

Pac-12 Men's Basketball Tournament

Tuesday, October 8 2019

Mark Fox California

MARK FOX: Well, I am excited to be here today with Paris Austin and Matt Bradley, two great young men and two guys I really enjoy working with every day. It's great to be at Cal. Obviously, as a new coach. I have 17 new players, guys all trying to learn how we want to play. But they've had -- they've been very responsive. I've been very pleased with their efforts, and I'm excited about our team and where we can go. Right now it's about making a daily investment to get better, and to this point, which is still very, very early in the season and obviously in my tenure, I've been pleased with the investment that these kids are making, and so we're excited about where we can go.

Q. Coach, what attracted you to Cal?

MARK FOX: Well, I think there's a lot of things that attracted me to Cal. Number one, it's an institution with incredible academic clout, and I think that's an advantage for us in the big picture. I think that obviously the league and the tradition of this league and the power that it has on this side of the country was attractive to me. And then certainly I think Cal has had some really bright spots in our history, and we have a tradition, and people care about basketball at Cal. So the combination of those things was very attractive to me.

Q. What makes you confident that you can turn it around after a couple of down years for them?

MARK FOX: Well, you know, I just think there's a lot of things that are advantages for us. Every job has their own set of challenges. We obviously are inheriting a situation where we haven't had as much success in the last couple years as we wanted. But we have some advantages going forward that if we just -- if we find the right formula that we can rebuild this program to places that everybody wants it to be.

And I think most jobs, they have a formula, and you just have to identify what that is and then go to work. But it starts with work, and it starts with investment and great efforts, and I think right now we're trying to make those every day.

Q. And lastly, how important was it for you to get Trent Johnson on your staff?

MARK FOX: Well, Trent Johnson is extremely valuable to our program for lots of reasons. One, he was very



successful as a head coach, has great experience. He's at a great place in his life. I think the most valuable thing really for us is the wisdom that he brings. I think these young guys as they go through life, they have a very wise voice that they can lean on in so many situations that have nothing to do with basketball, and I think that's extremely important for us to provide guys that resource. And so he's extremely valuable to us.

Q. You said each place you need to identify a formula. Have you identified that formula for Cal?

MARK FOX: Well, I think everything continuously changes. I think each month you see what progress you've made and you map out a new roadmap to move forward. But in the grand scheme of things, the formula doesn't change. You have to get the right people in place on your staff. You have to get the right players. You have to put an immense amount of effort into developing a program and have great buy-in across the board for how you're trying to play, and so I think that we have a formula right now that hopefully will move the needle forward. I've been very pleased with the support of our administration and the buy-in from our team, and hopefully we'll see progress soon.

Q. You spent the year away from coaching college basketball. Are you taking anything from that experience and at least stylistically that you want to implement into your team going forward?

MARK FOX: Well, I did have a break year, which was very healthy for me. I was able to spend a lot of time with USA Basketball and coach the international game, which I thought was a tremendous experience for me. I was able to go out and watch a lot of my friends teach their teams and study other coaches, and a lot of that is just very validating because it just shows, hey, we did a lot of things the right way, but you find a few things that people do better and say that's maybe a better way to do something.

A sabbatical, if you will, was very advantageous for me and allowed me to start here in Berkeley with refreshed energy.

Q. You also have some international players that you guys brought in towards the end of the summer, around or in the summer. Can you talk about how that came about in terms of the

recruiting, going after three-year national kids --

MARK FOX: Well, we have -- the story line has been that we have all these international guys, and we do have some. I see PJ here, who had a lot of success back in the day at Seton Hall with some international players, and maybe that was the seed for it. One of those nights with USA Basketball, PJ and I in our late-night discussions about the game.

When I got the job in April, we wanted to get the best players, players that could help us win, and obviously in the United States most of those guys that signed early were already committed. So we were able to find some kids that were in Europe. But also even some of our guys that are international guys, Kuany Kuany, is an international player, but he's spent the last four years playing basketball in the United States. So he doesn't feel like he's an international guy, if you will. Kareem South is from Toronto. He's a Canadian citizen and we got him as a graduate transfer, and he's getting credit for being an international player, and he is one, but he spent the last three years playing college basketball.

Even though we have an international flavor, it doesn't quite feel as strongly as maybe some of the stories are making it out to be, if you will.

Q. How do you feel about where Cal was picked in the poll?

MARK FOX: I don't know, where were we picked?

Q. 12th.

MARK FOX: Oh, were we? Okay. I mean, to be honest with you, it makes no difference to me. I don't -- no disrespect to any of you, but I don't read the articles. I don't listen to the stories. I look at our team, and we try and figure out how to win the day and get better.

It doesn't motivate me because we're extremely motivated every day, and you know, it's probably -- if there was going to be an anticipation, that's probably where I anticipate we might have been picked. But it really will have no bearing on the efforts we give today. We've been trying to change it from day one, and hopefully we can prove everybody wrong.

Q. What's the biggest aspect of the game that you think your guys have improved on under your leadership?

MARK FOX: Well, I think that our players have had a summer where they made lots of improvements. Is there an aspect of the game where we've improved the most? I think I will say it's less than basketball specific. I think that we've really learned how to work and how to show up every day and give the right efforts, and those efforts have led to improvements in how we pass it and how we shoot it.

But I think really just the understanding of the investment that's required to win has been an area where we've made a lot of progress.

Q. You've managed to get I'd say more integrated with the campus than maybe some other coaches have been in the past. How has that process been for you, going to the football games and getting to know people in the Bay Area?

MARK FOX: Well, it's been tremendous. I work at one of the finest academic institutions in the world, and our team is a part of that university. We're not two different places. I just don't subscribe to that. We represent one of the greatest schools in the world, and we've got a tremendous athletic director and a great athletic department, and I enjoy other coaches. I enjoy our swim coach, both the men and the women. We have a lot of fun times until the hallway. Coach Wilcox and I have become very good friends, and I want to see all those people succeed.

But for Cal basketball to accomplish what we want to accomplish, it's going to take everybody. It's going to take everybody in the Bay Area. It's going to take everybody in the state of California, it's going to take everyone in Berkeley, it's going to take help from everybody, and I'm not afraid to ask for that help and to solicit that help and to build relationships where we can get that help, and to do that, maybe we have to go to some events on campus and in the Bay Area to show our partnership.

But it needs to be a partnership, if we're ultimately going to do what we want to do.

Q. How hard is it, it's at least the third time you've done this where you start all over and there's zero continuity, every term, from terminology to every drill. How slowly do you have to go, and how challenging is that from a coaching standpoint?

MARK FOX: Well, it's a great question because you are teaching them a new language. And in some cases we're teaching guys two new languages, one in English and two in basketball. There are some challenges that come along with that.

I think what we tried to do was spend the summer workouts installing our defense and getting that terminology as in place as we could, so when official practice started we were only working on the other half of the terminology and on our offense, and so that has made it a little bit smoother. But when you have 17 new players, man, it's -- and new coaches, every day is not an adventure, but every day is certainly -- we've got to be very detailed in our plans, so everyone can be on the same page, and progress -- because there's 17

new guys is a little slower than a team where someone is returning and they only have three new players because they're all learning it for the first time.

Q. Can you borrow a little bit from the craziness of USA Basketball with the different windows and flip a whole new team and try to get them to play games like you guys did?

MARK FOX: I look back at that experience with the USA team in which we had Jeff Van Gundy put together a team that qualified the United States back for the World Championships and ultimately the Olympics, but every two or three months he would get 12 players and have to put together a team that was ready to play against every scenario - man, offense, zone offense, out-of-bounds plays, all the specials, and do it in essentially five practices. And so I think the efficiency and the greatness in Jeff's teaching has certainly helped me in my approach with this Cal team. I would give him a ton of credit. I think that experience has been very helpful.

Q. I know you mentioned at another venue the maturity aspect for you. What did you mean by that, leading up to this California job?

MARK FOX: You know, I think that -- I'm trying to think where I said that, and I think it was probably the one where we were together. But I'm in my 50s. I'm wiser, I've been around the block a couple times, and hopefully as you get older, you get better. I always try to evaluate myself at the end of each year and how can we be better. It's easier to be better when you've had time to reflect and be around great people and study the game.

But it's also easier to be better when you have people that are committed to doing this the right way. So it's very easy for me to go to work.

I just think that having been at a couple different schools already, I feel like that we know exactly what this is supposed to look like, and because we know what it's supposed to look like and because we had success at those two places, hopefully -- how to get it to look like we want it to look is something that we understand.

Q. What do you think the impact of the three-point line will be, and do you think it'll benefit Cal?

MARK FOX: Well, at one time I was the chairman of the rules committee and we had a lot of conversations about the three-point line moving back because the number of three-point attempts had skyrocketed, and so I think there was some concern that there was too many threes being shot, and he would ridge is out here, probably wishes that he got a chance to play with it even deeper because he would have been more

space to drive by guys after they went up to take the three away. But I think you'll see a few less attempts from three. I don't think it'll have a drastic impact. I think you'll see a few less. I think it will allow a little bit more space for those elite shooters to drive the ball and for the post guys to play with a little bit more space to operate. But I would not be surprised if the number of three-point attempts nationally didn't dip just a little bit.

Q. From the personnel you have, do you think it's helpful at all for Cal?

MARK FOX: Well, I think that we have a handful of guys who can shoot it and moving it back won't affect Kareem South or Matt badly. It hasn't affected those guys at all. Our stretch bigs are shooting it well. I think for us, because I didn't really -- the team last year wasn't a team that I coach, and so how it will change our team, really the rule change is not going to be what impacts that, it's going to be a new style of play.

Q. Down the road a little bit, what do you envision your team to be known for on the court, and as a program what direction do you think you'll be heading towards?

MARK FOX: Well, we want our program to be known for a lot of things down the road. But first off, we want to put forth an effort that the people respect and admire just because we've -- the kids have worked so hard and they play the game the right way, and it can make the people proud of the effort that they're giving, and because if they do that, all the results should take care of themselves. But we want to graduate our players. We want to win. We want to do a lot of things. But it comes back to us making the right daily investments.