

PAC-12 Men's Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 11 2018

Sean Miller

Arizona Wildcats



Q. What reaction, if any, have you had to some of the testimonies in New York and Arizona being mentioned?

SEAN MILLER: You know, any question like that I'd ask you to -- really direct you to my statement that I made in March.

Q. In February you said you never committed any NCAA violations. Do you stand by the statement in regards to that?

SEAN MILLER: Any question like that I'd ask you to go back and look at my statement in March.

Q. It was a different statement prior to that. Do you stand by that one?

SEAN MILLER: Next question?

Q. A lot has come up since March, with Ayton today and yesterday in court, with Joe Pasternack's name being mentioned, Emanuel Richardson obviously has been indicted. Do you feel confident that your program has been in compliance with the rules?

SEAN MILLER: You know, Deandre is one of the great kids that I've ever been around. Obviously we're all very proud of him, of what he's doing right now, and the fact that he's the No. 1 pick. But again, I would ask you to go back to the statement that I made in March.

Q. There's been some stuff that's come up since March that I think it's probably fair to ask you about, though, right?

SEAN MILLER: Again, I would ask you to go back to my statement.

Q. There was testimony that Deandre was paid -- the Adidas rep said he paid Deandre. He didn't say anything about you guys. Because that may have happened, is there any concern on your part that he could have been ruled ineligible last year because of that?

SEAN MILLER: Again, I'm aware a trial is going on, but if you'd like to ask me about our team this year, our program on the court, I'd be happy to answer those questions. Any of the other types of questions, I would ask you to go to the statement that I made in March.

Q. How much has all this external noise and all this external stuff impact the team, what you're able to do, and just out recruiting and trying to get ready for the season?

SEAN MILLER: You know, we're just at the beginning stages of it, so we're eight practices in, and we're not in the month of November yet. This is a period of time where I think every coach and team try to become closer. You learn more and more about who you have and what they can do, and that's really what we're -- that's what our charge is and the task at hand for me and our coaching staff.

Q. Do you think all this external stuff has any impact on what you're doing or the team?

SEAN MILLER: You know, I can't control that.

Q. The way your roster is constructed, does it take you back to your Xavier days at all, just the similar way that the teams are built?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, you know, really about a year and a half ago, we -- I think in any sport, any industry, you have to adjust to change, and if you look at the NBA, and we have a great example right here in this city with the Golden State Warriors, it's a different game now than it would have been five years ago. Ten years ago it's almost a different sport.

A lot of times what happens in the NBA starts to become a part of college basketball, and I think the game of skill is here, and utilizing the three-point shot more rather than less. Having a group of players that can really move the ball and maybe have more firepower, then it becomes the charge of making that same group efficient and effective on defense.

We really started to go down that route about a year and a half ago, and I think that the team that we'll put out there this year, that's the style that we'll play, and hopefully we'll improve, and as we continue to reestablish and add talent, that it will be a way of playing that you start to think about when you think of our program.

Q. A fresh start for Chase Jeter. How has he looked so far?

SEAN MILLER: Chase is doing a great job. One of the advantages for him last year is you think about who he practiced against and where he was, and he played

against Deandre, played against Dušan. He worked really hard.

In that year off sometimes you can establish confidence, and he has a big role for us. Hopefully we can maintain a level of health with our front line. But no question, Chase will be one of the more important aspects to what we're doing.

Q. How has what happened externally impacted recruiting efforts?

SEAN MILLER: I'm just focused on the task at hand. The external thing isn't really on my radar right now. My charge is to treat our players right, obviously run our program and get ready for the 2018-19 season.

Q. How are you doing?

SEAN MILLER: Fine.

Q. You look good.

SEAN MILLER: Thank you.

Q. We've always had a good relationship. I want to know about this team. What excites you about the Arizona Wildcats?

SEAN MILLER: Well, I think it's the first time I've come to Pac-12 Media Day and not been favored or co-favored in some time. Maybe if you look back on it, five, six years maybe, where we've been predicted to win it or finish second, and most of the time those predictions came true.

That's a different type of pressure. That's a different type of team. For us this year, we don't have that. We're a team that I think can play with a healthy chip on our shoulder, trying to be better than maybe everybody else thinks we are, and figure out the way that we're going to go about doing that.

And I think if you see us become successful, it will be because we're a team, we play together, we play with great effort, that we have like no ego, and that we're a fun team to watch, a fun team to be around.

It takes time for that to happen. We lost our top seven players from a year ago. Judging us in November would be very unfair. I think we're going to be a group that I hope, especially if we're healthy, that can grow and become a very good team as we continue to march forward.

Q. Is that at all a challenge you're looking forward to as a coach, maybe having a team that is out to prove itself, as opposed to a team that people are trying to knock down from the top?

SEAN MILLER: Well, we were out to prove ourselves the last six or seven years. We had high goals, and at

times we fell short. Sometimes maybe by one shot, one game. Last year we had, I think, an early stretch of games where we weren't as good as we felt we needed to be, but we improved, and unfortunately you lose early in the tournament, it's almost like you look back and say, what did we accomplish.

But a year ago we accomplished a lot. I mean, winning both the conference tournament and regular season, you end your year with 27 wins, a lot of good things happened. So those types of teams, and we've had quite a few of them here in a row, we tried hard, but you're right, I think for us this year, it's about managing expectations and proving -- not making one game too big.

We're going to Maui in the month of November. It's an unbelievable field, and I think any team would be hard-pressed to leave there with one win. You think about our team and the inexperience, we have our hands full with that challenge.

But at the end of that Maui tournament, we'll be better, we'll know a lot more about ourselves, and if we're fortunate to get a couple of wins or a win, even better. I think it's all about managing that and making sure that we understand who we are and maybe what we can become.

Q. For the returning guys, what's their biggest motivation besides the early loss from last season going into this season? What are they teaching the younger guys coming in?

SEAN MILLER: Well, we're not ranked. We're not predicted to win anything. A lot of people don't think we're going to be very good. I don't need to tell our players that. They understand that.

We have to use that as our advantage. We have to be very consistent with our effort, our togetherness, and again, figure out what's going to make us successful.

Q. You guys are picked fourth in this thing here. Does that seem about right to you based on what you've got and what the other teams --

SEAN MILLER: I was surprised we were picked that high. I don't look at us as being the fourth best team in the Pac-12. I don't mean that in a negative light at all towards our group, but we've lost eight players from a year ago. So I think if you look at that, there's a lot of teams that have very good players and more experience returning.

Q. When did Justin Coleman get on campus, June, July?

SEAN MILLER: Middle of the summer.

Q. And he's a captain, right?

SEAN MILLER: Yes.

Q. What did he do in that short period of time to earn that?

SEAN MILLER: You know, I have never named a captain. It goes back to how I felt as a player. Sometimes the captain was predetermined by how old they are or maybe who they were in practice, but I think your best players inherently are your team's leaders. In college basketball, that might mean that one of your freshmen emerges as a leader.

I think for us, that's kind of how we've done it. In an effort to reestablish leadership and with that much change that we've gone through, we decided to name captains this year. Our players voted first and then our staff, so it was earned through everybody voting.

But I think what Justin Coleman brings to the table is a great mindset. He's been there. He's played at Alabama, gone through coaching change, has played in the SEC. He's had big games. He's scored in the high 20s at Arkansas, against Oregon. And then he was one of the leaders of his team a year ago at Samford. So I think to be able to have somebody like that who has been through so much and experienced, I think his teammates sense that, and he's come at a really good time.

Q. You guys have had touted big men. What does Chase Jeter bring to the table?

SEAN MILLER: Chase, first of all, is a very, very bright young man. He's maybe the best student we've ever had. He can do anything he wants in life. He's also that way in terms of responsibility, which makes him a great leader. I think he's one of the leaders of our team.

He'll start at the 5. Different than some of the guys you talked about, because Chase has a lot of gifts on defense. He's smart. He can move. He knows where to be. A ball screen defense is a big part of the game now, and he's as good of a guy moving in that area as we've had.

Offensively he will learn how to play off of others, but he might not be as adept of a scoring guy, but I definitely think he can be a double-figure scorer, but what makes him good is his versatility, the things he can do on defense.

Q. When people come to you and they're concerned, reading the headlines, fans of the program, what do you tell them, respond?

SEAN MILLER: You know, we have a lot to sell. Arizona has had great teams and players for 30-some

years. You start going through it, I'm embarrassed sometimes to name names because it's who you leave out that means more than maybe who you even talk about. We're here in Golden State and you have Andre Iguodala, you've got Steve Kerr, Tucson, we have a Red-Blue Game at noon on Sunday, a couple days from now. It's 15,000. It's sold out. We don't let anybody in free. Everybody has to pay for a ticket.

It's a great basketball town. You walk outside, you look up, it's blue sky and 75 degrees. We've got a world-class university. We've got a conference here that has had back-to-back No. 1 picks in the NBA Draft, and it's not a difficult sell.

Q. When do you anticipate having more to say than what you said in March?

SEAN MILLER: I don't know.

Q. When you talk about the guys who may make a big jump, the sophomores particularly coming back, could Brandon make a big leap as much as anybody? Have you seen that?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah.

Q. One of your go-to guys probably, or how would you characterize him?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, I think one of the big story lines for us if we're successful this year is we had a group of five players in Deandre's class, and a year ago everybody -- and rightfully so because of how special of a talent and player he was for us, you just think about him. But there were four others.

A year ago none of those four might have had a big role, but they all did have a role, and they were a part of our team and program. They were in practice every day, and I think they all return as sophomores -- Ira Lee, Alex Barcello, Brandon Randolph, and Emmanuel Akot. If you look at who they were when they were recruited, they were all very good, highly thought of players, but sometimes the biggest jump you can make in college sports is between your freshman and sophomore year, and we're really banking on that. And in a way that is our recruiting class to a degree, that how much of a jump can all four of those guys make in a bigger role. We need them to be good, and I know each one of the four has really worked hard.

The last player for us for me to talk about is Brandon Williams, and I think Brandon will be one of the best freshmen that plays in our conference. Plays both the 1 and the 2. He's got a 6'6" wingspan, 6'2", so he's a bigger guard, can really score, and very dynamic in the open court. I think we'll rely on him a lot, both in his play making and scoring ability, and I look at him as making a big impact.

Q. Do you think anything that could come out of New York could threaten your job at Arizona?

SEAN MILLER: I've answered that already.

Q. You said your projected top 4 finish was a bit high in your estimation. What would it take for Arizona to finish top 4 in your opinion?

SEAN MILLER: We have to be a real fun team to watch. We're not going to do it with one player. We're going to do it as a true group of eight or nine, and we have to be connected on offense and defense. I know those are words that a lot of coaches use.

It's not easy to establish. But if we are to have a very successful season, I think we will become a team that you admire how we share the ball. You admire our effort, and I'm sure we'll be in a lot of tough, close games, in particular even in the month of November where, when you welcome this many new faces and have that much change, you're very vulnerable early on.

Q. What kind of significance does the Red-Blue take on for you as a coach to see how all the guys do out there?

SEAN MILLER: We've always utilized that as kind of like a precursor to the beginning of our season because you can't simulate what it feels like to play in McKale. I talked to Alonso the other day, and he was talking about how special it is to play in the Madison Square Garden, and obviously Alonso is playing about as well as any rookie right now in the NBA, and he talked about the adjustment from McKale Center to the Garden and that the adjustment isn't nearly as significant for him.

I look at that. Obviously there's nothing that replicates Madison Square Garden, but from the college version, being able to play in front of our crowd, as passionate as they are, it prepares you well, and I think to get used to that, the Red-Blue experience, is something we always draw upon.

Q. The new guys and guys in some of the bigger roles, for you to evaluate them with fans around means a lot more -- the Red-Blue and the two exhibitions coming up?

SEAN MILLER: Sure, you learn who can handle it better than others, and the ones that don't, you hope that they will make their adjustment.

Q. Opposite questions offensively. You're used to sort of having a catalyst, but with all the athletes you have, can this be sort of an aggressive defensive team?

SEAN MILLER: I hope so. I really do. Being smaller

sometimes gives you more flexibility on defense. That's something that hasn't really worked to our advantage in the last several years where what you see is what you get.

When you have that many big guys, you have to put them in the best position to be successful. With more wings and guards out there, you can try different things and hopefully you'll see that.

Q. Has there been a common denominator among all your best defensive teams, something they all had in common?

SEAN MILLER: Usually there's one or two guys that rise to the challenge, and you know how you say he's the leader of the team, it's easy to depict he's the leader of their defense. Kadeem Allen was that, Kyle Fogg became that, Nick Johnson and T.J. McConnell, maybe we had three on one team with Aaron Gordon, T.J., Nick, maybe four, Rondae. It's those guys that really embrace it and have ability. Things are contagious. Unselfishness is contagious, selfishness can be contagious, but defense can be, as well, and we're trying to establish that right now.

Q. Any potential guys who have that potential on this team?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, it's yet to be -- I don't have the answer to that yet. Hopefully we will at some point. Among many good things that happened to us on the court last year, we never really came up with that defensive stopper. We had a lot of guys that I think tried their best, but if you really pinpoint who that person was, I don't know if it ever happened, and it's easier to establish.