

PAC-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 8 2019

Larry Krystkowiak

Utah Utes



LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Well, we're happy to be here at University of Utah. Brought a couple of great leaders and hard workers with us, Both and Timmy. We've obviously got a young team with no scholarship seniors, one scholarship junior, and a bevy of freshmen and sophomores, but it's been a joy to work so far in the last two, three weeks since we started practice. Just excited to take some questions here.

Q. Have you coached a team this young before as far as --

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Seventh graders in San Diego, yeah.

Q. -- as far as the college level, as far as having this many freshmen and sophomores.

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: No, no. You know, there was a young team if we look back, Brandon Taylor, Dakarai Tucker, Jordan Loveridge, all those guys were freshmen, so it's a little bit reminiscent maybe of that, and I think it bodes well for them to get some playing time as young kids. Then you hope that's some pretty good fabric moving forward their upperclassmen years.

Q. What have these two, three weeks in practice been like, coaching such a young team?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Well, there's been obviously a lot of teaching, terminology, and I've always said it's hard to be a freshman. You know, it's a big adjustment for a lot of these kids. But it's unbelievably hard-working group. Culturally we're really dialed in, and a lot of the focus has been basketball. That's been great. There hasn't been classroom issues or teaching kids how to act or anything like that. It's just been real functional and trying to get our team better.

Q. What have you liked from Both and Timmy as far as making them media representatives here? What have you seen from them as the elder statesmen and sophomores?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, well, a great work ethic. There's no question in my mind, Timmy is a young man that maybe played a little bit of power forward last year, talked about putting some meat on his bones and came in, I don't know exactly what his weight was, but he's dropped 25 pounds in the off-season, really changed his eating habits, and then

more of a backcourt wing position now. So you've seen -- a lot of guys talk about it, and their ability to -- I was using the analogy with an actor. That's always been impressive to me, when an actor needs to gain 50 pounds for a role and they can do it, it's like, wow that's some discipline. Same thing goes with having to lose some weight.

Both he and Both spent a lot of their summer in Phoenix and worked their tails off, and even know when we start practice, weight room to practice, they're some of the first guys in the gym, some of the last guys to leave, and there's always a correlation with guys that are successful that do -- it's about walking the walk and not just talking the talk. So that's been real impressive.

And then I think also bringing some leadership and encouraging them that they don't have to wait until they're upperclassmen to be leaders, and they're providing a lot of that for us.

Q. Two of the upperclassmen, potential upperclassmen that you lost were centers. How does that either put more pressure -- does it put more pressure on the freshmen coming in that will be centers or did it make you change your game plan?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: No, it's interesting, we have Lahat, who's a seven-foot young man from Africa that last year was a redshirt for us, so he's been in the program. And then Matt van Komen, 7'4", which is really hard to coach 7'4", but he's had quite an impact in practice blocking shots, and he's getting better. He's put on 25 pounds when we talk about some discipline in the weight room. And then Branden Carlson, who's also one of our top recruits that just returned from a mission.

Not typical freshmen, I would say. One was a redshirt. One is a little more mature with returning from his mission. And those kids, it's been a little bit of inconsistency, when you're dealing with three freshmen, but they know that an opportunity is there for them to play some minutes, and I think finding some consistency from those guys, backing up one good week of practice with another, and right now we've been on a little bit of roller coaster ride and had some illness and some sickness amongst those guys, so that's hard to do, but I think it's exciting. One of our

coaches said, we kind of have a three-headed center, and they're highly athletic, they get up and down the floor real well, and you can't teach that. The seven-foot Lahat I think has got a 6'3" wingspan, and Matt's wingspan is off the charts, as is Brandon's, so a little bit more length than we've been used to in the past.

Q. So you haven't like changed strategies or kind of the way that you play?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: No, I don't think so. You know, there's -- we've been pretty consistent with what we've done. You know, defensively certainly there hasn't been a whole lot of change. Offensively maybe unlike some programs that run the same system and then go out and recruit to that system, I think we try to recruit the best players that we can and then put those players in positions where they can be successful. So I think if you've watched us play, I think this is year nine, we haven't always done the same things offensively. So we've more tinkered with maybe who our top players are and trying to put people in positions to have success.

So I don't feel like there's been a big change that way. We are putting a big emphasis on throwing the ball inside. I do think it's going to be interesting to see what happens with the three-point line moving back a foot and a half. I think that my thought is it's going to bring the big man back to the game a little more and certainly the mid-range game back a little bit more. It's going to separate the contenders from the pretenders as to who can really shoot threes. So I think there's going to be more of a value on having an emphasis and a post threat down there, and we are going to throw the ball to them, and we haven't always done that here in the last couple years.

Q. You guys had a pretty good top-4 finish -- streak of top-4 finishes. Will this year test it with all the new guys or do you feel like you can make a run for it again?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Oh, no, I feel like we can test it. I think the thing that we're all focusing on right now is being ready to play some games in November and December against some quality opponents. I think there's no question the league has been considered down, and it's been a little bit of a roller coaster, and there's I think pressure on all of us coaches and all of our programs to go out and be productive and get some marquee wins, and then as those games go, so does our league go, and I know that we've always improved. Our team has always improved as the season has gone on, and we put ourselves in a position I think it's five years in a row where we've gotten a bye, but I also know the last couple years we haven't won the first game. Kind of ran into a buzz saw with Oregon, a team that's been hot the last couple

years, but we'll -- there's a number of ways you can get to the NCAA Tournament, you know, and we kind of work backwards, and one of those ways is to win the Pac-12 Tournament, and you have a much better chance of winning the Pac-12 Tournament if you can get a bye. And then I think more importantly is that everybody here collectively here is ready to play some games.

I think I've changed maybe my focus a little bit and know there's a sense of urgency to be more game ready and prepared in November, and that's probably an error on my part working with different lineups and things, and so we're changing. We've kind of got a top seven guys that's pretty identifiable right now, and if you want to get in that rotation, do something about it, and getting a lot of reps with the group that's going to get thrown out there in November, so that maybe we can be a little bit more productive.

Q. What's it like and what does it mean to you to have your son on the team?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Oh, yeah, it's cool. My son Luc is a young man that really hasn't been healthy for the last couple years. He's really struggled with some knee tendonitis. And as parents you want your kids to be happy and healthy, so that's been frustrating. He's quite a basketball player. He just hasn't been able to show it.

He wants to be near home, which we thought was cool. We've got one son that's -- another freshman that's just started at Dartmouth playing basketball, so we've got two that are out of the house right now.

Q. You got a raise.

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, yeah. So you know, it's fun to see him every day, and we've got a great training staff. Our weight and conditioning coaches and our athletic trainer Trevor Jameson is the best I've ever been around. Our doctors and all those people.

So the first thing is to try to get him healthy so that he can start enjoying himself again, but in the meantime it's pretty cool to have that relationship to be able to see him on a daily basis.

Q. What's your thoughts on the California likeness law, and I don't know if you -- how it can impact the conference if it happened and maybe other sports?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, I think we're pretty fresh in all of it. You know, and I'm really just trying to -- I've really got to focus on what it is I can control. That's what I've found out is there's so much going on in the world, whether it's this or whether -- the politics. There's so many different -- you can get caught up in it and get drained energy-wise, and I'm just having a

really fun time with this group of student-athletes that we're coaching, and we're going to try to focus on getting them better and putting them into position.

My thoughts really don't have a whole lot of value or input in the situation. I think it's going to -- it's up to the NCAA to come up with a plan and how we're going to make all this work, and then we'll just take those directives and figure out how to survive within that.

Q. Just in general, it just seems like recruiting implications can be all over the board on this thing. Do you have any -- do you have any quick thoughts about what a new world that could be?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, I mean, I think it's -- we've actually been in a little bit of gray area with recruiting issues to begin with, right, with rules in place, and to me it potentially could open a whole can of worms. You know, and I've read various people's ideas, but really I'm just kind of in a position that you can't win. I just want what's best for our student-athletes. If we can find some common ground, I think that's great. But just keep plugging along.

Q. When Danny and I were coaching, we had like literally a full six weeks to get ready. How challenging is it now as opposed to last year with so many young guys, whether they're coming back from missions or not, to get them ready? And you kind of said like you're changing your emphasis a little bit, trying to get ready in a shorter period of time.

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, no, I think it's changed a lot. We've had some time in the summer, which has been valuable. The rules, I mean, when you used to start practice Midnight Madness October 15th and you had three weeks to get everything in, that was brutal for everybody. And now there's a little bit more of a pace to it.

But I think the last couple years we haven't necessarily had that role development, and I've probably played that game a little too long where you just kind of make everybody feel like they're a part of it. At the end of the day, you need to take a page out of football. Like this is our first unit, this is our second unit. And post it up and let everybody know because I think that's maybe looking back, that's been part of my mistake as a coach is to let some of that sort itself out way too late. So we're putting one versus two in practice, and if a guy wants a piece of that first unit, then let's get it done.

But we don't have a lot of time. We all know how important November and December are, and so -- and I'm confident if we do that, get some role development, get some cohesiveness amongst our guys, I think that'll

pay off.

Q. Any real surprises with all the new players, the freshmen, sophomores? Anybody come back and all of a sudden you said, wow, this guy is really improved over the summer?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, well, I've been impressed with all of our returners. You know, Riley Battin has done a great job coming in. I've always said it's super difficult to be a freshman. It's a lot harder than people think to make the transition. I don't care how many stars you have. It's pretty rare to be -- have a big impact as a freshman, and so much gets thrown at these kids. So I've always said, even if you don't get any better, let's say your body doesn't change, you don't spend a minute in the gym, how much better are you going to be just being a sophomore to know what you didn't know a year ago.

And so we push our guys to continue to improve, but I like that group, the leaders that we have there. And then I've never put a whole lot into the star, the five-star, four-star, three-star deal.

Q. Maturation and improvement --

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, I can tell you that we've got more stars than we've ever had, but we've also got a really high-character group of guys, and I think we've got a chance moving forward, and we may take our lumps at some point. I hate to say this with our team because we're never going to throw in the towel, but the fact is one thing we're lacking right now is some experience, and you need -- in order to get experience, you've got to play some games, and we've got a heck of a preseason schedule. Really going to be challenged with that. And keep this unit together and I think the future is bright.