

American Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena At The BJCC

Florida Atlantic Owls

Coach John Jakus

Kanaan Carlyle

Niccolo Moretti

Postgame Press Conference



Florida Atlantic 63, Temple 59

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida Atlantic head coach John Jakus. We have Kanaan Carlyle and Niccolo Moretti.

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, first of all, all wins in March are good wins, so we're thankful for that. Going to move on pretty quickly from it.

Up 11, three to go, I don't think we handled the last couple minutes very well, but there was a run right before that that was really meaningful. I thought Kanaan's two assists to Nicco's two threes provided some juice for us and some separation.

Offensively that was just enough in a battle of teams with low assists. They had four; we had seven. We had a couple more, and I thought those two were the biggest ones.

Our defense traveled so that's a great thing in a tournament like this. To hold them to 38 percent from the field and 20 from three, that's an incredible positive.

For us, hopefully our defense will carry us through the tournament and then we'll create some more shots and cut down on the turnovers.

More than anything we are thankful, and just think Nicco and Kanaan Kanaan were special, and an unsung hero is Xander who is a plus 17 when he's on the floor. Probably deserve to play more, and that is good for us because we are going to need depth to go five games in five days.

So we'll probably look at that overnight, but pretty special

run for us and I'm just thankful for the win.

Q. Nicco, there was a moment throughout the moment stretch, a few moments where the momentum could have gone either way. What was your key to keeping composure and staying calm?

NICCOLO MORETTI: We have been in this type of situation a lot this year, and we had a six-game loss streak and about three, four because we didn't handle late-game situation well.

We got to do a better job off turnovers. We got a couple late from us, too. 17 total turnovers is a lot, so we got to clean that up against tomorrow a team like North Texas, very good defensively, very handsy.

But keeping your composure, making your free throws at the end. I think Xander won us the game with those two and defense will carry us a long way.

Q. Kanaan, I wonder what you were trying to accomplish there in the last 15 seconds defensively. That's happening, there's no time-out, it's just going. What were you focused on trying to get done defensively to make that last stop?

KANAAN CARLYLE: Just talk, we got to be able to stop them when they're coming back down for the last shot. Just continue to talk, let people know where we are and force them to take a bad shot and get a rebound.

Q. Coach, generally speaking, was your defensive game plan today generally what you switched to in the second half of the game that you played two or three weeks ago against Temple?

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, we probably got closer to that. We came out the second half against them and went on a run to kind of separate the game at home.

Some of our decisions were similar on the that last possession. We hadn't been switching one to five, but we did and we got the deflection off the knee so that was one

little adjustment.

For the most part our ball screen coverage changed a little, but then we went back to the one we used most often last game against Temple at home.

The one thing at this time of year is you cannot give a good basketball team with good guards the same ball screen coverage for 40 minutes. Eventually the coach and the guard with pick on it.

So we tried to hide a couple coverages, but we took a lot from the last home game. We did a better job specifically against Gavin. He torched us home. His threes were unmistakable and these guys switched him down and took his action away today. The fact that they were two of ten from three was probably our biggest growth from that game to this one.

Q. Congrats on the win tonight. Had a big second half performance from Nicco Moretti, especially on defense with Josiah forcing that last turnover from Temple. What are your thoughts on how this performance helped you guys persevere in the first round of the conference tournament tonight?

NICCOLO MORETTI: Yeah, just using momentum. This is the third part of our season and we started 0-0 and today we're 1-0. They gave us momentum to play North Texas. They haven't played yet and we have a feel of the court, so we have a little bit advantage here. Those things matter and we're going to keep it.

Q. Coach, Devin Vanterpool was absent but he's making strides, progress, recovery for his injury. How is he looking tomorrow night against North Texas if his health is improving day by day?

JOHN JAKUS: He'll remain cautionable. The reality is tonight we're doing treatment. These guys are taking an ice bath, whether they like it or not. They're going to see our trainer, Joel. So much of what you got to do to survive five days, especially the two at 8:00, and then they turn around and make you play at 2:00 in the afternoon, which isn't ideal.

So how we handle our bodies the next two days is going to be really important. Dev will be part of that. If he wakes up and Joel says we'll warm him up, we'll try to warmup. My guess is the next step is a possible warmup and a decision after that. I wouldn't even know until game time. We'll look at him tonight.

We didn't think it was even worth the attempt to warm up today, so my guess is he's probably another day or two

away. But we're going to keep doing the best we can to take care of him, love him and if she's ready we'll use him and if not, we'll roll with what we got.

Q. Hey, Coach. Obviously the ball went to Xander there in that last possession. Was that by design? After the ups and downs he went through, for him to hit those last two free throws and ice the game, is that a moment you're proud of as a coach to see him persevere through his struggles earlier in the year?

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, it actually was a design. We call it small even though he's 6'11". We went with Joe and Xander at the four and five instead of D Will.

Defensively Joe would be in more switching situations at the five. That ended up working out because he's the one who got the deflection off the knee. And then offensively it puts them in a position where these two and Xander I think are the three best free throw shooters on our team, so Nicco was hot from three. Three of three; Seven of nine from the field.

So the option was initially Nicco and the Xander was our safety. Xander is a good free throw shooter. I trusted him to be the safety, and ended up being a good call. But more than anything I'm proud of the way he stuck with it.

There was about a couple weeks there, maybe a six-game stretch that was really hard on him. We got him back. He's been positive, and I would say the stretches of time he played defense without fouling -- I love the kid and I'm really proud of him.

Q. Was there a moment tonight when you realized you would have to rely on Nicco as a scorer rather than kind of a disher tonight?

JOHN JAKUS: We went back and forth. I thought K hit the first couple of shots in the first half. Any time Kanaan gets shots or more, it's been pretty good for us. He had 11 tonight.

In the ball screen they just went heavy two on the ball in the second half. I think they wanted our five to beat them instead of our guards.

Kanaan hit Nicco on the fill one time and then we turned right back around and ran a set where Nicco ended up on the fill again, and Kanaan was smart enough to do that without a time-out.

So the two back to back tag reads ended up in Nicco's hand. The first one he made on his own; the second one He earned some love from the bench and we set it up.

But those were two of the biggest plays of the game, both the assists. Kanaan's intelligence and then Nicco stepping up I thought were fantastic.

Q. Any thoughts on North Texas coming up?

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, we're going to look to be solid, I would say. Rest our legs. Understand that they're probably the best defense overall in our league. It's going to be tough to score, but choose our times when to run.

And then for sure we lost the battle when it came to fouling.

We got a technical. Isaiah Elohim got out of the game early. We're going to have to keep our heads. As long as we keep our heads and follow the game plan, we'll have a chance. We'll dig into that tonight.

We know them as well as anybody. Obviously Josiah and Demond's brother is on their staff, so we watch as much North Texas basketball as anybody. It's not going to be about who knows who better. We know each other well. It's going to be who the toughest team is and who I just for one night. Tomorrow is that deal and we're looking far to it. We're thankful for it. It's March.

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