

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Northwestern vs UConn

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Dan Hurley**

**Tristen Newton**

**Cam Spencer**

**Donovan Clingan**

Media Conference

UConn 75, Northwestern 58

**DAN HURLEY:** Just obviously impressed with the performance. You know, just really attacked them in the paint. Obviously the injuries that they have sustained during the year changed the total complexion of that team. That team, you know, with those two guys that they lost, we're not playing them today; they are probably a 5 seed or a 6 seed.

We were obviously thrilled with the performance, and to get that separation, you know, while going 3 for 22 from three. And a handful of those were contested but obviously we didn't shoot it great, and to still win by that margin, obviously it spoke to our defense and obviously the 20 assists on 29 field goals.

**Q. What does it mean to get to the next stage here, the Sweet 16, as the defending champions?**

**TRISTEN NEWTON:** It feels great. We have a big picture that we want to get to and we have to take it one step at a time. Getting to the Sweet 16 is another step to our main goal, and it feels good.

**Q. Donovan, seems like the last four games since halftime of the Xavier game to now, it seems like it's the best basketball that you've played, at least on the score sheet. How do you feel about that? Is this the best basketball you've played at UConn?**

**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** Yeah, I feel healthier and lighter



than I've ever felt, and you know, I just really got my confidence back, and you know, just trying to fly around the court and do whatever my team needs me to do to win.

**Q. We talked yesterday, obviously came to UConn with this goal in mind. What's it like for you to be in the Sweet 16 and kind of continue your dream and what are your goals going forward?**

**CAM SPENCER:** It's pretty cool. It was the goal obviously to get from Brooklyn to Boston, so we are looking forward to that. And you know, we have four more to go, so that's really what we're focused on, our next game, really.

**Q. You both talked about limiting free throws Friday. How did you feel you did today with that goal?**

**TRISTEN NEWTON:** I would say we did pretty good. You know, I don't know how many free throw they shot in the first half, but second half, I don't know, I feel like we did pretty good. And they were running in there and throwing the ball up. So I think we did great.

**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** Yeah, first half we did good staying out of foul trouble. Second half we had a little stretch where we were a little sloppy and they were getting to the line a little bit. But other than that, felt like we kept them off the foul line and we forced them to take tough shots.

**Q. Has your team defense stepped it up a notch in the tournament play?**

**DONOVAN CLINGAN:** Yeah, I feel like we all know what's at stake. So you know, we all have to crank up our offense and defense. You know, if you want to win games and try to reach our ultimate goal, you've got to play the best defense you possibly can.

**DAN HURLEY:** Just didn't get any rebounds.

**Q. Big East, three teams, 6-0 now. You've sort of thought at the end of the Big East conference tournament that the idea of only three teams getting in was disrespectful, I think was your word. What do you understand about the Big East conference that maybe**



## **the people on the selection committee did not?**

DAN HURLEY: Just the quality of the league. Look what we've done in non-conference games, you know. I don't know what our record is the last two years, non-conference MTEs, NCAA Tournament, and Seton Hall beat us by 15. You know, we've won eight straight in this tournament all by significant margins, and they were good enough to beat us and they were good enough to beat Marquette. And there should have been five or six Big East teams in this tournament.

You've see how other leagues that got the bids that our league deserved has underperformed. But me, Shock and Big Mac, we've got a group chat going, and the other coaches in our league, I saw Kim and Shaheen, you know, with the full league group chat that we have got with the coaches. I know everyone is fired up to see us continue to push and rep the league at a high level. I know Val is excited, too.

Obviously the mistake was made. It sucks.

## **Q. How impressed were you with Steph's performance defensively on Boo Buie?**

DAN HURLEY: That was a lot of steps from Has mixed in there, too, but Steph caused problems. Just the size, the foot speed, the strength. And we also put it to them on the ball screen game. This for us was about Langborg, Barnhizer, and Boo. It hurt them missing the shooter, Berry. You know, just not having another floor spacer out there for them and then missing their starting center, obviously hurt them. But Steph is the anti-entitled five-star freshman. He does nothing but help his team win.

## **Q. Pitino has called you a machine before. Do you think the significant margins is going to continue throughout the tournament? Do you think that you are going to continue winning by these large margins?**

DAN HURLEY: I hope so. It's tough, though. Again, you make yourself bulletproof. You can see the preparation, the other day was Kimani Young with the scout, today it was Luke Murray. These are head coach quality, some of the best coaches in the country. Not some of the best assistant coaches in the country but some of the best coaches in the country, period, that I have the luxury of having on my bench to prepare this team for these games.

We are bulletproof. Again, elite offense, elite defense. Didn't love the offensive rebounding and didn't love the second half defensive rebounding but 20 assists, seven turnovers, one player had 14-14-8, point guard had 20-10. It's tough to lose when you have that legality of quality.

## **Q. How great was it to have the fans, even though it wasn't at the Guard like you all do when you pack the Garden for the Big East Tournament, how great was it to have the UConn fans come to the Barclays Center in Brooklyn?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, there was more tonight. They showed up and I know there are going to be a lot of them in Boston. I think it's going to double in Boston for us. Yeah, I guess you could add Brooklyn to Storrs south. I didn't know it was part of Storrs south but I guess it extends from Manhattan to Brooklyn.

## **Q. You spoke how are underrated Tristen is all season. What about him overlooked in the stats sheet and how has that helped your team in the last couple years?**

DAN HURLEY: Again, like I've said, the NBA people, the right people, value the size, the all-around game, the range on the shot, the competitiveness, all the winner qualities. And you know, he's in the process right now of putting together a resumé as a guard. Obviously we have a lot of work to do here. But you're talking about a guy that has got the Final Four, the National Championship, the Big East Tournament, the regular season, he's got the First Team All-American. Obviously he got Big East Player of the Year AP. He didn't get it from the coaches. His two-year run in that UConn uniform is as good as anyone's had, and I think UConn has had good guards.

## **Q. You talked about a couple of the imperfections in the second half. Are those things you're going to focus on and mention to the guys the next few days to become more bulletproof for the weekend in Boston?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, some of it, too, you're not going to win the game by 35 or 30 versus Northwestern with Chris and his culture and his staff, one of the best. I think they have lost one game by double figures this year. So you're talking about a team that's ultra competitive.

You know, they made some plays, and you know, Langborg, we lost him a couple times for threes, where we lost a little concentration. But I think it had more to do more with the heart of the Northwestern program and pride and them refusing to have the score be disrespectful to their program.

## **Q. After Friday's game, Ryan played more -- did you make added emphasis to deny him and Brooks to deny --**

DAN HURLEY: Well, really, this game was about the

three-point line for us with those guys. We went into it wanting to keep Boo and Ryan and Brooks to less than four made threes between them and we wanted to limit their attempts to seven.

We felt like they couldn't beat us in a middy-tough-two game. We knew Donovan would take the rim away, and we wanted to chase those guys off the three-point line. We felt like the only way that they could beat us today is if they made a lot of threes, those guys. If Boo was hitting sick, deep, Trae Young type of threes like he's made throughout his career.

So we blew everything up, got over everything. We're über aggressive with our centers, and we are really just trying to funnel the ball to their five men. That was the game plan.

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