

PAC-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 12 2017

Sean Miller

Arizona Wildcats



SEAN MILLER: Well, a couple weeks ago when everything happened here, I came out with a statement, and today I stand by that statement. As the investigation into these allegations continues, it does so with my support. During this period of time, I'm going to continue to do the things I've done over the last eight years as the head coach at the University of Arizona, with compliance at the forefront. Most importantly, as it applies to today, of making sure that I give our team my undivided attention, and our staff's undivided attention so we can have the best season we possibly can have.

I know you have a job to do and certainly feel free to ask any questions that you like, but my response is that I'm going to stand by that statement that I came out with and what I just said.

Today is about this season. I have two outstanding people here, Allonzo Trier and Dusan Ristic. Very seldom do you take the podium in today's world of college basketball with two upperclassmen. In Dusan's case, he's from Serbia. English isn't his first language. He's worked hard, as hard as any player that I've coached, both on the court and in the classroom. He has three classes left and he'll graduate, which is amazing when you consider that English isn't his first language. He was a double figure scorer for us last year. We expect him to continue that this year.

Allonzo Trier is here. Allonzo has a special place in my heart because I don't know if I've been around a player that has overcome so much adversity and at the same time continued to be an outstanding player. I believe he'll be one of the best players in college basketball this year. He's had a terrific off-season, and I think all of us are hoping that he can do it from start to finish, from the first game to the end.

We've been hit with one setback injury wise. I think it's common knowledge. Rawle Alkins broke his foot. If there is a silver lining, he has two weeks under his belt of healing. It's an injury that should sideline him anywhere between 8 to 12 weeks. In the meantime, we're working hard with the players who are there. Rawle's spirits are actually great considering that it happened, and we certainly look forward to him returning at some point.

Q. You've given a statement, but did you have any idea that Coach Richardson was taking bribes?

SEAN MILLER: I'm going to stand by the statement that I gave.

Q. Were you questioned by the F.B.I.?

SEAN MILLER: I'm going to stand by the statement that I gave.

Q. What responsibility does a head coach have no knowing what's going on in his program with situations like that?

SEAN MILLER: I'm going to stand by the statement that I've given.

Q. Sean, when young coaches talk to you about wanting to get into coaching, do you have frank conversations with them about the amount of pressure that they could be under?

SEAN MILLER: You're talking about coaching college basketball?

Q. Yeah, where coaches are paid a lot of money to win games.

SEAN MILLER: I think there is different pressure. Sometimes there is pressure to put food on your table. There is pressure that in a manual labor job, blue-collar worker gets injured and doesn't have anything to fall back on. College basketball has always been and will continue to be about the kids. That was the reasons I wanted to be a coach. I was a student-athlete at one point at the University of Pittsburgh. To be able to teach these guys, love them, coach them hard. In some ways I think it's the best classroom that any of them could have, no matter how bright they are academically. Because it is an opportunity for them to blend with a different race, different socioeconomic backgrounds, diversity of people, learning to sacrifice and play a team sport. So I think those are the fundamentals of college sports and really sports in general. I try not to lose sight of that.

Q. Do you think on that same note some of the kids feel pressure from their families to ask for money when they're being recruited?

SEAN MILLER: I'm going to stand by my statement.

Q. What do you think of the way things have

changed?

SEAN MILLER: I think it's important not to judge or stereotype people. Some of the people from the most grassroots coaches, they've done more for kids who have had nothing than anyone in their community could ever have imagined. In some cases they've helped hundreds of kids. They've helped them from really tough backgrounds. Gave them an opportunity to get a free education and a scholarship.

There are certainly great high school coaches as well. My dad, he's one of them. In some cases their coaches are better than others, whether you're a travel team coach or high school coach, people are people. That's what sports really teaches you. You just can't cast the net that wide and just say everybody who coaches outside of the high school isn't a good coach or person. That's the furthest thing from the truth. I think that any college basketball coach can tell you that.

Q. How do you go about addressing your situation with your team and moving forward from that?

SEAN MILLER: Every season represents its set of challenges. We had a few last season and we had a couple the season before that. It's never a smooth ride from start to finish. How you handle it is everything. Again, back to my point, when you're a young person, as part of our program as you go through this right now, it will do nothing but strengthen you for life after college. There's going to be not the perfect storm awaiting you. There's going to be somebody in your life that gets sick unexpectedly, there is going to be a certain situation you can't believe happens, and I think that all players in our program rely on the lessons they've learned from college. That's what I mentioned a minute ago.

My directive right now is to make sure that I do the best job that I possibly can to coach these guys, to teach them, to love them, to coach them hard, and bring out the best in what I hope could be a very, very successful season.

Q. Are you having to address this with recruits and their parents?

SEAN MILLER: I've given my statement on this.

Q. (Indiscernible) is there anything to share about that?

SEAN MILLER: I'm not able to share anything about that.

Q. What are your thoughts on the community that has supported the program so incredibly for all these decades? Any thoughts on how this has affected them?

SEAN MILLER: You know what, no one loves the community in Tucson more than me and really my family. They have embraced our family from the very second that we came to Tucson from Ohio. They give us their heart and soul. There are 14,500 every game, and they love the Arizona Wildcats. It's a cult following. It's a culture there. I think anytime that we lose a game, I feel for them. When anything negative happens, you certainly feel for them.

By the same degree, I think they understand that there are certain ups and downs that accompany sports, and we certainly look forward to providing them with some great moments this year.

Q. What do you make of the Pac-12 Now having a task force, and the NCAA has a commission? In light of what you're saying, you don't want to paint everybody with the same brush. Could this maybe help ferret out what the problems actually are?

SEAN MILLER: No, I support the investigation into the allegations. I also support what anybody can do to help make our game better to protect people, players. You think of college basketball, you want to think of March Madness, you want to think of Final Fours, you want to see great stories. Steve Kerr who resonates with everybody here being who he is today, but he at one point was a student-athlete, and he learned a lot of courage and a lot of things at the University of Arizona playing for a Hall of Fame coach, playing on great teams, being the first team to go to a Final Four. I think if you talk to Steve, those are lessons that he has today that's helped him become a better Parent, father, certainly coach of the Golden State Warriors. He's an example of that.

Q. (Indiscernible) was there a piece of advice or something that changed?

SEAN MILLER: I can't comment on that right now.

Q. Do you think you have the best team in the country?

SEAN MILLER: I appreciate the question. I don't think we are right now. You know, Rawle Alkins getting hurt, I haven't had an opportunity, and we haven't had our collection of players together. Part of what I think makes our team this year potentially good, special, we're not there yet, obviously at the beginning stages.

We have a great mix of very talented newcomers, freshmen, with returning players that have been starters in all-conference players like a Rawle, like Allonzo, but the freshman class that we have, in my opinion, could be the best class that we've brought in at Arizona. I think we've had a number that have had big impacts on our success. The group of five, they have a great attitude. They're very easy to deal with.

They're very easy to coach. That group is led by Deandre Ayton. And for perspective, we've had Aaron Gordon, we've had Nick Johnson, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson, I think, three exceptional basketball players and athletes. The other day, Deandre at 7-foot, 260 pounds, on a 15-foot run, jumped 43.5 inches. It's something I've never seen before. He touched the top of the backboard. He's 7-foot, 260, he's a great kid. He's working extremely hard. He's made tremendous progress over the summer and here in the fall in a structured environment. Having the opportunity for the first time in his life to lift weights, it's really taken him to another level. I'm excited to coach him.

But the other freshmen are just as impactful. Ira Lee, Brandon Randolph, Emmanuel Akot, Alex Barcello. Very talented players in their own right. I think they give us depth in a freshman class that if we are going to have a great year, I think I'll be able to back up the statement that I made that it could be the best class that we've had.

Q. Is Parker banged up a little bit?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, Parker had kind of like a thigh contusion. We worried about it at the beginning because he got hit fairly hard. He might have been on the schedule to come here, but that's a big reason why he didn't, so he could take care of that. But he practiced two days ago which was our last practice, and he's full-go moving forward.

Q. How much time did he miss?

SEAN MILLER: Two days.

Q. What did it mean to you when your president and athletic director came out in support of you with those statements? Is that something you were able to direct?

SEAN MILLER: It meant the world. Meant more than any words that I can express. They didn't have to do that, but I appreciate it and hopefully have the opportunity to make both of them proud.

Q. What's it going to take out of your players this season to meet those high expectations with obviously all of this hovering over the program this year?

SEAN MILLER: Our players are resilient. They focus on the task at hand. So many times things happen, and it's almost like coaches with what are we having for dinner. They're able to move on sometimes easier than adults because they're so new, so innocent. They have a lot of things going on in their life for classes, practice, expectations. They're looking forward to our red-blue game.

In their mind, I don't want to say it's easy, but I think for

them, staying with the task at hand to walk in the gym every day and work as hard as they possibly can and become the best team that they possibly can, we're on the right track in doing that.

Q. So obviously Rawle is out because of his injury, but was there any talk about suspending any players because of the investigation while it plays out?

SEAN MILLER: I can't comment on that. I respect your job and I understand why you ask me the question, but I'm going to stand by my statement.

Q. Can you talk about freshman Ira Lee and what you expect him to bring to the program?

SEAN MILLER: Ira is a hard-working kid. Sometimes that's almost as if you don't have to say that. Not everybody works as hard as the others. Ira is an exceptionally hard worker. He's got an incredible work ethic. His dad being a former student-athlete and NFL player really rubbed off on him in that way. But he goes for it. He plays the game in a physical, hard-playing style. He works after practice. He's eager to learn and sky's the limit for Ira. He's going to be a big contributor on this year's team. In my opinion, he's going to have a really exceptional career. I'm thrilled to have him.

He's part of -- he's one-fifth of that class that we talked about, where each of our freshmen are able to bring something to the table in a big, big way, that I think can help this year's team.