

# National Invitation Tournament: Seton Hall vs Georgia

Monday, April 1, 2024  
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA  
Hinkle Fieldhouse

**Georgia Bulldogs**

**Mike White**

**Noah Thomasson**

**Russell Tchewa**

Semi Finals Pregame Press Conference



**side at this time of year, has that been something that's been discussed among the team?**

NOAH THOMASSON: We've been watching the March Madness basketball and stuff, so we know how many team are playing now, you know, and NIT. We obviously know. It's a blessing, man. That's my first time in five years of college, play in the tournament, so it's a blessing.

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Yeah, our freshman year, postseason got canceled because of COVID. So now in our fifth year, our last year, a chance to be playing in postseason, is a blessing.

**Q. Your thoughts on just Hinkle Fieldhouse as an historic venue and being able to have kind of a unique postseason experience in a 100-year-old basketball arena with a lot of history?**

NOAH THOMASSON: Yeah, I haven't been familiar with the story of this gym and stuff. But after today, I'm going to be able to go and search a little bit more about the story.

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Hinkle Fieldhouse is very historical. I think 20 years from now when I have children that are playing, I can look back, and say I've played at a lot of different big-time arenas being in the SEC, and now Hinkle Fieldhouse. It's been a great ride, and I can't wait to play a game there.

**Q. You hit on this a few minutes ago, the fact that this run has extended y'all's college careers. Just what's that experience like, knowing that y'all are still playing and got a chance to play in Hinkle Fieldhouse now?**

RUSSELL TCHEWA: You know, it's great. I knew that after Florida, we had -- I felt like we had some time left. I didn't want to jinx our team. But you know, an opportunity to keep playing with my teammates, my brothers. This is a family. I'm going to remember this for the rest of my life. I'm glad I made this decision and I wouldn't have picked any other way if I had to do it all over again.

NOAH THOMASSON: Yeah, I think this year has been my

MIKE WHITE: Pleasure to be here. Honor to be here to reap the University of Georgia. Historic event, and historic venue, obviously. Special contemplation. Really proud of the run that these guys have made. Proud to be a part of it. No one more important obviously to what we are doing than these two guys. Finished strong, playing the best basketball of their careers. We are playing the best basketball of the season. Five of the last seven, these last three have been really impressive with the way that we've played.

So trying to take advantage of every opportunity we can get and we are appreciative of this opportunity. So happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: First question for the players. Talk about what it's like to have this extra time with your team, you're one of only eight teams playing right now. What does that mean to you guys and how much have you enjoyed being the only team here that's had to really go on the road and win some big games?

NOAH THOMASSON: Russell I think it has been good for us, for the foundation and for the year we had this year, and for the commitment of all the players. I think this was a great opportunity for us.

RUSSELL TCHEWA: It's been fun. I mean, you can just look at our culture. There's no guys that opted out of the NIT. We just wanted to play, have a good time. We really love each other. I say it all the time. So an opportunity to keep playing with these guys, and especially for me and Russ, our last year, it's been a blessing.

**Q. To follow up on that a little bit, would you all talk about, there are eight teams left playing on the men's**



best basketball college career year. So I'm just embracing it. I give everything I have. We're going to focus about this game today, and you know, get a W.

**Q. I know you were battling a little bit of an illness last week. How are you feeling, and what was it like to be watching from the sidelines more than you have been most of the season?**

NOAH THOMASSON: It was good. I know my -- I mean, all my teammates, they are just being ready when their name are called. It was good to see my teammates, especially Frank, respond to his name. So I'm really happy for him.

So it's been good all year.

**Q. You mentioned that you guys have been watching March Madness, and you guys were beating Alabama by 13 points with 11 minutes left and you had a double-digit lead on Tennessee, an Elite 8 team. How far is Georgia Basketball from being one of those NCAA Tournament team, and has that gone through your mind watching Alabama and Tennessee thinking, yeah, you had those teams beat?**

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Yeah, we laugh about it all the time. I think that even though this is our first year here, I think we've seen a change in Georgia Basketball. And it's going to keep growing, even when we're not here. I think that was the main goal, of us coming here and help build something that's bigger than us.

I hope coach White and the rest of the staff keeps making those strides to bring Georgia back to where it needs to be and not just be a football school. We can be an every-sport school. That's the main goal.

NOAH THOMASSON: Obviously I'm not surprised about all the ACC teams in March Madness and stuff. I'm just really, really cost about Georgia Basketball's future.

**Q. This is your first season at Georgia but you are the older guys on the team. What's it been like seeing the younger guys develop this year? I know you guys are on a really deep rotation, a lot of freshmen, and what advice have you been giving them of what to take away from this March run?**

NOAH THOMASSON: It's been great. We have a lot of good players, young players and stuff. Also for our kind of point of view, it's been a good thing to lead by example. So showing the other men how it looks like, just respond the way we've been coached. It's a way for them to learn and grow.

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Right when I got here in June with Silas and Blue, being guards like myself, the biggest thing is showing them what it looks like to come to work every day and do the little things, being on time, getting reps after practice.

In this tournament, like I said, this is my first time playing in the postseason as well. So I try not to say too much because I haven't been here. But leading by example is the main thing. Coach White says run through that wall, and I meet him on the other side. That's what it needs to be like for the whole team. Just trying to show that every single day.

I know when I'm not going to be here and I'm done playing college basketball, George is going to be in good hands. I'm proud of them.

**Q. Noah, following up on Blue and Silas just a little bit, I remember down in Birmingham from Media Days, you talk about taking both those guys under your wings, so to speak. Elaborate a little bit more on the progress they made in Birmingham to where they are right now getting ready to play a game tomorrow.**

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Just their confidence. Every day, I said it in Birmingham, but I'm going to say it again, they are freshmen, but they carry themselves like juniors and seniors. They are big-time players and they keep making big-time plays for us and they helped us a lot throughout this whole season.

**Q. Noah, I'll ask this to you specifically but I've seen a lot of sarcasm and stuff about the NIT. I saw somebody referred to it as the NCT, the Nobody Cares Tournament. Obviously that's not the case with you guys, but there's like seven, eight teams or so that declined. What would you say to those teams right now or what is your feeling about that? Because obviously you guys are taking this really serious?**

RUSSELL TCHEWA: I'm not going to say anything to those teams. All I can worry about is Georgia Basketball. So Coach White said there's a chance we can play again, our focus got to whoever we play, let's get ready to get a win.

For me that's another chance to keep playing college basketball and more eyes on my career after here. I was blessed that we were a team that we were going to play in it, and I'm happy and we played many memories throughout this whole tournament. Now the goal is to try to win it.

**Q. Just wanted to ask you guys about how you have grown, even just in the short time of the NIT and the postseason compared to, obviously, in the regular season. It seems like you guys have talked about playing your best basketball and all that kind of stuff. How have you grown as a team in just this short postseason?**

NOAH THOMASSON: I think it's a good thing. Just to see hour teammates, our brothers, practice again for a few more days. You know, know that this is our last tournament and we are going to be away from each other. We are never going to have the same thing back, ever.

So just think about this, and be able to, you know, play again, practice again with our brothers and coaching staff is such a blessing. We are not going to get this back and we just give everything we have there.

RUSSELL TCHEWA: Like Russ said, you know, a chance to play with these guys again, play for coach White again, it's been a blessing. We won't be in this locker room again so we might as well make the most out of it and try to win the NIT Championship.

So that's been the main goal, the main focus. We just take it one game at a time. We have to get through Seton Hall tomorrow and figure out who we play for Thursday. Just trying to take it one game at a time.

**Q. I know your focus is on your upcoming match tomorrow, but big picture with the rules only allowing certain practice times, how much does this opportunity to extend your season assist in preparing for next year, the bond, the connection, the development of your team?**

MIKE WHITE: You know, in today's landscape, it's uncertain. Based on, obviously, what happens in the spring with our roster and every other roster in our league. And you could go, we can talk about that for a long time. I'm more focused on just trying to help these guys, a couple of these guys here, Noah, Russ, RJ, guys who have exhausted their fourth-year eligibility. We have four fourth year juniors that have options this spring of course and we have some freshmen and some other third-year guys.

This is about this current team more so than anything. You know, extra credit meeting building for the future, but I appreciate these guys' comments about the future of Georgia Basketball and we'll get there and we can talk about that next week.

I would like to see this team just continue to play well. They are playing their best basketball of the season. I love

being with these guys. I love working with these guys. I'm proud of our development, especially, over the last month just trying to help these guys finish strong.

**Q. Frank's extended minutes have seemed to pay off the last couple games. Is it a balance now to work Russell back in, and can you update us on Jabri as well?**

MIKE WHITE: Jabri, day-to-day. Sunny, same way. Frank has played really well, and in some of our bigger wins this year, he's been on the court. Every Day Frank is what we call him. He had a great practice yesterday I would bet he has a great practice today. That's who he is. He works. He has got great energy, and he really played well the other day is why we continue to call his number and why he continued to earn the right to stay on the floor.

So we'll evaluate it in realtime tomorrow night, but Frank will certainly continue to get opportunity.

**Q. I asked Noah and Russ about this tournament run, the fact that it's kept their seasons, their college careers alive. What's that meant to you to see the run this team has made, especially those older guys continuing to get to play?**

MIKE WHITE: It's been awesome. And I don't -- you know, for the past month, I mean, this team has played, has been super, super competitive. There's not a lot of teams in the country that regardless of the circumstances, could do what we have done. You know, there's obviously a few and a couple of those teams are still playing in the other tournament.

But the way that these guys have performed, we lost -- we have won five of the last seven. We lost at Auburn. They have as good a home-court advantage as anybody in the country, of course. Played Florida to a one-possession game in the last minute of the game, and have won five against five really good teams.

So let's keep playing, right. Let keep playing. It speaks to the character of our guys. Also the basketball character, their relationships with one another. They want to continue to fight for one another, and you know, we're playing loose and we're having fun.

But they also want to continue to prolong the season. It's also very unique for us, in addition, because this is an incredibly long season. When you consider the fact that this team started in June to prepare for a foreign tour in Italy, this has been a 10-month season for these guys, which to me speaks further to the fact that Noah Thomasson and Russ Tchewa like each other and want to

continue to prolong this thing as long as possible; like playing at Georgia, like representing the G, and like building. But also going back to this current team, want to see where this thing can finish.

So we are honored to play. Seton Hall had a really strong argument to play in that other tournament and these other teams did, as well. We won at Wake. It's hard, hard, hard to win at Wake Forest. We won at Ohio State. Really hard to win there. The numbers speak for themselves. This team has had a heck of a month.

**Q. I asked Russ and Noah a few minutes ago about watching Alabama and Tennessee, two teams that Georgia led in the second half, but what has this team done in the tournament now, whereas you were not able to close out those games against Elite 8 or Final Four teams that you were beating for 30, 35 minutes?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, a couple that we all wish, at least most of us, that you could have back at the end of every season. You know, but especially as you watch a couple of those teams make runs in the NCAA Tournament. We talked about it all year; the fact that we are just a lot more competitive than they were a year ago, even though we only have a few more wins.

We had chances to beat some high-level teams to complement the high-level wins that we've gotten. I think down the stretch, we have played with a little bit more confidence offensively. Found a little bit more rhythm. A little bit more role identification offensively. More mentally tougher and resilient to finish. I don't think that there's just one area that you can point at that's a major improvement from a couple of those losses.

That said, another big factor of why we lost to a couple of those teams is because they are really, really good. The SEC are really, really good, and we just weren't quite good enough on those nights to beat those teams. But we have been lately.

**Q. You mentioned winning at Wake and Ohio State. You also had some success on the road during the regular season. That game at Florida State, I remember you saying after that game, "This could mean something down the road." How did those experiences help you against Wake and Ohio State?**

MIKE WHITE: Well, I think it continues to show our guys and hopefully infuse confidence in the fact that we are very capable and we've got a lot of momentum. These other teams have momentum, too. Seton Hall has got momentum.

But we've played in some tough environments and we have played neutral court environments in the past. We've played on the road in the SEC, which is as difficult as any league in the country.

And here we are with another great opportunity against a team who is really good and they will be very prepared and had a great year. But we are going to have fun with it. As Noah talked about and Russ confirmed, we are just seeing where this thing will take us, and we're trying to finish as strong as we can.

**Q. You keep talking about how you guys are playing your best basketball. Why is that, do you think, at this point? And April 2nd is the latest the Bulldogs have ever played into the calendar year as a program. Can you speak to the significance of that?**

MIKE WHITE: Sure. I talked about it earlier but the fact that we're still playing and playing on April 2nd and potentially April 4, depending obviously on how we play.

When you complement that with the fact that we started in June, it's really incredible. It's as long as a basketball season can possibly last, right. It's going to be ten months and a few days regardless of what happens this week.

So again, I think it speaks to the character of our guys; the fact that down the stretch, although it maybe took eight and a half months, better late than never, for it to come together a little bit in terms of that extra level of, again, mental toughness, resilience, what have you. Just playing really well. We've just kind of gotten incrementally better throughout the year, through ups, through downs, through some winning streaks, some losing streaks.

But our guys have stayed the course. Great practice team. Best practice team I've ever coached. I've said it all year, and it's the same deal. I'm still saying it ten months in. We'll have a really good practice today. We've played a grueling schedule. We played a lot of really good teams. We are building, and you know, we're anxious for another opportunity against another high-level team tomorrow.

The first part of your question, did I dodge that or did I answer it? Okay.

**Q. You mentioned the strength of the SEC. You've obviously played a lot of those teams close, teams that made the tournament, and you hear those guys talk about the future of this program. Just how close do you feel like Georgia is to being on that kind of a level?**

MIKE WHITE: I mean, we're really close. I think anyone in this tournament is very close, especially the teams who are

sitting here now in Indianapolis. I mean, the way that we've played, again, in the past month, if we played that way all year, we would have been in the other tournament.

Again if you look at what Ohio State has done at home and what Wake Forest has done at home, and the team Xavier has been all season, and with the SEC wins late that we got, we are playing like an NCAA Tournament team right now.

Unfortunately you've got to do that all year to get in the other tournament and you've got other factors that are involved with your quad one and quad two opportunities and how you take advantage and your computer numbers and all those things.

We have -- we talk about growth in our program as much as anything. Growth on the court, growth off the court, playing your best basketball season late in the season, becoming your best version, maxing out. It's all the same stuff, right, in each program phrases those type things in different ways. Those are usually the words we go to the most.

But if it comes down to growth and that's where your focus is, process-driven, as opposed to results-driven and getting better throughout the year, I'm proud of what this team has accomplished, really proud. Because today, we are a very good basketball team, and who knows what that means for next year. We are going to finish as strong as we can.

But, hopefully it gives us a little bit of momentum to be this version, you know, for longer stretches during next season and the following season and moving forward.

**Q. What jumps out about Seton Hall from watching them on tape and, what kind of factors will determine whether you win in terms of the matchup?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, they remind me of a couple teams in our league that really sit down with discipline and physicality on the defensive end. The positioning is high, high level. Texas A&M comes to mind. Tennessee comes to mind. We've got some really good defenses in our league. Mississippi State.

But tough, physical, again, sound, committed to the defensive end. Really protect the paint at a high level. High percentage of steals. Really high level percentage level, excuse me, of blocked shots and altered shots. Force to you make jumpshots. We've got to make jumpshots, of course. Mix being defenses. Their zone has been effective. They have got good guard play. They have got good length. They are very, very good.

**Q. Just wondering, a lot of the coaches and the teams that opted out of this thing said they did it because they needed to work on their roster. I'm just wondering how you guys have been able to do that? Have you been able to build on your roster, make any transactions while you multi-tasked getting ready for this next game and getting ready for next year?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, we are all multi-tasking. We've been very active with recruiting throughout this. But we are throughout the year. Obviously when the portal opens, it really ramps up a little bit. We've had some Zooms. We've had some phone calls.

But we would be remiss if we didn't continue pouring into this team, and again, finish as strong as we possibly can finish, and really give to these guys. We owe Noah and Russ and RJ, these guys came here with one year to play to try to do something special, and they found a way to get that NIT invite and continue to find ways to prolong this season.

So we are balancing it best we can, and we'll continue to do that this week.

**Q. What challenges does Kadary present as a 6-6 point guard who can post up? You know a pro player when you see him. Do you think he's got NBA potential?**

MIKE WHITE: Oh, tough one there. You know, I'm not scouting for that league, but you know, Seton Hall has a few guys that are going to play basketball for a long time; I'll say that. He's very, very talented. He's got great tempo, pace, to his game. Got a little burst that's deceptive. Great hands. Really good feel.

There's a few guys like that in our league that have the ability, but not many, I should say a couple to a few, that could bring it up versus pressure and also can post up guys their own size. So he's a really versatile guy that complements the pieces around him.

They are very hard to score on, but they are equally as difficult to defend.

**Q. Obviously it would take 40 minutes on Tuesday to get it done, but what would it mean for this program if you guys advance to the Championship Game, something Georgia has never done before?**

MIKE WHITE: Well, it was great to make the NIT. It was great to win the first one. It's been -- it's like every tournament process like every one. You say, boy, it's great to get here. It's great to be in the NIT Final Four and play

in Hinkle and play against a team the calibre of Seton Hall. Just continue to give these guys lifelong memories. Continue to enhance our brand as a men's basketball program at Georgia and give our guys a chance to compete for a championship.

Right now we have done a really good job of staying in the moment. Again, our focus today is having a great practice. You guys are sick of me saying that all year, I'm sure. If not, you should be, because I'm sick of hearing myself say it.

But that's what it is. It's having a great one today. Having a great film session tonight. Having a great first-four minute segment tomorrow against Seton Hall and trying to get some A shots against their stingy defense, hopefully converting, spring back in transition, trying to get some stops and slow these guys down.

Hopefully we are in a position mid-second half where we're within striking distance to capitalize, to finish, and then we'll worry about postgame when we get there.

**Q. You've been coaching in the NIT for a while. You had these great runs at Louisiana Tech. How does that experience impact how you approach a tournament like this one?**

MIKE WHITE: The experiences of competing in the NIT as often as I've had the opportunity to do so, probably has taught me to relay to our guys what we just talked about in the last question. You know, just being in the moment. Just enjoying it. Being appreciative. Playing with gratitude and joy. Playing for one another. Prolonging with thing.

But it cannot be about -- because I think at times, going back to maybe some earlier questions, and this is something that our local people that do a really good job of covering us could probably talk about.

I think at times in the middle of the year, when you're lacking the amount of quad one opportunities or quad -- and you've got a big -- you've gotten ten coming who is ranked this and you find yourself a double-digit lead, and all of a sudden, it can become very result-driven. I thought at times a little bit during the year, we played a little bit tight offensively when we had chances to win those games and capitalize.

We played a little bit too much in terms of guys looking at the scoreboard, and this shot's bigger than the last shot because this one's got to go in or we're not -- and it can't be that way. You know, unless you play like that all the time, and not many teams have success doing that. This team is playing loose. They are having fun. If we had

played as loose as we're playing offensively, maybe in a couple of these other games at home when you're playing with that sizable lead, it could have been a little bit different.

We found what's working for this team, especially this time of year, and we're playing well.

You have another 20 seconds can I say something else?

So my brother-in-law, he texted me, his name is Paul Chappell. He texted me and thought it would enhance our chances for success tomorrow night if I just relayed the fact that he's fired up that we're in Hinkle, and he wants the world to know, he was the 1998 Bulldog Free Throw Shooting Camp Champ. So Paul Chappell, Free Throw Shooting Champ at Butler Basketball Camp. Thank you, guys.

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