

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Stetson vs UConn

Friday, March 22, 2024

Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Dan Hurley**

**Tristen Newton**

**Donovan Clingan**

Media Conference

UConn 91, Stetson 52

**DAN HURLEY:** Obviously love the start. It's exactly how you want to start a game like this where -- you're in March Madness. You know the history of these No. 1s or high seeds and just we took away all hope in that game from them early on with the defense, with the offense, with the relentlessness. So I thought pretty good first performance.

**Q. It looked early in the start that Coach was talking about, you guys had the lob pass any time you wanted it. Was that kind of the plan coming in to establish that and then work off that?**

**TRISTEN NEWTON:** I mean, you know, coaches do a great job of putting us in positions to make plays for others, and Coach gives me the freedom to make the read and he gives me a lot of options. So there's either a drift, a lob, or, you know, somebody will be open. You know, Coach told us just play our offense and we'll bring down the defense. So that's what we did.

And the lob was open early and throughout the whole game, so just read what's going on. We have two great lob finishers in Donovan and Samson and just make the read off the screen.

**Q. Last year playing behind Adama gave you a little different perspective going into the tournament, now with more of a larger role expected from you. How much did that experience prep you for this season, and, Tristen, can you follow up on what you've seen from him in how last year has helped him out?**



**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** Yeah, he prepared me for everything, the way that we battle against each other every day in practice and how hard he plays, and just watching him on the floor and seeing the role that I have to step into when he came off the floor, you know. So just playing behind him and seeing how dominant he was and everything that works for him definitely helped me coming into today, coming into this tournament.

Just realizing that Adama was very dominant last year and led us throughout the tournament. So I'm just trying to carry on that role of being as dominant as I can, as impactful as I can, and just trying to help my team win.

**TRISTEN NEWTON:** Donovan has grown in so many aspects of the game. He's a great leader for us and he dominates the paint and plays great defense. So the role that Adama had last year definitely helped him out, and he stepped up big this year and that's what we need throughout the whole tournament.

**Q. Does it feel different taking the court as defending champions this year, as opposed to last year?**

**TRISTEN NEWTON:** I wouldn't say so. Last year -- I mean, we go into every game expecting to win. So I don't think coming from last year winning the whole thing, it feels any different. It's a win-or-go-home game every season, so to me personally it feels the same.

**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** I felt like we just attacked it like a regular game and just trying to go out there and beat our opponent. Obviously we know what's on the line. It's win-or-go-home. But, you know, we really don't think about, you know, just what happened last year. We're really just trying to achieve a new goal of this year with this team and, you know, really just trying to attack it one game at a time.

**Q. For either of you guys, what has stood out to you about Castle and just how he's obviously a highly-rated freshman, and just how he's seamlessly fit with you guys this year?**

**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** I feel like his toughness and his



willingness to stop the other team's best player. He really just wants to guard at a high level. And in the locker room today he came in at halftime and said I'm just trying to hold this guy to zero.

He's just such a unique player in the way that he guards, how tall and strong he is. And on the offensive end, he's setting ball screens, coming off ball screens, getting to the rim, finishing strong. And he's just an all around team player, offensive rebounding. You saw that dunk where he missed and got his own rebound and put it back up. He's just willing to make multiple efforts, and he's a really big part to this team.

TRISTEN NEWTON: Like he said, he goes out there and guards the best perimeter player every day. I don't think he gets enough credit for that because he can sacrifice offense, and looking good for everybody else to just stop their best player. He's maximizing his role and he's helping us out a lot. He's really improved this season.

**Q. You had a big game. Are there any areas that you want to work on before round two?**

TRISTEN NEWTON: Yeah, definitely. They shot 20 free throws. We have to guard without fouling. The defense was spotty at times. I mean, not the defense. The rebounding was spotty at times. I feel like those are two areas that we need to work on the most.

DONOVAN CLINGAN: Yeah, I feel like rebounding the ball. Going into Sunday playing a Big Ten team that rebounds the ball well, me and everyone else just got to really attack the ball with two hands on the defensive end and, you know, to be able to push in transition. And really like Tristen said, just guard without fouling and play smart.

**Q. For Tristen, give me your feelings and perspective about today's game?**

TRISTEN NEWTON: We got off to a fast start like we wanted to. We played great three-point line defense. That's what the emphasis was, stopping them from the three-point line because they are a good three-point shooting team. And I feel like we moved the ball effectively and turned the ball over -- well, more than we wanted to. But you know, I feel like it was a pretty good game, but we have areas to improve on.

**Q. It almost sounds cliché, if you let these underdogs hang in the game, they get confident, but it sounds like that may have been part of the messaging to the team, emphasizing that fast start.**

DAN HURLEY: I think that's what everybody wants to do

in this tournament. It doesn't always work out like that. So that's not exactly like, you know, high-level coaching. Everyone wants to start fast. But they just had our respect at a high-level coming in. I respect the heck out of Donnie and his staff, and you know, they won at Central Florida this year. You know, they played the three bye games. Obviously the Houston opener they got jumped, but then they won at Central Florida and they were right there versus Cincinnati on the road.

This week we were nervous about the matchup because of the shooting, and it wasn't just the backcourt, which is tremendous. They have got shooting all over, and they got size at center. I thought we had -- I thought they should have been a 15-seed for me. I thought they were the hardest 16, and as the overall No. 1 seed, I was surprised that in my opinion we got the best 16.

**Q. Was it good for you to see some zone there? You saw some in the Big East, but not a whole lot. And how do you feel like you did against it, because I know one or two sequences you didn't look too happy?**

DAN HURLEY: I didn't, and they mixed them up and that's what they do, some 1-2-1, some 2-3, some 3-2, some switching one through four, switching one through five, on ball, off ball. They did a lot of different things out there. Obviously at halftime with the 15 assists, two turnovers, we're shooting 70 percent. It was hard to be disappointed about a bunch of things there.

But second half, human nature kicked in a little bit. Obviously we missed some really good opportunities and some good shots and weren't able to sustain the level that we played at offensively in the first half.

Overall there's so much pressure. We all felt a lot of pressure going into this game. It's hard not to, as great as you feel about your team, because you just don't want to be that 1-seed that, especially with the year that we've had since this time last year.

**Q. Did you or your team watch the Kentucky game? Did you talk to them about it at all as far as an upset, and what is the art to balancing integrating talented freshmen with older players which you obviously have done well and some other teams have struggled?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think, number one, you've got to insulate big-time freshmen like Steph Castle around the core of returners to your program every year and then supplement with the portal. So you can't miss on high school kids, you can't miss on player development. I think you've got to do it in a strategic way.

And Jaylin Stewart is another freshman that right now is helping us as a freshman but has a chance to be a star as a sophomore. So I just think there's a timing and a planning that comes -- the way that you construct and architect your roster. And it's got to be a mix of portal, high school players, insulated by also a core of returners to your program.

And I didn't -- we know what this tournament is all about. We stay bulletproof by being elite on offense, elite on defense and a great rebounding team. The preparation with Kimani Young on the scout today ^ to do what we did defensively versus a very, very hard to guard top hundred offensive team who was impressive.

**Q. In this day and age, do you think teams can win with a group of one-and-done freshmen or do you think now you need that experience to win?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean, it will be interesting now, I guess, the G-League, Ignite. I guess that thing shut down. So maybe more of those difference-making five stars. I think a lot of it depends on the mentality, I guess the culture of your program, the mentality of the kids that you recruit.

I mean, there's a lot of -- you know, there's a lot of pressure in these NCAA Tournament games. It's unlike anything else in sports for these freshmen -- you know, to go on the court and to be a 2-seed versus a 15 or a 3 versus a 14 and the arena turns on you. And now you're surrounded by a bunch of other young freshmen that have never swam in these shark-infested waters.

I think Steph Castle in the way that we have our situation set up, has got some men around him out there and just a great mix of youth, experience, and a core of returners that understand a culture.

**Q. When you come into this game, obviously it's do-or-die but coming in, you were favored by 27 and a half points and you got up early. So my question is: What do you tell your team when you guys are up that big and it feels like the game is in control? What are you looking specifically from your team to do in that so-called garbage time?**

DAN HURLEY: Foot on gas. Foot up.

**Q. You talked about needing a dominant performance from Donovan yesterday to win today. How much did you like what you saw from the guy?**

DAN HURLEY: He was awesome today. You see, he's just a game changer what he creates for us on offense,

how he spooks people at the rim, the rebounding presence, the fire and the life that he shows up with every day. And, you know just to have the balance around him, to have five starters today, eight attempts, 11 attempts from four guys, our All-American point guard only took eight shots in this game.

Obviously the strength of this team is just the versatility of the five starters, and obviously six through eight now on the bench has given us big-time stuff.

But Donovan, he's the centerpiece.

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