

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

**Saint Francis U Red Flash**

**Coach Rob Krimmel**

**Valentino Pinedo**

**Juan Cranford Jr.**

**Riley Parker**

Media Conference



Alabama State 70, Saint Francis 68

THE MODERATOR: Coach, your thoughts on an outstanding basketball game.

ROB KRIMMEL: First of all, congratulations to Tony and Alabama State. They're one of the hottest teams in the country, I think now 12 out of 13. What a basketball game.

Again, if you were coming through Dayton, and I've said this a couple times now in some press conferences, if you were coming through Dayton and just looking for a college basketball game and you happened to stop in here, two teams that left it all out on the court.

I've said this to our guys, and sometimes because we've experienced it, there's a fine line between winning and losing. But the margin, the emotional gap is huge.

These guys for 34 games left it all out on the court for us. These three guys that are with me were our All-Conference performers and performed extremely well on a big stage.

My dad, he has a saying that the two worst days of the year are the day after Christmas and the day after vacation. We've talked about this being -- this run that we've been on, like a vacation, trying to extend a vacation. Vacations are fun, especially when you're with people that you care about and that you love. So this is that day after vacation feeling that my dad had always talked about.

I know that they're disappointed. That's the thing that I love about them. They're champions, and nothing can take that away from our group.

They played some close games, and so has Alabama State. I think they're one of the teams in the country that has played the most close games, and they've certainly won their fair share.

But what these guys have done for Saint Francis basketball, what these guys have done for our community, they don't know, nor should they. But they left their mark on Saint Francis basketball and the tradition that goes all the way back to the '50s, '60s, '70s, and that '91 team that set the standard for modern success, and these guys are part of that group.

Couldn't be more proud of them. We left it all out there, and unfortunately today we were two points short.

**Q. Can you guys take us through the run of this team, first time in 34 years? It's got to be quite a feeling.**

VALENTINO PINEDO: Well, obviously at the start of the season we didn't start as good, but we came together, pushed through every game, got better as a team, and just played as a team and not tried to get stats or play individually or whatever.

I think that's what's special about this team. We just play together the whole year, and we managed to push through a lot of games, and obviously winning our championship to come here. We came up short, but I couldn't be more proud of this team.

JUAN CRANFORD JR: Yeah, I wouldn't want to do this with any other team. I love this group. This group is one of the best groups I've ever been with, including coaching staffs. It was fun. It was a good journey. Learned a lot. Learned a lot of lessons, and we learned from it, and we made them work.

It was a journey for us, and I'm very grateful for this opportunity.

RILEY PARKER: Yeah, just to piggyback off what the boys said, this is a great team and a locker room full of great people, and that's what Coach Krimmel told us when they recruited us that Saint Francis is a community full of good people, and it really is. Our team shows that. We



gave it everything we got the whole time, and I'm very proud of my team.

**Q. You saw the community support in the Selection Show. You could see a lot of Red Flash T-shirts in the crowd today. How important was that community support throughout this entire run and especially these last couple days?**

RILEY PARKER: The community is everything to us. We would not be here without them. Their support is phenomenal, and I just want to thank them so much because we would not be here without every single one of those people. Thank you, Red Flash family.

JUAN CRANFORD JR: Yeah, what he said. Big shout-out to the community, man. They play a part, and big, in all sports, and they show. Home games is crazy. I love playing at home. It's a great feeling. The support and love that they show is just out the roof.

VALENTINO PINEDO: Picking up on what they said, shout-out especially to our band and cheer. I think we've got the best band in the conference. So just the fact that we're able to just see them every time we go out there in our home games, they're a big part of the reason we also won our NEC championship (indiscernible), so big shout out to them, too.

**Q. Juan, to have this type of performance in your hometown with this team, what does that mean for you?**

JUAN CRANFORD JR: Everything, man. I couldn't ask for anything else better than this. This is a dream for me, especially being here at home where I grew up. This is a great opportunity for me and experience.

I honestly wouldn't want anything else but this.

**Q. Can you guys talk about the last two weeks you guys played in enough close games to fill an entire season in the last two weeks. Just talk about that, the last two weeks of the season.**

JUAN CRANFORD JR: Last two weeks of the season been pretty fun for me. Just in those close games, just learning from where we messed up at, and coming to the next game and trying to figure out what we can do better. We proved that we can do that, and it showed game by game we started to figure it out. It come easy for us.

VALENTINO PINEDO: Picking up on what he said, we just came together and figured out how to win those close games. We got on like a hot streak going. It was just like

playing together pretty much.

RILEY PARKER: Yeah, we had a lot of fun. Just like Coach said, we wanted to extend the vacation because vacations are fun and we just wanted to keep having fun. These past two weeks have been absolutely amazing. It's a time we're probably going to remember for the rest of our lives and we're probably going to share photos to our kids. I experienced it with a great group of people.

**Q. What did you see on that last play? I saw you flattened at the end there. Take us through that last play, what you can remember.**

JUAN CRANFORD JR: All I remember is the ball being in the air, honestly. I thought we had it, came down, ball got tipped, then all of a sudden they come up with the lay-up.

It was crazy what happened. I thought we had the possession. We turned the ball over too many times, honestly. We turned the ball over that many times, you can't expect to come out with a good outcome.

VALENTINO PINEDO: I was obviously on the inbound play so I wasn't really over there, so seeing that from a distance hurt a lot for me, just not really being able to, like, impact as much on that possession. That really hurt me.

**Q. This is for Juan and Riley. In the second half you guys got a little bit cold shooting-wise. That last minute there you guys hit a couple key shots to even the score up again. What changed? Did you guys have any talk late? What changed that allowed you guys to get back in the game in the final minutes?**

JUAN CRANFORD JR: Nothing really changed for us. Just having that confidence in yourself and your teammates, you can make that shot, the next shot is going to go in even if you're not hitting. I go for eight, I'm still going to shoot the ball. The mindset is going to be the same. Just got to take our time and come out with the outcome.

RILEY PARKER: Yeah, exactly what Juan said. Just trust your work and have confidence in yourself. And shooters shoot, so just keep shooting the ball. And we shoot those shots every single day, so just keep trusting it.

**Q. The second half, really the key turnovers in the second half, can you assess what you saw in that stretch?**

ROB KRIMMEL: Yeah, that was -- we talked about that going into halftime. At that point I think they had 15 points off of their turnovers. We had nine turnovers and then



gave up 15 points. Almost half of their points were off of turnovers. It was an emphasis going into the second half.

Coming into the game we knew that was something they were very good at, turning people over. But when you look at the box score and they had 22 more shot attempts than we did, a lot of that turnovers. And then I think the second thing that hurt us in that stretch, offensive rebounds.

When you're turning the ball over, not getting a shot at your basket and then giving them second and third opportunities, it becomes very difficult to either extend the lead or just keep the game close.

In spite of those turnovers or despite those turnovers, we were able to have the ball and a chance to win the game at the end, but that was a huge key. You look at the final box score, 26 of their points came off our turnovers.

**Q. Coach, a minute and 36 left, you call a time-out and you're down by four. What's your message to the team in that moment?**

ROB KRIMMEL: We've been here before. We needed to make a play. We decided to get the ball, and at that point Juan and Val, get them to connect and come up with some points, and fortunately we did. And then at that point it was a game situation that we've been in quite a bit here in the last couple of weeks, and unfortunately we were two points short.

**Q. Rob, you talked about the '91 team and how they had set the bar. How did this team set the bar, raise it, and what will you remember from this group and just the legacy that they set here at Saint Francis?**

ROB KRIMMEL: It's a special group, especially in the landscape of college basketball right now. To bring in six new faces and then have two of your more experienced returning guys get hurt, one before the season and one four games in, says a lot about those guys in that locker room.

To be able to create a camaraderie and a chemistry so quickly was a big part of us taking a step as a program.

There weren't guys out there trying to get their numbers. I heard one of the guys say it; it was genuinely -- they were pulling for each other, and they wanted the success to come as a group and not as a bunch of individuals.

I think that's probably what makes it so special right now because we've had some talented teams in my 13 years that have been close and have come close to that championship moment. But these guys, they're going to be

forever remembered as the Northeast Conference champions, and no one can take that away from them.

As much as this hurts right now, 10, 15, 20 years from now, or maybe 10, 15, 20 months from now, they'll be able to reflect on a really special season. I couldn't be more proud as their head coach, the way they respond to everything we gave them, both on and off the court.

I told them, they were so much fun to watch, whether it was in a hotel, in practice, in a game, wherever we were. They made my job easy because it was a joy every time this group got together.

Then to compete with people like that is a lot of fun.

**Q. Coach, I know we talked before about the young, youthfulness of this team. Can you talk about, with this underclassmen-filled roster, how they grew in a setting like this and overall during the season?**

ROB KRIMMEL: Yeah, once you get to January, the old you're no longer freshmen anymore. We had one in particular, obviously, that was Rookie of the Year. Then I think Jeremy Clayville was All-Rookie for us, also.

The youth, I think, early on hurt us a little bit, especially in late games because we didn't have maybe a go-to guy or they didn't have the experience of understanding how to have that composure that I've talked about a little bit here.

But then over the course of January and February, because those guys were truly together, I think the strength in numbers -- we were able to overcome some youthful moments, and I think you talk about the young guys, but there was a lot of older guys that were reaching down to try to help out.

Justin and Ace were out, but there were times in practice or even in games where they were trying to encourage these guys or even pick them up. Guys that have been through it, trying to help those young guys along. And that's the makeup of a really good team, and that's why they were such a joy to be around, because they genuinely wanted to help each other.

**Q. With so many young guys on the roster, how do you make this not just a Cinderella run but maybe something the program can sustain for years to come now?**

ROB KRIMMEL: Each new year, and when we wake up tomorrow, the new year starts. But we've challenged these guys, and I've always talked about progress and wanting to get a little bit better each day.



The big thing for this group is to continue to set the bar high, is to continue to demand greatness from each other. Now that the season is over, you can't resort back or maybe get complacent, become lazy in certain areas.

They're student-athletes, so we get back, they've got to get to class. They've missed quite a bit of school here in the last couple weeks, so they've got to get back and get their heads in their books and make sure they're great in that arena. And then after a couple weeks off, we've got to come back and raise the bar. Those moments will come.

It's a great starting point. Listen, don't -- you can't underestimate the power of a win or the power of success because people want to be around that. They want to be a part of that. That foundation in the locker room combined with success, I think progress is a part of it.

**Q. Much has been made about Loretto being in the middle of Nowheresville, Pennsylvania. Do you feel now Loretto is on the map, and what's your message to the community?**

ROB KRIMMEL: I told our guys they put Loretto, Pennsylvania, on the map. I think in today's social media world, maybe the '91 team, they had a ton of success and they were really, really good. The talent that they had on that roster, Coach Baron coached them up, and they had some really good players. But with some of the publicity that we got, Loretto, Pennsylvania, is now known by a lot of people.

The area, Blair and Cambria County, there's so much passion for Saint Francis. There really is. We're nestled between Pitt and Penn State, the two giants in Pennsylvania, equal distance from each other. If you're going between the two, Loretto is a stop on the way.

I told our guys, they put Loretto on the map. They put Saint Francis University on the map. When you start talking about basketball and being able to retell the Maurice Stokes story, being able to talk about Kevin Porter, Norm Van Lier, it's a special place.

It's been home for me for over half my life, for 30 years. What makes things great, organizations, they're the people. There's no secret to that. All the craziness in the world, what makes things special are people. Saint Francis embraces that in the community. Blair and Cambria County, they certainly are in that category, as well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

