

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

Xavier Musketeers
Coach Sean Miller
Marcus Foster
Zach Freemantle
Ryan Conwell

Media Conference

Xavier 86, Texas 80

THE MODERATOR: Coach, your team's performance tonight and being able to advance in the field of 64?

SEAN MILLER: Well, my initial thoughts are that's one of the greatest games I've been a part of. Obviously the energy of the crowd, our fans certainly took advantage of the proximity to Cincinnati. And that emotion when we needed them, it was certainly a factor in the game. I think all three of these guys would tell you that we certainly felt it, really appreciated it.

Look, I thought we beat an excellent Texas team. They are disciplined. They have depth and talent. Johnson, we knew he was going to be a tall order to guard him, and it was. He had 23 points for no lack of effort on our part.

We knew we beat a really good team from the SEC, and we knew going into the game it was going to be a great challenge.

I'm just so proud of these three and our team. There were just times in the game where it didn't feel like it was going to go our way, but I'll just stick with resilience. It's the badge of this group. Right when you think you're going to count us out, we win. Right when you think things aren't going to go well, we have found a way. I think that's a great characteristic in any NCAA Tournament, and we certainly have that.

Q. All three of you, what it felt like out there, if it almost felt like you were in Cincinnati? It was pretty electric.



MARCUS FOSTER: Yeah, it pretty much felt like a home game. Like Coach Miller said, we needed everybody to pop out for us to pull that win because that was a great Texas team. A very hard-fought victory. And I'm just proud of our guys and Coach and the staff for believing in us and just willing us to a win, basically.

RYAN CONWELL: Yeah, first and foremost, I want to give all glory to God, just to be able to play just in a special game like this. Just thank you to our fans just for the atmosphere. Like Marcus said, it just felt like a home game, and just a game to remember. I'm glad we got the job done.

ZACH FREEMANTLE: Yeah, shout out to Xavier Nation. They came out, supported us great tonight. They were loud. We felt their energy the whole night, and it's very much appreciated.

Q. Zach, you waited all this time to play in an NCAA Tournament game. Could you script a better storybook ending than dunking in the ball as time is running out?

ZACH FREEMANTLE: Storybook, maybe not. Obviously we would have liked to maybe win by a little more. But any win we can get is a great thing. It was a very-hard fought game. That's a very good team we just played, and I'm just thankful to be a part of it.

Q. Marcus, what went into your second-half performance individually and then as a team, it kind of flipped things there?

MARCUS FOSTER: Really, my teammates just found me in the open spots, and I was just confident in my shot, and I just shot it and it went in today. That's a good day. We needed that performance for us to pull out the victory.

And like I said, I'm glad my teammates were confident in me. I know Z-Free, RC, they found me a couple times. So I was able to get some clean looks. And that's what we need. We need players to step up during these times and pull out wins.

Q. For Zach and Ryan, you both battled foul trouble,

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obviously, in that first half. What does it say about your ability to play through the foul trouble, still play with emotion, play tight defense in a game like that?

ZACH FREEMANTLE: Yeah, I mean, we just tried to not let it affect us. You've got to play the game the way you're going to play the game. If they're going to call fouls, then it is what it is. But if you let a couple fouls make you play soft or back up or whatever, you're going to end up giving up points, losing the game. So we've just got to keep fighting through it.

RYAN CONWELL: Like Free said, you can only control what you can control. Just going out there, trusting that my teammates got my back and that my coaches will put me in the right position to succeed on the court despite the fouls, and that's what we did today.

Q. In the first half, they scored 26 of their 41 points at the rim. What changed in the second half? I'm sure foul trouble might have contributed a little bit to that, but what changed in the second half? What adjustments did you make to stop that?

MARCUS FOSTER: I would just say our defensive intensity, getting more deflections, focusing on getting kills at halftime. We only had one kill and not enough deflections. We're a 30-deflection team every night. And when we get deflections, it's hard to beat us.

So we really just locked in on that. We understood that we really didn't have much of a problem on offense but a problem on defense. And once we addressed that, things started to go our way.

ZACH FREEMANTLE: Yeah, just like Marcus said, yeah. I kind of lost my train of thought.

Q. What was different about the defense --

ZACH FREEMANTLE: Oh, yeah, my bad. We were really a lot more of a tight group. We made a big emphasis at halftime to get in the gaps, get in the paint. They are a much more attack-the-basket type of team. So we had to clog the lane on them, and we did a good job of doing that, trusting each other.

Q. Marcus and Ryan, what y'all did to hold Tre down, did you feel like you frustrated him?

MARCUS FOSTER: With a player like that, it's pretty hard to stop him. The biggest thing you can do is make every catch tough. Every time he catches it, you've got to smother him and make him uncomfortable. And that's what we tried to do. He's a great player, so he still ended

the game with 23 points.

The most important thing is getting the victory, and that's what we did. That's what we tried to focus on, more so Texas as opposed to just him.

Q. Marcus, I know it was a team effort against Tre Johnson tonight, but when you're guarding a great player like that individually, did it kind of spark the challenge side of yourself offensively and get you going on that end, too?

MARCUS FOSTER: Yeah, most definitely. I look at myself as a competitor and a two-way player. So just being able to have the opportunity to go against young, fresh talent who has an opportunity to get drafted, it was exciting to me, and it made me want to play even harder and even better and wanting to compete more on the other end as opposed to just having to guard him.

I feel like this atmosphere and the competition brought out the best in me, and I'm thankful for that.

Q. Sean, a couple things. Marcus Foster, his threes in the second half, how big those were. And just the crowd. This was a neutral site game, but I wonder how much that may have been work to keep y'all in it when you were down 10 or 12?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, the thing about the tournament, I've been in it a number of times. I was at Arizona one time, and ironically we played the winner of the game that we were just in, and we played it in Providence, Rhode Island.

If you get a map out, that was definitely not to our advantage, flying from Tucson, Arizona, to Providence, Rhode Island, and then playing Fred VanVleet and Baker and Wichita State, like, wow, it didn't feel like they were the last four in, either. You've just got to keep getting in the tournament. Sometimes you get a good bounce.

The second thing that happens in this tournament is individual players, they rise to the challenge. Marcus Foster is a very important player for us, but he hasn't been our leading scorer very often. Tonight if he doesn't rise to the challenge and go 4 for 5 from three or 8 for 9 from the floor, it might not matter how close we were to Cincinnati; I don't know if we'd win.

So we had a number of players rise to the challenge. I thought we kept fighting through the game, and no doubt about it, the energy of the crowd helped us.

Q. You hadn't trailed at halftime since the loss to Creighton in Omaha. What's it say about the



resiliency, and like you mentioned with rising to that challenge, that your team was able to go into the locker room like that and pull out a victory in the second half?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, we've been more of a first half team this year, we really have. I don't think it's that we don't play as hard in the second half. I think there are a couple teams in our league, in the Big East, that they're incredibly quick and deep. St. John's comes to mind, Marquette comes to mind. And I think at times in those games we might have worn down in the second half.

I thought tonight we did not wear down. If anything, maybe we had a wearing-down effect, especially with the way the crowd was against Texas. But it was great to see us be down at halftime and respond because we've really been more of a team this season where we had to hold our lead and get to the end.

Q. Given how they were scoring in the first half, where did you think the scoring was going to need to come from for you guys to rally, and how much of it did you look to Foster or the guys on the bench?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, the gentleman behind you asked these guys a question about the field goals they had at halftime from two. It was incredible. We had a very difficult time defending them in the first half. They were at the basket. They were in the paint. They drew fouls.

We were tighter defensively. We were more help-oriented. I thought we did a better job of adjusting on the ball, like in other words, the guy on the ball didn't get beat as often as he would have in the first half.

We went through an awkward segment in the first half where two of our best players, they were sitting at two and three fouls, Freemantle and Conwell. And when you're a player in the tournament and you're in foul trouble, it can mess everything up. I thought we were tentative because of that on defense.

I'll also say this about Texas: Chendall Weaver is really a unique player, and as we started to scout them, nothing made sense to me because you're watching games and you're trying to get information, and he didn't play for a long time. Just watching him play in the SEC tournament, when he checked in the game tonight in the first half, the game flipped upside down.

At halftime, I think he had three steals, and he was 3 for 3 from the field himself. He pushed the pace. I thought like the surge really happened because of him.

But with Weaver, I think Texas is a better team. I really do. He's really an instrumental player. I know they played most of the season without him. We knew if he would play tonight, and lo and behold he played 30 minutes, I thought they posed some different challenges against us that, quite frankly, the SEC didn't have to deal with when they played Texas this year.

A great example was Ryan Conwell was 4 for 7 from the field. A lot of that was because of Weaver. He is an amazing defender. I think Texas probably feels that way that I'm describing, hey, we had a really important player miss most of the year. Getting him back, I think it makes our victory even better because I think Texas is an overall better team with Weaver.

Q. Sean, you've coached several games in this building and won here, but is this as good as this building has ever treated you? I don't know if it surprised you at all or not or if it was even louder than you thought?

SEAN MILLER: It was an amazing atmosphere and environment. Amazing. It was a great win for us. One of the best that I've been involved with.

I'm going to date myself, but I think it was 1993, I was an assistant at Miami, and we came in this building and played Arizona, ironically. Damon Stoudamire and I have talked about this numerous times. Again, they had to fly all the way from Arizona. Sometimes the tournament like this does that.

But that win here and then this win tonight are certainly two of the best moments in sports that I've had. I'm so proud of our team, and I thought that a couple times Texas really had us on the ropes tonight, but we hung in there and fought through it, and I think that makes the victory even sweeter.

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