

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## USF Bulls

**Amir Abdur-Rahim**

**Selton Miguel**

**Kobe Knox**

Postgame Press Conference



South Florida - 81, East Carolina - 59

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: For anybody who hasn't covered us before, we always start by giving God the glory, so to God be the glory. We're grateful and thankful for the opportunity to come out here and glorifying His name with our energy, our effort, how we approach every day. So to God be the glory.

But hats off to a really good East Carolina team. Playing two games in less than almost 24 hours, it's not an easy thing to do. I thought they played hard, they competed, as Coach Schwartz's teams will.

But I'm really proud of our group. To have our 18 assists, nine turnovers, I'll take it all day. Have less than 10 turnovers in a game, you're going to give yourselves an opportunity to win. I thought we did a great job of sharing the ball. I thought we had great connection defensively because to force 13 turnovers is a big deal. Really proud of these kids.

I just want to -- last thing I'll say is this. You're sitting up here and you're going to talk to two guys who deserve and who have earned everything they're getting right now, two of our hardest workers, two guys that have grown and persevered through so much, through people hating on 'em, saying they weren't good enough, saying they weren't this and they weren't that, and they just stayed working, they stayed trusting what we've asked them to do, and man, I'm just really proud of both of 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll start in the room with questions.

**Q. When you can go to your bench like that and count on reliable guys, how does that just change your team?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: That's a great question. I've said this, and I'm going to openly say this. Selton Miguel has been our MVP this year. He's been our most valuable guy because he's allowed us to bring him off the bench and not one time -- and I'm not making this up, not one time has he ever made it about himself. Not one time has he ever said, well, man, like, last year I had this, I had that, or, Coach, I'm averaging -- I'm leading us in scoring along with Youngblood. Like, he's just trusted what we've asked of him and gone from there.

But when you can go to your bench and you can bring guys in, and it doesn't matter who it is, whether it's Selton, whether it's Corey Walker, who was a starter tonight, but you're able to bring Kasean Pryor in, and he responded the way he responded tonight, it just gives you confidence as a coach to know, especially in a tournament setting, you're going to be able to keep fresh legs and you're going to be able to keep the same focus, energy, and effort that you need to win a game.

**Q. What was the message to the team coming off that loss to Tulsa going into the tournament, ending that loss, ending that win streak and everything there?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: I don't know if you've ever listened to it, but I would recommend anybody go listen to Chadwick Boseman's commencement speech at Howard, and toward the end of that speech, there was a part in there where he said, you'd rather find purpose than find a job. He said, because purpose, it crosses all disciplines.

So after that Tulsa loss, what we talked about as a group, as a team, we talked about having a purpose to everything we were going to do. When we went down to practice, having a purpose, because purpose, if we have a purpose, it's going to drive our energy, it's going to drive our effort,

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it's going to drive our attitude. So I thought these guys played with great purpose today.

**Q. What was it like to be able to go deep into your bench today and just bring out some of the fan favorite players, just for your fans that came in today?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: No, it's awesome. But again, just like Selton has been great all year and accepting his role and -- not even just accepting it, being a star in his role, it was -- man, I was so happy, the fact that the coaches and the rest of the league recognized him as most improved and Sixth Man of the Year, right?

But it was awesome to be able to play Danny Tobiloba and Nic Smith and those guys because these guys show up every day and Daniel probably hadn't played in 20-something games. Nic same thing. But they come to practice, they come to work every day with a great attitude. Nic is a guy that's on scout team every time. He's helping us prepare for it.

So for those guys to have an opportunity to play in an American Athletic Conference tournament, that's a big deal to them, definitely.

**Q. Right before the game, it was announced that you were up for Coach of the Year. What about this team has motivated you and pushed you to go out there and do what you do day-in and day-out?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: I would say the first thing, there's no such thing as Coach of the Year. First off, to God be the glory. To be recognized, it's awesome, but it's no such thing as Coach of the Year. It's a coaching staff that helps create the opportunity. My job is to make sure I manage my people the right way. It's humbling, but again, to God be the glory. All the praise is for Him.

**Q. When you win 15 in a row like that and you faced adverse situations beyond that, does winning become so habitual to you all that you just don't crumble in those moments, that you still maintain your confidence?**

KOBE KNOX: Yeah, I feel like just every day we focus on just keeping the same habits and just going, like, winning every single day as a team, coming in focused and going into each and every game prepared. So that's something big for us, is to make sure we're very prepared coming into the game, and I think the rest will take care of itself.

So, yeah, during that win streak, just coming into practice every single day doing the same thing with a good mindset.

SELTON MIGUEL: Just picking up on what he said, keeping the same habits every day, like coach mentioned, every day. Just trying to be a better players ourselves every day no matter what we've been going through. Come to practice with the same mindset, don't change, just keep being us, don't worry about who we're going to play next, just come doing the same thing every day. That's what make it's special.

**Q. We saw Corey Walker go out kind of early, went to the tunnel. Any update about his health or status?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: It's pending right now, but he'll be okay. We just wanted to -- our thing is this, as I've said before, I'm in the business of molding men, and part of that is making sure that they take care of themselves. We're never going to put a game in front of a player. So I think they told me at 10 minutes, hey, if you need him, he's ready. No, no, no, we're going to make sure Corey's okay because my first priority is the safety and care of my guys. Plus, I'm not trying to have Kathy Walker strangle. I'm not.

**Q. We saw a big turnout of Bulls Nation today here, so what does it mean to you guys to have this kind of support so far away from home?**

SELTON MIGUEL: It's been special this whole season. Especially right now we need that support. Last year we didn't have none of that. This year is really special for us because when they are here -- not just here, but when they're home too, it brings a different energy to us, just like you see today. They help us a lot. It's really big-time for us.

KOBE KNOX: Yeah, just the way that they travel for us, you know, come to Texas where a lot of these teams that we're playing against they're closer, so they have more fans to come. So just the love and support that they have been showing us the whole season, just it means a lot, especially for us to bring our own energy as a team and them to be here, it's an added bonus and we just love that.

**Q. Kobe, Coach alluded to it, 18 assists, nine turnovers. Y'all shot the ball very well. Y'all defended very well. Was this your most complete game of the year?**

KOBE KNOX: I mean, I don't really keep track of just like my complete games, but I feel like just leading up to this game, the whole season just -- guys just very confident in me and they know how hard I work. Selton's one of the main guys to tell me like, man, just keep shooting, just -- I mean, if the shots are falling or not they're falling, just keep shooting because he knows how much I prepare for these moments. So I think that just helps a lot for me as a player

just the confidence they have in me.

**Q. What about collectively as a team, most complete team effort?**

KOBE KNOX: I would say so, just putting together a full 40 minutes of just offense and defense, trusting each other. The 18 assists just shows the confidence we have in each other. So, yeah, I would say so.

**Q. Random question. What motivates you? You definitely talk as a motivator and that's been a big part of your view, but who motivates you?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: For the people that are here, you can turn around. There's two little girls sitting back there, a really pretty lady in a green jacket and a little boy in her arms. It starts there.

I was very fortunate, man, to have an awesome father, right? I'm very fortunate to have a really cool big brother, great big brother. Man, you're the best. And a bunch of great siblings. My sister, who lives in Little Rock, is sitting back there. So, for me, I've always had great examples of what leadership looks like. I have always had great examples of what a man should look like, a leader, a father, a husband.

So what motivates me -- again, I'm in the business of molding men, right? I know if the man grows, right -- they talked about habits, and I'm on 'em all the time because if their habits off the court don't match their habits on the court, man, you are never going -- there's always going to be some inconsistency somewhere. But I've been so fortunate to have great examples along the way. My parents, my siblings, even the coaches I worked for. Billy Kennedy was out there tonight, my college coach and who I worked for at A & M and at Murray state.

And so what motivates me is I just want them to have a great example of what a man looks like, what a leader looks like, what a husband, a father looks like. These guys, they have father's, I can never replace them, but they're around me every day, so I just want to be consistent. I never want to break that trust and that bond that we created. It drives me every day, you know, because I'll be honest, like, I've grown as a head coach, I promise you that. But, yeah, I don't want to break that trust. I want them to know they can trust me in whatever it is in any situation.

**Q. The two teams today have very different styles on offense. ECU scoring a lot in the paint, and USF being a very efficient team from three. How do you go about coaching in these clashes of style?**

AMIR ABDUR-RAHIM: For me, for us, I should say, people that ask me sometimes, what's your playing style. I don't necessarily have a playing style. Our playing style is built on player development. I want our players to have clarity and confidence. So in the summers, we work now, all right, we work, because it don't matter what our run, if we can't pass, shoot and dribble, it doesn't matter. So what allows us to play the way we play and be able to play any kind of style, and I say that humbly, is I think these guys are confident, they have clarity on what we want offensively. I very rarely, I'm not going to say ever, because Selton will look at me like I got two heads, I'm not going to say I never take 'em out for taking a shot, but it's very rarely I take 'em out for taking a shot because, again, I want 'em to play with confidence and clarity. If they're looking over their shoulder for like every time they shoot a shot, there's no way they can play with the confidence they play with.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Coach, thank you.

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