

Pac-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

Friday, October 21 2016

Steve Alford

Isaac Hamilton

UCLA Bruins



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with UCLA head coach Steve Alford and Isaac Hamilton. Coach, an opening remark about the season ahead?

STEVE ALFORD: We're excited to be here. It's great being at Pac-12 Media Day and the enthusiasm around another college basketball season. We're right there with that enthusiasm. We've got a great blend of veterans like Isaac that have been through a couple Sweet Sixteens, a lot of fun times, and last year, not so fun. We've got some hungry vets with a collection of freshmen that are going to ask to do a lot for us that we're very excited about. So we're pretty healthy at this point of the season, which is good when you get to the third week of practices. A little banged up, but not anything serious. So things are progressing very well for us.

Q. First for Isaac and then you, Coach. Isaac, you guys have a really big recruiting class coming in. You've been through that before and you know what it's like to be a big-time recruit. What advice have you given these freshmen that are coming in to get ready for college basketball? And, Coach, what kind of leadership have you seen Isaac provide these freshmen?

ISAAC HAMILTON: For the most part coming in from high school to college is a big transition. But for the most part I just told these guys to play their game. The way we're playing this year, Coach is letting us, you know, just a bunch of read and react. And for a player -- and these guys have high IQs. So for the most part, it's just playing how they did in high school and with instruction from Coach. So that's what I tell these guys, just make sure you come play like you played in high school and talk on defense, because that's what we're going to need this year.

STEVE ALFORD: Yeah, and we don't have Lonzo shooting half-court shots. But, yeah, it is, I think, a style that's a lot of fun, but a style that's conducive to what our talent is. Not just Lonzo and T.J., who obviously are McDonald's All-Americans and have gotten a lot of hype, but Ike. Ike, 6'9.5", 250 pounds, averaged a double-double down in Australia, and two

of those teams are against pro teams. So he's doing that against grown men very early in his career. So he gives us a rim presence we haven't had.

So these are three freshmen that are going to be in the mix from day one and a lot going on. So that leadership from our senior class, Isaac and Bryce is going to be huge, because they're the ones that have had the experiences. The thing you fear as freshmen, you're going through it the first time. Whether it's the home opener, whether it's in tournament, whether it's conference play, it's all done for the first time. Where Isaac and Bryce have been on these road trips, they've understood it. So they've got to do a good job and continue to do a good job. They've done a really good job creating that culture in house, because you've got two really good young men. And they're respected from their teammates.

And I do think what Isaac and Bryce have done the best job of, what Isaac told you, sometimes and I've been on those teams as a player and a coach, that when you're the older one and here come the younger guys, the younger guys feel like they're walking on eggshells for a few months because they want to know if all of a sudden the older guys accept them. And Bryce and Isaac have done a really good job accepting those guys back in June when they got here on campus. I think that's eased a lot of that transition with Ike, T.J, and Lonzo, to where, as Isaac pointed out, they just do what they do. Bring your talents. Bring what you brought out of high school to Westwood. That's why you're here, and that's what we need out of you as a team. That's a part of really good leadership on Isaac's part.

Q. How different have practices been with those three freshmen as part of the team now?

STEVE ALFORD: Well, we've probably talked enough about last year. I'd just as soon stop talking about it. But we're always going to compare that because it's what you learn. When adversity hits and bad times hit, it's not about -- in my opinion, it's about what doors are opened, how do you get better? And last year's team was a really hard team to improve, because they're not going against each other. We didn't have the depth. This year we've got incredible depth right now. Hopefully we stay healthy and that depth continues. But we've got Bryce for most of the practices. Bryce

and Isaac are going against each other. Lonzo and Holiday are going against each other. G.G. is going against TJ every day. Ike's going against Tommy Welsh every day. You get better.

When that happens, and you're going against guys of your equal or guys that are very good players, you can't help but get better. So that's what we're seeing. From what we looked like in June, through Australia, to now three weeks into practice, I like our development. And these guys have to bring it every day, because if they don't, the other one embarrasses them. That's what's been, I think, the most benefit of having a little bit more depth and these new guys joining the current team.

Q. At the end of last season you penned a letter to the fan base. I'm curious how that's been received by the fans or your team.

STEVE ALFORD: Well, all we do is continue, so a lot of the booster functions have been tremendous around Los Angeles. Hasn't really been talked much about from a team standpoint. I don't think our team is concerned about what money I make or what money I give back. I don't think that's an issue to the guys at all. So that part hasn't been talked about. I think it's about where that bar is. Coach Wooden raised the bar at UCLA, whether it's been me or other guys before me, guys after me in the future. Same with players. Players that played under Coach Wooden versus the guys that are playing today in Westwood, that bar was raised a long time ago in Westwood, by a guy that won a bucket-load of games and a lot of championships and established something that, quite honestly, hasn't been established anywhere else in the country. So when that bar is that way, there's expectations. When you don't meet or come close to those expectations, we talk to our players all the time, there are going to be consequences. Consequences is a great word that I learned from Coach Knight. If you're out of a stance, you don't block out, you don't think the game, you don't move the ball, make the extra play, there are going to be consequences. You're going to lose games because the victor always favors the team that makes the fewest mistakes.

So I wanted our players to see those consequences when we as coaches don't perform well. Whether it was giving back an extension or writing a letter to the fan base or just letting them know we care. Sometimes you get isolated as a coach, and would you really care or is there a passion? Yeah, that's the reason I came to Westwood, to be able to coach guys like this at the level that these players are at, and have a chance to win championships both in league and nationally. So when you have a year where that doesn't happen, there is frustration. I want the fans to know there is frustration on our part just as much if not even more so.

Q. Can you just talk about the parity you saw in the conference last year, and what you expect to see in the conference going forward this year?

STEVE ALFORD: Well, a lot of parity last year with seven teams to make the tournament. I think we're arguably the only league in the country that's been to three straight Elite Eights. We're getting more teams in. More teams are advancing in the tournament. More teams are getting ranked. We're going to have three or four in the top 20 to start this season, top 25 in this season. So we're starting to get that trend and that recognition that I think this league deserves. It's an exciting league. You have a lot of head coaches that the majority of us played the game long before we coached the game. We were having fun with the players in there. We did a photo shoot here at about 9:30, and the network people said, hey, can we have all the players up here, and the coaches started walking, because we were players first. And that's exciting. Because of that, we've been able to recruit big-time, elite players like the Isaac Hamiltons of the world. So you're getting better players in our league. We're scheduling better. We're playing in more national tournaments. We're getting a lot of big games home at home, and we're starting to perform well in those games. So that breeds a lot of success. I think that parity will just continue this year. You're seeing a lot of great players moving on to the NBA from our league, and yet there are still a lot of guys that have been retained that make this league very special going into this season, and you're going to have that.

We talked more about the parity last year than we are this year, but there's going to probably be just as much, if not more parity by the time the season unfolds in January, and February.