

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

Miami (Ohio) Redhawks

Coach Travis Steele

Eian Elmer

Luke Skaljac

Media Conference



Miami (Ohio) 89, SMU 79

TRAVIS STEELE: Number one, really appreciated all the Miami fans showing out tonight. In a lot of ways, it was a home game for us. It's such a unique opportunity to come watch an NCAA Tournament game. We're only 50 minutes away from campus, so very, very appreciative of that.

But again, listen, we have great players. I've been saying this the whole year, but we have better human beings. Our guys play for one another, play the right way. I think we finished with 20 assists, four turnovers on the game. My goal was to get up at least 40 threes. We shot 41 threes. And I felt like if we could just neutralize them on the glass -- because they are so big and they're athletic and they're tough, I thought we'd give ourselves a really good opportunity to come away with a win, which we ended up being even on the glass 35-35.

The message I gave our guys before the game was they should leave no doubt with who the more attacking team was, and I thought that was very evident from the jump ball all the way to the end of the game. Very proud of our guys, but obviously there's a lot to be done yet.

Q. Obviously you guys were very confident you belonged here, but for anyone who was watching you guys that had maybe not seen you a lot, do you think you proved to people tonight whether there was any doubt you belonged?

LUKE SKALJAC: Yeah, I would agree with that. I mean, we know we're not focused on that type of stuff, what the media and fans and stuff have to say. We know who we have inside the locker room. It was more just proving it to ourselves that we belong, which we believed all the way.

EIAN ELMER: Yeah, piggybacking off what he said, we're not really focused on proving whether we belong honestly. Everybody in the locker room thinks we do. Everybody in Oxford thinks we do. I just think if anything we're just going to go out there, play our hardest and have fun.

Q. Why are you guys so unafraid to shoot the ball at any moment, at any time? Where does that come from?

EIAN ELMER: It definitely comes from our coaches. They instill confidence in us, and it definitely flows through each and every person on our team. They don't take us out for shooting bad shots, and we are good enough players to know what a bad and a good shot is.

LUKE SKALJAC: Yeah, I feel like it's just kind of the work we put in through the off-season, through practices and stuff like that. So when we're in these moments, we're not second-guessing ourselves. We're ready for it.

Q. Eian, a couple dunks in Dayton. You've played with Taft in the state Finals and then you ended up throwing down a dunk here to carry Miami. It's a full circle moment. Can you relate that?

EIAN ELMER: Yeah, it was definitely a great feeling. Coach drew up the play, wanted me to put an exclamation point on our game. I'm thankful for that. I have a lot of people that came here to support, so it was a good feeling to do that in front of them.

Q. The play in the first half I think ended up being your thousandth career point, but Luke knocked it away, Antoine threw it away, Suder bounced it down. What did you see on that play and the passing sequence that led to your lay-up?

LUKE SKALJAC: That's like some March Magic. I don't even know how Eian made that. That was insane. He kind of just threw it back in. But yeah, that was crazy.

EIAN ELMER: Yeah, I don't know how I made it either. I was expecting a lob. Peter was running full speed so I was just trailing. He made an amazing pass, and I got lucky, honestly.



Q. They had a size advantage, at least on paper going in. What was the strategy to negate that, and how do you feel you were able to accomplish that as the game wore on?

EIAN ELMER: For us, we battle size with toughness. I think Peter really set the tone early in the game. He was getting almost every rebound it felt like, a lot of rebounds and everybody else just followed. That just comes from not being afraid to hit.

Q. Eian, what could have been a frustrating night dealing with fouls, you came right back in after you had four fouls, came in and hit a big three when your team needed it and had a couple other baskets. Just how you kept yourself focused in the game and were ready for the moment a second time?

EIAN ELMER: That comes from my coaches. Everybody sees I sit by the coaches when I'm on the sideline. They just tell me things I need to do and things to see. Coach K, Coach Steele, Coach Holmes, all our coaches, they kept coming up to me telling me just stay in the game, I'll be all right. They just kept instilling confidence in me that when I go in I'll make a big play.

Q. For both of you, when you hit a big-time three on such a national stage and you hear the arena around you explode, what goes through your mind? How does that feel?

EIAN ELMER: It's a great feeling. It's something you dream of as a kid, playing in March, playing for something -- it's do or die, so emotions are very high. When you get to go out and make a big play, honestly, it's what you work for.

LUKE SKALJAC: Yeah, it's just something honestly you dream of, making big shots in March. That's what every kid dreams of that loves basketball. Obviously we had a ton of big-time threes today, so that was really cool.

Q. Had a big lead there late, 13 points, then they go on a little run, looked like they were closing the gap. You were able to hold them off. What was the mindset as they were making that run? How were you able to fend that off?

LUKE SKALJAC: I would just say we said we've just got to stay together, finish these last four or five minutes, whatever it was when they went on than run. They're a good team obviously, they've got really good players, but we knew that we were the more together strong team. We just had to outlast that run.

EIAN ELMER: What he said, but also playing to win. In those moments you don't win by playing with scared money. You've got to go out there and continue what you're doing. I think we just continued to be the aggressor.

Q. You've been around basketball your whole life. You've seen March. You've watched it. But to have lived through this now in the last two hours, does March mean a little something different to you now than it did two and a half hours ago?

TRAVIS STEELE: You know, ever since you're a little kid growing up in the state of Indiana, man, this is everything. It's the best month of the year. You watch all the games. I've said this before, hopefully the teachers allowed you to watch it at school. My mom would keep me home sometimes, I'd ask her. Not saying you should do that, for the parents out there. But my mom would keep me at home so I could watch all the games.

But it's something you dream of being a part of. What an incredible atmosphere. I told our guys when we had the opportunity to come here, this is the best atmosphere NCAA Tournament wise that I've ever been a part of. When I was at Xavier back in 2014, we played NC State here in the First Four. The memories you guys will have with this, it'll be an electric place, and that's what it was tonight.

Listen, our group is uber, uber confident, uber confident. We know we belong. I told our guys afterwards, man, I'm happy, but the job is not finished. We want to continue to advance in this thing.

But again, love March. Again, I'm happy for our guys that they're able to experience it. And our staff, man, it's all about them.

Q. Travis, yesterday in the pregame presser, I asked you if you felt like this was important for mid major basketball and you felt like you understood that you had the weight of the world of mid major basketball on your back. What do you hope this accomplishes?

TRAVIS STEELE: I think it just shows there's a lot of good teams out there. I mean, we had to basically be perfect in the whole regular season to get an at-large. But yet we're going to go win a game tonight, and we can advance far into the tournament. I would say that the reason people love March Madness is they love to see, quote-unquote, upsets. This wasn't an upset tonight at all, but people are going to say that it was. That's what the outside world is going to say.

And listen, there's a lot of good teams. Belmont was phenomenal this year. They lost in their conference tournament. They can win games. I have a ton of respect for Casey Alexander. Or UNC Wilmington. It goes on and on. Those teams can compete with anybody, but they don't get the opportunities in the regular season quite honestly to put them in a position to where they can get an at-large bid, and that's the challenge.

Hopefully it shows, hey, listen, we're just as good as any of these other P5s or P6s that are going .500 in their leagues or whatever out there. There's some really good mid major teams. Really good.

Q. Building off of that, the MAC specifically, now it's a two bid league. You talk about the success Akron has had a the last couple of years, you guys are doing what you're doing. What does it say about the MAC specifically and what's possible in this league?

TRAVIS STEELE: I think the depth of the MAC. Man, obviously Akron is in the tournament as well. I don't know if they play tomorrow, whenever they play Texas Tech. But man, that game versus Toledo could have went either way in the championship game, now. Todd Kowalczyk is as good of a coach as there is in America. Not the MAC conference, in America.

Ron Senderoff, the consistency that they've had at Kent State. Jeff Boals, Tom Simon. George Halcovage has rebuilt Buffalo. Frank Martin in our league. There's a ton of good coaches and great players.

I think there's a lot of parity in our league. There is a ton of parity, and hopefully it just shows how good the MAC conference is.

Q. Coach, your team looked like the aggressors all night. Even from the opening whistle they were playing with their hair on fire. What was the message to them in the locker room before you came out tonight?

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, listen, just push your chips all in. Attack. We deserved the moment. Our guys deserved to be in this position. They've earned that right. The hay was in the barn. We prepared the right way over the last couple days. Just go attack, man.

I felt like we were the better team going into the game, and I think our guys have that real belief. And I've said that a lot, that's the most powerful thing you can have is belief. And our guys always feel like we're going to win.

Q. Coach, Suder tonight, tough night shooting, but

seven rebounds, six assists. He played more minutes than anybody. What about him, and then there was a shot -- he might have airballed that three and you just slapped his hand as he's going by there. Why so much trust in him no matter how things are going, and why did you show him that love at that moment?

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, number one, I trust Peter. I love him unconditionally. He only plays to win. There's no agendas with him. There's none. No hollow stats, nothing. He's just an animal. He just plays to win. He had 7.7 rebounds, six assists tonight, and he had an off-night shooting and he still dominated the game.

Comes out, cramps, throw him back in there, he's going to finish the game. He's just an absolute warrior. He's everything that college basketball should be about. But in that moment he obviously missed a three right in front of me and he was frustrated. It was a great look.

But again, just want to touch him just to make sure that he understands listen, got to go next play. That you still believe in guys even though maybe your shot is off. A lot of times players will attach their whole game to are they making shots, are they not making shots. I think just as little encouragements, and we track what we call touches, throughout practices and games just helps guys go, refocus, and go to the next play.

Q. Coach, I thought tonight was one of your better rebounding games of the season as well as guarding the paint. What went into that game plan?

TRAVIS STEELE: Obviously we got our tail kicked against UMass on the glass in the MAC tournament. We gave up 24 second-chance points and it was a one-possession game at the very end. So you can say that we've done a lot of physicality drills since then and now.

Because we knew, hey, listen, we were probably going to play an SMU-type of team that was going to be big, athletic, strong. And Andy Enfield's teams do a great job of rebounding the ball, so we made a huge point of emphasis, you just got to hit. And then on the other end, we send all five to the offensive glass. We got 12 offensive rebounds, I think we scored 17 second-chance points which were critical points for us.

Sometimes those are the most efficient baskets you can get are off offensive rebounds. But to neutralize SMU, man, which is very difficult to do on the glass and our guys, I thought, just battled in there, played hard.

Q. Travis, the way Eian Elmer stepped up tonight but he's done that several times, he's hit big shots for you

in games this year that have sent you into overtime wins, just the way he rises up?

TRAVIS STEELE: Eian is a winner. He won in high school, when he was at Taft High School, won a state championship in this arena you mentioned earlier. He just wins. He impacts the game in every facet. He's a lot like Peter. He defends, he rebounds, he cuts, he can drive, he can shoot. He can assist. He's gotten so much better, and I'm so proud of him for keeping his head tonight because he only played 24 minutes, I believe. Yeah, almost 24 minutes, a little under, because all the foul trouble he had.

He never lost his focus, his concentration, even when I was sitting over there. Man, that just shows how mature he is.

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