

American Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena At The BJCC

Florida Atlantic Owls

Coach John Jakus

Isaiah Elohim

Postgame Press Conference

North Texas 74, Florida Atlantic 70

THE MODERATOR: We are joined on the podium by head coach John Jakus and Isaiah Elohim.

JOHN JAKUS: I want to congratulate North Texas. They did a good job. I thought if you told me we held them to 39% from the field and 25% from three that we would have been in a great position.

I thought our defense traveled again both yesterday and today. The 27 free throws was a big differentiator. At the same time, I would say the bigger differentiator was transition the points. They were a plus 11 there.

They were able for a team that really slows it down to really run it down our throat, and I thought that was a really big deal. Stevenson was comfortable. You can't let the best player get off.

And then lastly I would say there some moments where they were just the tougher team on the glass. You have to compliment that. Toughness is really important this time of year and they all the bit of that.

I am disappointed just in the sense of like there was a point when we were healthy, 6-1, really thriving, and we've been handling injuries for quite some time. I just thought a healthier version of us would have gotten or deserved a little bit more than this.

So I'm sad for our guys more than anything. If you look at the top three or four teams they had the same starting lineup and the same top eight the whole year long, and we have not had that.

In some regard I'm sad for my guys. In other regards I want to just say how proud of them I am just because the



constant fight. We probably lost a handful of games by three points or less and it defined our season.

When injuries and close games end up defining your season, the heart of who your kids are don't get to show as much. They deserve more. Isaiah Elohim is one of them that deserves more. 20 points today; eight rebounds. What he's been since our injury bug hit right about the Memphis game at Memphis has been incredible.

I think just one of the special kids I've ever got to coach. And he's not the only one. Kanaan was out there today basically with a separated shoulder playing the whole time. I don't know that we get through the season. No one is healthy right now 100%. Our guys, some of them, just gave everything they could just so we could have a close version of who we could be.

I'm hoping for retention but more than anything I'm hoping on Sunday for a chance to play again in a post-season tournament. I know it won't be the NCAA but I'm hoping to continue going.

Q. Obviously it was a valiant effort in the second half trying to make the big plays on both sides of the ball. Some went in, some didn't. What are your thoughts about how competitive this team was down the stretch, even though it didn't end up working in the end tonight?

JOHN JAKUS: I thought the first media we were everything we wanted to be, and then we kind of hit a wall. We were lucky to close out the first half with some juice and get it close enough to where we felt like we were in striking distance.

We went zone, some because of their shooting percentage, but some because at certain point, 22 free throws in the first half, if they're going to call the game a certain way, we have to adjust.

We didn't want them to win the game at the free-throw line. We wanted them to win it from having to take shots. So that zone stretch really helped us.

Then we went back to our man, which to be honest was good. It's been really good for us. Last game we held Temple -- it was one of our best defensive performances.

The ability to go through those runs, there were positives, like you were saying. I just don't think it was sustained enough, and then we have these odd moment where we cut it to 2 or 4 and we end up just giving up a transition thing.

I think the turnovers that led to transitions just were painful. Every time we seemed to figure something out, just one of those popped us in the worst way.

Q. Isaiah, obviously finished with 20 points and eight rebounds. With Kanaan having an off night with the injury he was dealing with, you stepped up to the plate on offense. What are your thoughts on how you were able to make your shots and keep the teams within a close margin against the Mean Green.

ISAIAH ELOHIM: Well, I just tried to do like everything that I could to help us win. I thought we had some dry spots on offense, so I tried the best I could to try to score and keep the game close.

It didn't really lead to a win, so there's just things I have to get better at and there's obviously some things I have to look into when we look at film and everything, but it was an extremely valiant team effort with all the injuries we have.

I'm supremely proud of my guys and proud that Jakus is my coach. He gave me a second chance, so I'm very thankful.

Q. Coach, I know you briefly mentioned retention there at the start. The last two seasons, your first two go rounds with the portal and all that. It was a tough go bringing guys back. How will some of those conversations go in terms of trying to retain guys like Isaiah and Kanaan and Devin and so on?

JOHN JAKUS: We're going to give it a crack. I think we'll get some back. I want to thank Dev and Nicco and Amar and Max and Liam. A lot of people say we struggle with retention. That might be true. We lose guys that make more money some place else that may be our whole budget.

I understand that's part of the new dynamic of the sport. I'm not going to complain about that, but I'm not going to be a victim about it, either. We had five guys say yes. I think we're going to have more than five guys say yes this time around, and I think we are going to have some of the

starters say yes this time around.

I think we'll be pleased with that, but right now we're going to mourn this because we're going to miss this season. I think our president and athletic director have stepped up in a couple ways, and we've had some donors and businesses in the area do the same.

I'm incredibly hopeful, but I'm not going to compare last moments with this one. I think this team has a pretty special dynamic, and my guess is we're going to have more than five back.

Q. Isaiah, you had a very big jump from last year to this year, USC to a full time starting job with FAU. You've made a lot of strides in your game on both sides of the ball. What are some things that you're looking into, whether or not you get full season play to help yourself get better while trying to help the team get better as a whole for the future?

ISAIAH ELOHIM: I think just my motor on both sides of the ball. It can be inconsistent at times. As far as defensively, just being more present and help side and stuff like that, being more present in gaps. I can ultimately be a plus defensively.

And then offensively, there is just some things that I got to tweak, like free throws or off-the-dribble threes. Other than that, the grand scheme, it's more defensive stuff for sure.

Q. And Coach, back-to-back winning seasons -- despite the loss tonight, back-to-back winning seasons, and whether or not you get a post-season bid to the NIT and such, what are some things you can do to bolster the roster and the personnel on the coaching staff as well to give yourselves a stronger chance at what you can be next season and beyond?

JOHN JAKUS: I think the first thing is probably retention. The second thing is we had 7% of our scoring back; We were 350th in Division I experience. For two years we had the freshman of the year back to back. We had the most improved player. Last year it was Trey; this year it was Dev Vanterpool.

I would just say that those are probably the two awards that have something to do with player development, and we won those players back to back.

So when you ask a question about my staff, I'm going to tell you my staff has done nothing but absolutely kill it.

Isaiah, what did you average? He's averaging 13 to 15; almost 17 in the last month. When you go from what guys

were to what they become when they're with us, I would say we're one of the best player development staffs in the country. There's a reason people pay a lot of money to steal our guys.

The second thing I'm going to say is when it comes to being critiqued for the portal and all that, we're going to get there, okay? And I'm not going to tell you how we're going to get there, but we have a plan. I'm just telling you, we're going to have more retention than we did last year.

I don't think there's anybody who would look at us and say if we were able to bring those guys back that we don't know what it means to find some talent. Trey was First-Team All Big East. We love him. Baba, First-Team All Big 12. We love him. Matas, one of the most improved players in the SEC. I could keep going on.

So when it comes to the ability to find talent and make it better when everybody else overlooked it I think we're as good as anybody. But I know your question is fair and it resounds around how long can we keep them? And I'm just going to say with all my heart we're going to do our best. I'm telling you, there are some people that are going to help. Just give us six weeks, but right now I want to see if we can play again, all right?

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