

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Florida Atlantic Owls

## John Jakus

## Matas Vokietaitis

## Devin Vanterpool

### Postgame Press Conference

Tulane - 83, Florida Atlantic - 76

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

JOHN JAKUS: Obviously incredibly disappointed because this means our run together is done. I couldn't be more thankful to the president, athletic director, Brian White, FAU in general, for the first year that they have given me. It's an incredibly great brand in the sport coming off the Final Four run and to participate in that brand means a lot to me.

I just want to say that in a time where people don't play freshmen, they're becoming less and less important, I think we have two of the best in our league and it's not even particularly close. Matas was Freshman of the Year, but Dev had his career high tonight. Matas had a double double.

Our whole pitch is that we're going to be a family, keep this thing going with retention, and there couldn't be two more people that we want back than these two. So we're incredibly thankful for their performance today and the year they gave us.

Then I want to say thank you to our seniors. I just think Ted has been such a wonderful gift to us from Brandon Weatherspoon and Todd Abernethy, our assistant. We've got a tradition with Mississippi in the Sip, and he's from there, and he's from such a wonderful family. His parents were -- just raised a great young man.

Then I want to I say same thing about Kyky Tandy. He's



been through a lot of ups and downs with his injuries, and him and our trainer, Joel, are best friends, but it's just so he could fight, and I thought he fought all the way to the end. He's been playing secretly with this thing for a while and just really proud of his strength.

Then Jack Johnson, our walk-on, the heart of the program. Not many people can say they have gone to a Final Four and registered a stat in a FAU uniform, and he's one of them.

So we love them deeply and we're sorry to see them go and we're looking forward to building this thing in the future real quickly here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Tough finish tonight. Only three points in the final four minutes there. What was Tulane able to do to slow things down for the offense over the final couple minutes?**

JOHN JAKUS: I said this before in our media sessions together. They get 50 percent of the credit, but we were up in the first half. In the last media of the first half, we had eight possessions. Only two of them had paint touches, and we had no assists, and I thought Leland hit this guy on a couple rolls and we were -- we took the lead by passing the basketball.

Then from that point on, we stopped. I don't believe you can give Tulane all the credit for that. I think that's a self-inflicted wound. We begged him down the stretch to continue to share, and I just think there was a point in these big moments where people want to make big plays, but the big play probably was to share the basketball.

Obviously, we couldn't keep them off the free-throw line and guard one-on-one, so that's part of it, but I thought the lack of passing had something to do with it.

**Q. You touched on it. You guys were in the game, obviously, a lot to the effort of these guys, Matas really early on and Devin in the second half there. Was that**

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**part of the game plan or was that just an unexpected outcome tonight?**

JOHN JAKUS: These two being there? I mean, Matas when he doesn't foul is part of our game plan all the time. Truth is is that if he stays on the floor -- he's a plus 11 tonight, and him on the floor minus the foul troubles I think we're probably in a different situation right now. I don't know that for sure, Tulane did a good job, but I would have liked to roll my dice and see what would have happened. Devin made this happen, and Dev has made this happen for the last three weeks. We went through a little spell there where people were struggling to guard the basketball one-on-one and what I would call just giving everything they have at all times, and Dev never seems to have that issue. He gives everything he has at all times, and he separated himself in the last week or so. We're incredibly proud of that.

So next year we're going to try to keep him on the floor for 30 minutes, and we're trying to keep Dev in the program and watch the leap that makes. So, so pleased to have both these guys with us as freshmen.

**Q. Devin, I want to ask, obviously this was a career game tonight for you. Outcome aside, what's it like to have this moment to give your best effort in the last game and battle through some struggles early in the year?**

DEVIN VANTERPOOL: At the end of the day I just like to win. I like to make winning plays, whatever plays I can make to win is mostly my focus. Just glad I was able to have a career night, we just weren't able to come out with the win.

**Q. Matas, could you just kind of reflect on your year a little bit, first year in the States, pretty successful freshman campaign, tough outcome tonight, but overall for you it was pretty successful, I would say.**

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: So, I think I grow a lot this year. Coach has helped me, my teammates help me. First part of season maybe was harder, but second part that was better. I think next year will be much, much better.

**Q. Was there -- obviously don't know portal and whatnot, was there any message to the locker room heading into next season at all?**

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, we took two 23-year-old seniors in Ken and KyKy, and everybody else we purposely recruited with the intention that they would come back. And some people think we're crazy for doing that, some think that's impossible in today's college basketball culture, but we

rolled the dice and I think we've separated ourselves with some player development. Tre didn't play last year, he was most improved player in the league. Look what Dev's done in the last six weeks. You look at Baba's growth from his transfer. Caleb. Nico didn't play any minutes at Illinois at all look at his growth. So we felt all along the one thing we do as well as anybody in the country is player development. And we're going to spend the next two weeks selling that as much as we can to keep these guys. And obviously NIL's going to be part of that, I'm not crazy, but I think they know how much we love them, and I think they want to be here. I asked for 48 hours so I can go see my wife, because we spent six months apart in order to build this thing. But after that 48 hours I'm going to sell the heck out of FAU to these guys, because if they stay, we're going to be just fine.

**Q. What do you feel like Tulane's going to need tomorrow to give itself a chance against Memphis?**

JOHN JAKUS: Oh, I think their coach can answer that. The three-point line probably helps. These tournament games, if you look at so called upsets, a lot of times you can look right there. So making the three will matter. Then the free-throw line will matter. If they can keep PJ off the line, they can get to the line like they did tonight -- we shot 24 and they shot 32. With the way the games have been refed so far I think the free-throw line is an option. So if Tulane can control that some they will be okay. Then they're going to have to control pace. Both are really good teams, both top 4 in our league, and I think it will be a great game.

**Q. I hate to ask, but has there been any change since we last talked about NIT or CBI with your mindset?**

JOHN JAKUS: We just finished this game. I thanked my AD, I was shaking their hand and they listened to my last speech with little tears in my eyes. I don't think we've talked business yet. So we'll have some dinner and maybe get to that tomorrow. But for now I just want to spend some time with our guys before we go back. So thank you.

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