

PAC-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

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Mike Hopkins

Washington Huskies



MIKE HOPKINS: Excited to be here. Another season, year three for me, and it's always exciting to be here to see the other teams and the players, and seems like it's going to be an incredible league this year. Excited to be here and be a part of it.

Q. Do you think the Pac-12 could have a better overall season this year than last year?

MIKE HOPKINS: Yeah, no question. I felt like the key to having success, especially in the NCAA Tournament, is great seeding, and we obviously had I think it was the 11 seed, 9 seed and a 12 seed, we all won games, which I thought was a great thing for the Pac-12. Oregon going far. I think it showed where our league is. I think with the recruiting classes, 10 of the top 50 players in the country coming to our league enhances our league. Gives it more exposure in a good way. Three new great coaches in our league.

And so we've got to be able to win some games early. I think scheduling has been a big part of it. We have the new scheduling system in our league, which I think will help upgrade, and we're just trying to make our league the best league in the country, and it starts with us winning in November.

We're excited about that.

Q. What have you seen out of Jaden McDaniels in practice so far?

MIKE HOPKINS: I've seen a lot of length, a lot of talent. But most importantly, with young guys, it's just how smart of a basketball player he is. Not only is he exceptionally talented, but he makes others around him better, impacts the game in a lot of different ways. Really excited for him.

Q. And how have you seen Sam Timmins develop over the course of his time?

MIKE HOPKINS: I think Sammy has really improved. I thought freshman year he had some big-impact games for us at USC, Kansas. Last year a little bit erratic, up and down, but he's a big part of when we took over the program, part of culturally wise and knows the system, and when you have a team when you have a lot of young guys, he's been able to help them learn the system quicker. Should have a great year.

Q. Do you notice his rugby background at all?

MIKE HOPKINS: You know, what Sammy is, Sammy is just a great teammate. He's got a lot of talent. But his leadership ability, understands the system, and he just wants to win. That's the culture we're trying to create at Washington, and he's been a great example of that, especially for the young guys.

Q. What did you learn about your team in Italy? And did you come back with any cool clothes?

MIKE HOPKINS: I didn't come back with any cool clothes. I have no cool clothes. But Italy was a great experience for us just to get to know each other. I think when you have a young team, a lot of new pieces, if we didn't do the Italy thing, we'd still be trying to figure out, okay, in a game situation what will he do.

Italy was a great opportunity for us to play equal minutes for the most part. We had three decent games, one really competitive game, and it got the younger guys to understand how we're going to coach as a staff and what we expect. And so not only was it great on the basketball court but also for team bonding because no one got sick of each other.

Q. It seemed like you were playing a lot of man-to-man. Is that just experimental?

MIKE HOPKINS: It's just hoodwink, make sure all the opponents are watching the games on Flow Hoops. "They're going to play man."

No, you know what, it was -- you know, it's a great question. We've always -- when we first got the job, it was interesting because we tried to -- we wanted to press. We were doing West Virginia press, we were doing it and we decided that the zone was the way we were going to go. We want to keep evolving, getting better and giving ourselves the best opportunity to win. We felt like we had been working on it in practice. We have a new transition with losing five guys from last year's team, a lot of experience, and we feel like the man-to-man, how we're trying to play it, could actually be a great off-speed pitch for us.

I think we know what our brand is and how we play, but man-to-man is something that I think we can do and do it really effective this year, as well.

Q. Obviously it was just announced this morning, but the two-year series now with (indiscernible).

MIKE HOPKINS: Yeah, we're really, really excited, working with Oak View Group and MGM Resorts. It's hard to get games, and for the Pac-12 to be able to go out and put this event on and to be able to play a competitive team from a great conference in Las Vegas, and then go to Dallas in another great media market, in terms of us recruiting for the future is just -- we're so excited. I know the coaches in our league is really excited about the opportunity to get that, especially being on our turf and in such a great city like Las Vegas. Excited.

Q. Any updates on Quade?

MIKE HOPKINS: No updates. We're still in the process. He's obviously been practicing, been great, but still waiting for an answer.

Q. How much different does the team look with him in the lineup?

MIKE HOPKINS: Well, I think he didn't get to play with us in Italy, but him in practice, obviously he's an elite point guard. He's arguably one of our best shooters, and he makes everyone around him better. But you know, Elijah and Marcus have done a great job adjusting to how we want them to play. They give you two different dynamic style point guards. Elijah -- percent I was talking about man-to-man, can really get up in you, like he's a really good on-ball defender. We think that could be really beneficial for us. Marcus played like a 35-year-old veteran. He's got great size. He is with pressure that Elijah is putting on him, and Quade, he can get you into your offense and run the team. But still, there's so much learning curve from experience. When you add David and Matisse, you knew what you were going to get. We're estimating there will be bumps in the road, but guys are getting better and we believe in them.

Q. What do you want your team to be known for?

MIKE HOPKINS: You know, basketball-wise, everybody knows defensively we can be one of the best teams in the country. I think we hang our hat on defense. And the big thing if you talk about University of Washington basketball, the word that we stress in everything is family. We talk about tougher together. And so the proudest moment is when your kids -- what are you guys about, we're about family. I was looking in one of the offices of one of the people that work at the Pac-12, and they had a sign that said, "The star of the team is the team," and I took a picture of it, and we're stealing it.

But it's really what it's all about, playing for something greater than yourself. That's the culture that we're trying to create.

Q. You have some real length and some real pieces. It must be fun to tinker once in a while.

Have you tinkered with any of those big guys?

MIKE HOPKINS: We have a lot of super heroes. We'd be a good Marvel comic -- Jaden -- we've got a lot of length, we've got a lot of athleticism, we've got a lot of depth. Now it's putting it together. Some guys might -- they have different roles. There's a lot of growth there, and so we're going to have some growing pains, I'm sure. We have a really competitive schedule. We start off with Baylor, who's a top-25 team, out in Alaska. You're coming back a game and then we'll be playing Tennessee in Toronto. Obviously we've got the Zags and you've got Hawai'i. We'll be tested early.

We believe last year the strength of our schedule is what helped us not only do well in the Pac-12 but get to the tournament and do well in the tournament, so it should be really exciting. A lot of unknowns but I think exciting.

Q. Do you have shooting right now, or --

MIKE HOPKINS: I think we have shot-makers. I wouldn't say -- Raequan Battle, freshman, everyone talks about Isaiah, we've talked about Isaiah, we've talked about Jaden, we've talked about Marcus. Raequan Battle I thought in high school basketball and AAU was one of the best shooters in the country, we believe. So that's great. Quade Green, that's one of his strengths, so having him early, he's a really good three-point shooter, proven in college.

But you know, we hang our hat on defense. If we can really defend -- we were 18th in the country in KenPom defensively, we can be even better than that with our new length and athleticism, and then with our offensive guys like Isaiah, Jaden, if we just share the ball, we get good shots, we've got some pretty high-level talent.

Q. In regards to the rotation, you've got about 10 or 11 guys deep, once Quade is eligible. What does that ideal rotation look like once we hit mid-January?

MIKE HOPKINS: Oh, gosh, for me, people always say -- I worked for a coach, Coach Boeheim, who would always go seven or eight, and it was like the recruiting thing, well, we only play seven or eight, you don't want to go there. But I'm challenging myself as a coach, you have to learn. We've got guys who are really effective. You've got Nate Roberts who redshirted last year, who's made huge improvements. No one even knows he exists, but boy, is he talented. And so you've got to find ways to get these guys on the court, and everybody is going to have a different role, and it's just -- it's what you would call a high-level problem, but it's still a problem, and it's something that I've got to get better as a coach with our staff working to how we can

get these guys in and still keep a flow and a rhythm.

Q. You talked about having a little bit of a rough going early. There's another team that's probably going to struggle early because of the youth. Do you feel like -- do you feel veteran compared to them, and also, what do you see ahead for them?

MIKE HOPKINS: Utah?

Q. Yeah.

MIKE HOPKINS: He's arguably one of the best coaches in our league. You know, he's always done it. They play incredible defense. You know, when you have turnover, I think there's always the unknown, but for the most part, I think when you have new guys, there's always early bumps in the road. Unfortunately with the NCAA Tournament and stuff, a lot of it weighs on early season, November and December, to what you do in the non-conference. I'm just -- I think Utah is -- they've got a great coach. They've got really good players.

I know every time I remember a year ago when they were in the NIT, I was calling them, like, "Represent the Pac-12, you're such a stud." I just love everything about them. And I'm a big -- I'm a Pac-12 homer now. Every game I watch, I'm just rooting for all the coaches, and I always feel like we're on the defense, and I was really happy with the performance of the teams in the NCAA Tournament last year, and obviously Colorado and USC has got a great class, and I'm just excited for the future. All we can do is you can't worry about that, you've got to worry about the future, and I think we're going in the right direction.

Q. You were picked to finish third. Do you think that's about right?

MIKE HOPKINS: I don't know. You know, time will tell on that. Last year I think we were picked third. The year before we were picked 12th. You've just got to go out and -- I think everything changes. I think you look at Colorado, they're just so talented and they've got the guys back and Coach Boyle. They're like the toughest team always in the league every year.

And so I think there's a lot of sleepers, too. I think any time you get new coaches, Mark Fox, Kyle Smith. They're great coaches. They'll win more games than they have in the past. They've got different strategies. They'll be new in the league. Mick Cronin, at Syracuse we had played Cincinnati a lot, and it'll be fun to watch what he does with his team. It will be a great year in the Pac-12 this year. I really predict that. It's really exciting. Really good coaches, really good teams.

But third, fifth, ninth, we've just got to go out and play and try to reach our potential.

Q. You have an interesting dynamic with so many guys leaving and so much talent, you're probably more talented. Do you feel better than last year or --

MIKE HOPKINS: Potentially on paper, yes, if you look at the metrics and you look at what they are, yes. But it goes back to we've got to be able to put it together. Nothing takes away chemistry. You've got to have great chemistry. Everybody has got to play for each other. And if we can do that, we should be a really tough team to beat.

Q. Do you have a thought on this new bill in California and the potential to recruit against something like that?

MIKE HOPKINS: You know what, we've talked about it. I've read some articles on it. I don't know enough about it. I think the most important thing is that we get educated, that the student-athletes get educated on it. Does it mean is it one player that gets sponsored by, if it's the Olympic model, Snickers or whatever it is, or is it not -- ticket sales? Like how does it work? What's the structure?

But you know, they've got some of the best minds in the sport, especially in the NCAA, trying to work out and understand the ins and outs of it, but I'm not too -- I need to be more educated on it before I talk about it.

Q. You had a viewing party Saturday. The game wasn't great, but what was that like?

MIKE HOPKINS: You know, just being around -- I think the great college basketball environments have great home-court advantages, great college programs, and I know when we first got the job, it was really connecting with the Dawg Pack. I had heard so many times they say, University of Washington is the hardest place to play when it's rolling. It was hard, and the students were right on top of you.

We had been trying to build relationships with them from day one. You know how Will Conroy is with them, throwing the ball and just connecting. So to be able to go out and support our football team, our football program and interact with the students, a lot of the freshmen, new Dawg Pack members, was really, really cool. You can't do it without them. Those guys bring the juice, bring the energy. They get the 75-year-olds up and going. You've got to -- the energy rises, everybody. Excited about that.

Q. (Indiscernible) is that going to be really interesting preparation? I know the football team plays the same night and it's going to be hard to get the fans up to Anchorage. What's that preparation look like and when do you start thinking about Baylor?

MIKE HOPKINS: They're one of the top teams in the country. They played Syracuse last year in the NCAA Tournament, so we're familiar with them. We've only played them a couple times being where I'd been, and great coach, great program, play a different type of zone, but they play zone. You know, it's going to be exciting. I do know those are great games to kind of get a gauge of where we're at, and that's what you're always trying to do as a coach. We live by a #DMGB, "doesn't matter get better." Win by 30, doesn't matter, get better; lose by 30, doesn't matter get better. We've just got to keep -- like last year, we had a tough schedule. We had good games, bad games, but we kept getting better, were able to play well in the conference and then get to the tournament and have a chance to play for a National Championship. That's been our model. Very simple.