that you've built a relationship with, that you have that chemistry with on the court as well. He definitely knows how to run a team. He's a great leader and all that stuff.

It's definitely great to have him back.

**Q. Brandon, can you reflect and explain from your foot injury what you were thinking then and now not taking basketball for granted?**

BRANDON ASHLEY: Certainly. I mean, with the injury itself, it was tough going down. But as soon as I heard the news I was going to be out

for the season, my main focus was rehabbing, making sure I got back healthy, but at the same time maintaining that same focus with my team and making sure that I was still there for them, trying to be a leader, trying to be vocal in the background even though I couldn't necessarily help out on the court.

**Q. You look at Stanley Johnson, 6'7", 245, a physically ready recruit. Has that been your sense during this off-season?**

COACH MILLER: You know, Stanley is a big part of what we're doing, as well as the other new players. One of the things that is unique about our team is we welcome back a veteran cast of players: Brandon, Kaleb [Tarczewski], Rondae [Hollis-Jefferson], Gabe [York], T.J. If you think about all those players on last year's team, and in some cases two years ago, they've had big roles and have been through hundreds of practices. They know what it takes to win and they know how difficult it is, how long of a season it is. I really believe we'll be led by those guys.

But the other part of this year's team is we have quite a few new newcomers, who are talented in their own right, Stanley being one of them. They haven't been through games, so a lot of this is new. It's interesting to watch the blend happen.

A year ago we had amazing team chemistry. I think that more than anything stands out when you reflect back on a year ago. It's up to guys like Brandon now, myself, to rekindle that. We find ourselves as we try to do it, it doesn't happen in 12 days. It certainly doesn't happen when you're welcoming such a big group of new players into a cast that has a big group of guys that have been there before.

I think part of it is the quest of bringing everyone together, a big challenge for us at this point.

**Q. In this era that we see a lot of one-and-done players come through, is the way you have your roster built right now with this mix, this balance, is that a conscious effort or something that just happens? Is it an ideal scenario?**

COACH MILLER: The thing about it is, I think anybody who acts as if we have the solution is either lying or they don't really know. I'll give you a great example. If someone would have told me that Derrick Williams would have been the number two pick in the NBA Draft as a sophomore, I mean,

you would have bet the house that wouldn't have been the case. A lot of people asked were we going to redshirt Derrick. He wasn't ranked in anybody's top anything.

Brandon is another example. He came in as a decorated player, McDonald's All-American. He got injured. You just don't have a crystal ball. I think you try to do the best that you can.

The one thing that I think is real is you have to look at each season independently. You can't look any more two years out or three years out because there's too many unexpected things to change.

We try, I think like a lot of programs, look at it on a year-by-year basis, try to have the best roster we possibly can.

It's so difficult to predict something that's so hard to do. Russell Westbrook, those of you who followed his high school career, who would have ever thought he would have become the player so quickly. Once in a while the contrary happens.

I think we all try to do the best that we can.

**Q. Losing a guy like Aaron Gordon who set the energy on defense and rebounding, who do you see as the players taking up that responsibility this year?**

COACH MILLER: Well, certainly the guy next to me is going to have a lot to do with that. Brandon brings an array of different things to the table. Having him and then not having him a year ago, you learned a lot about the things Brandon does well. One of them is he's very, very long around the basket.

We have Kaleb [Tarczewski] who is in there as our center. When Brandon and Kaleb are both in there together, it's not easy just to turn around and shoot, drive. Our rim's protected by great length.

The size of our team is something we're counting a lot on to become, again, a very, very good defensive team.

The same thing from an offensive perspective. I think that one credit I give Aaron is he always was true to himself. We gave him a role and he did it to the best of his ability.

We're at that point now where, as we start to define roles, it's important that guys stay within the framework of that role, embrace it, do the very best they can. In Nick [Johnson] and Aaron's case, part of what made them so good, they really

didn't try to be a whole lot of what they weren't. They tried to bring their array of skills that they were already good at to the table, not just in games but every day.

I look at Rondae, I look at Brandon right now, Kaleb, T.J. we talked about, those are the guys that certainly we're counting on to have that same effect on this year's team.

**Q. You look at your roster, and length jumps off the page. What is the likelihood we could see a twin tower scenario?**

COACH MILLER: Not very likely. Dusan [Ristic] is a very talented young player. He's actually longer than I think Kaleb is. Certainly has a bright, bright future.

But being able to guard the variety of players with those two in the game is probably not in the cards right now. As much because of Dusan's youth and also because Brandon having Rondae, you can only put five out there.

**Q. I'm Brandon Ashley's mom, and my question is, are you taking your vitamins? The second question is, are you ready to go for this season?**

COACH MILLER: Are you asking me or him (laughter)?

BRANDON ASHLEY: Definitely made it a key part of my everyday regimen to make sure I take my vitamins, make sure my bones are strong and everything like that. Definitely trying to remain healthy.

Definitely ready for this season because I haven't been out there in a while.

COACH MILLER: You can see I'm a smart coach bringing him to Media Day.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you for your time.

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