

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Saint Louis vs Georgia

Friday, March 20, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Saint Louis Billikens

Coach Josh Schertz

Robbie Avila

Dion Brown

Amari McCottry

Media Conference

Saint Louis 102, Georgia 77

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you can start with an opening statement and then we'll go to questions for student-athletes.

JOSH SCHERTZ: Certainly I thought our guys, unbelievable performance. Georgia has a terrific team. Obviously Coach White does a great job. They have really good players. They've had a fantastic season. Watched them a bunch in the SEC, so congratulations to them on a terrific year.

But I thought our guys, you know, set a great tone early in the game from a physicality standpoint. Certainly leaving Pittsburgh felt like our fight and our competitiveness was getting back to the level that we were used to, and we had to bring some discipline and brains to it. After some bad fouls early, I thought we did a great job in all the areas we needed to.

I thought we played super hard. We were really physical. I thought we executed well, and I thought we were connected and together.

Proud of our guys. Certainly a great win, and now we'll get a chance to try to do it again, play obviously I think the best team in the country on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Dion, your team had 66 points in the paint. I think



every one of your baskets came at the rim, and during a big run you guys had pretty much every basket at the rim. How were you able to get that many quality shots and that much closer to the net?

DION BROWN: Understanding details and staying disciplined. We are an offense where if a guy drives, you better make that cut, and I made the cut. Guys got me open. I was able to hit guys, find seams, and it just worked out in my favor today.

Q. What statement was made with this marquee win over an SEC opponent?

ROBBIE AVILA: I think we've kind of been making a statement all year. I don't think it was just based off of one game. I think we've shown that we can compete at a high level with any given team. Whether it's in our conference, A-10 teams or it's the Power 5 teams, I think we just came and treated it like another game and are ready to compete at a high level.

Q. Dion, you came out in both halves looking like you had something to get done. What was in your mind there? You had the first six points in both halves.

DION BROWN: I mean, empty the tank. I'm a senior. My first time being in the tournament. I have nothing to lose, everything to gain.

I wanted to do this for myself and, most importantly, for my guys. It's a big accomplishment to be in March Madness and play in front of all your fans, in front of everyone on national TV. I just thought I had nothing to lose. Why not?

Q. Any of the players can take this. One thing I noted was you guys won so many 50/50 balls, offensive rebounds. Can you speak a little bit about that and kind of what that said about your effort tonight?

AMARI MCCOTTRY: We knew coming into today's game that -- tonight's game that it was going to be us having to win 50/50 balls to have a chance to win. You know, we talked about it all weekend just how physical and how athletic this team is. Credit to our guys. We came out to compete, and we were playing hard from the start, so...



... when all is said, we're done.®



Q. Amari, you guys at times have relied on the three. Tonight they weren't falling the first half and early in the second half, but you guys were still able to pull away obviously. Was this kind of an example of you guys being able to win and operate offensively efficiently without the three-pointer?

AMARI MCCOTTRY: Yeah, definitely. You know, our offense is just all guys are activated, so you know they're taking away -- Georgia has to play something. You know, so if they take away the three, we have lanes. If they take away the lanes, then flood on drives. We got shooters.

Today they were more so obviously playing the three a lot. Obviously we got a lot of wide-open threes, but for the most part we were getting to the rim. If they flood it, we're just kicking out to our shooters.

Q. Robbie, you guys obviously had a great first half tonight, but that first five-minute stretch in the second half really sealed it for you guys. What was the message at halftime? What do you think the difference was in those opening few minutes?

ROBBIE AVILA: We just talked about how it's a long basketball game. You know, the first 20 minutes were over, but we had 20 more minutes left to play. We knew if we came out strong and we really reset the tone in the first few minutes we could really take their will away.

I think it showed, because we were able to, after the first -- I think we scored six -- they called a timeout, and we came back and scored ten more, I think.

We were able to really pile on them early and kind of, like I said, take their will away and really allow us to finish that game early.

Q. You were dealing with that foot and ankle injury last week and a couple of weeks ago. Is that still bothering you? If so, how have you been able to play around it?

ROBBIE AVILA: Yeah, it did bother me a few games ago, but I've been feeling great, feeling good now. I'm just ready to continue to play for as long as we possibly can. I'm just ready. Like I said, excited to play with my guys right here.

Q. This is also for Robbie. I'm sorry for taking -- having all the attention on you.

DION BROWN: We're used to it.

ROBBIE AVILA: Hey (laughing). Question is 2-2 right

now.

Q. What's it mean to have been on this journey with Josh and now to get an NCAA Tournament win? What's that mean?

ROBBIE AVILA: You want the truth or you want me to fake it? (Laughing).

Q. Which one is better?

ROBBIE AVILA: All right. No, it's been a special time. Our four years together starting at Indiana State was a lot of fun. We built so many great memories together, so many runs. You know, we did it again sophomore year in the NIT, and so to make it to the tournament and not only just make it, but get a win and continue to keep dancing has been fun. It's been special, but not only just him, but this whole entire team.

It's been such a special season, so I love these guys. They love me. So we're going to continue to play for as long as we can.

Q. I have a follow-up. Was that the truth or were you faking it?

ROBBIE AVILA: I'll let you decide (smiling).

Q. Amari, the run to start the second half, 18-0, which is even big by even your standards for this team, what was the feeling during that as it goes on and you keep scoring and scoring and scoring and then stopping them on the other end?

AMARI MCCOTTRY: Man, it was amazing. It kind of just felt like we were getting closer and closer to victory. Shout-out to the guys. We didn't get complacent. We kept our head on our shoulders and we just kept going. That was pretty much...

Q. How much fun is that?

AMARI MCCOTTRY: It was a lot. It was a lot. It was so much fun, yeah (laughing). It was a lot of fun, a lot.

Q. The last tournament appearance was in 2019. Talk about the tools that Coach has given you to get you to this point to be super successful the way you've been so far?

DION BROWN: He's been talking about the same things all year. Let your defense help your offense and vice versa, and today we were actually able to implement that in the way I think that will make him happy.



You know, I spoke on it before. We finished our last eight games 4-4. To come out here today and play Saint Louis basketball you know, it's not surprising to us because we've been doing it, but it's refreshing to say, hey, we can still do this.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. Questions for Coach Schertz.

Q. I guess it's one for the annals of your great halftime speeches. The start of the second half, how did everything going -- both attacking at the rim and the defensive stops?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, I think the defense fueled everything. We talked at halftime that the first five minutes would really establish what the game was going to be like in the second half. I think we went up 17.

Generally, you know, if you can go out and really throw a punch there to start the second half, you can kind of, you know, knock them out. If they're able to come and throw the first punch and cut it to 10, 9, you know, now it's a game and they get their confidence back. We just talked about nothing more (indiscernible) than a halftime lead, and the first five minutes would set the tone for what the second half would look like.

I thought we did a good job defensively. We got a bunch of stops. We were able to get a couple of turnovers, force some turnovers, steals, get in transition, and that's when we're at our best. It's always been a team where the defense fuels the offense. Not the other way around. I thought our defense tonight was -- until the last five minutes was great.

Q. Josh, you told the story yesterday about the guy you coached at Lincoln Memorial who slashed his eye and the next day made nine three-pointers. Dion didn't make nine three-pointers, but he made nine layups and dunks after cutting his eye. Did you tell them that story at all?

JOSH SCHERTZ: I actually did tell them that story. I did. And we're going to start just cutting all our players' eyes. Everybody is getting stitches before the Michigan game. Like the old Rocky movie, "Cut me, Mick." We'll cut guys and see what happens.

No, he was awesome. It was great to see. I did tell him that story, and he got pretty excited. He's like, oh, I might make nine threes. He didn't make any threes, but he was 9-for-9 from two and was I think the catalyst in both halves.

Q. You guys had six in double figures tonight and another two with nine. How does it make you feel knowing that everyone has it going and that anyone can get you guys a bucket if you need it?

JOSH SCHERTZ: I think the depth has been a key all year. Particularly in a game like Georgia where they're so big and physical, guys can wear down. The game was so fast-paced, so you're in transition offense. You're getting pressed. There's no way guys could play 35 minutes, not well in a game like that.

So I thought, like you said, six guys in double figures, two with nine. One with seven. All nine guys that are in our rotation. They've contributed all year, and they've sacrificed all year. You know, you look at our minutes. I don't think anybody averages more than 26 minutes a game. That takes a special kind of competitive character.

Like Dion has 18 points. He only plays 21 minutes. Paul Otieno is great tonight. He gets nine points, four rebounds, and plays 11 minutes. And he's happy. They're happy. They're great teammates to each other.

That depth has been our calling card all year long that we got a bunch of different guys. It might not be somebody's night every night, but we got so many options that it's usually somebody's night every night.

Q. Saint Louis is renowned for its three-point shooting, and today they weren't necessarily falling. Could you talk a little bit about Saint Louis's philosophy about getting to the rim and having things flow from that?

JOSH SCHERTZ: That actually is the philosophy is to get the ball to the rim and then decide from there. You know, the defense always tells you what to do. There's a right play to be made. You got to make the right play.

Whether that's the ball being driven, whether that's rolls, whether that's post-ups, whether that's off ball action, everything is tried to design to get the ball to the rim, play with unbelievable force, and then make the right decisions.

Sometimes that's you. I think the first half -- I don't know what it finished with. First half we had 13 no-dribble layups, and you're hunting those. At halftime we had 13 of them. We were 3 for 15 from three, but we had 49 points.

I thought our spacing was great, our active spacing was great. We had a bunch of active drives and got the ball downhill. I thought we were disciplined with our QB. We call them QB decisions, but rim decisions, and found guys both on the perimeter and in the paint. Even the threes, I



thought most of them -- we had a couple of bad ones in the first half, but most of them were really high-quality threes.

That's the offense. It's twos and the rim first, and then the defense tells you what to do, and you play behind that.

Q. After your tough loss to Dayton in the tournament, you found out 24 hours later you are playing a top-tier Power 5 school. What has been your message to get the guys ready for tonight?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, I think -- I thought we found ourselves the last 60 minutes in Pittsburgh. I thought the second half against GW, a really good team. We were down 21 and rallied back to win. Then I think we were down 15 at half, 14 at half, and we rallied back to win. We really found ourselves second half.

The Dayton game we competed great. We fought great. We just didn't play well enough to win. You know, 18 turnovers and a bunch of fouls, but the compete level, fight was right.

I told them, look, we bring that level of fight, that level of competitiveness, we put some brains and discipline to it, you know, we're certainly going to have a chance.

I think the A-10, you see it with us winning, with VCU winning. This league prepares you. I mean, I guess there are upsets, but I don't think VCU winning is an upset, I don't think us winning is an upset. We play in one of the best leagues in the country. When you look at A-10 teams coming, it's pretty common they come and win and beat Power 5 teams. We can't usually get them unless it's in this situation.

The Atlantic 10 Conference is one of the best leagues in the country. We're lucky to play in it. It prepared us for tonight and prepared VCU. Certainly I think that wasn't any -- that part was -- I thought we just played with more discipline than we had in Pittsburgh.

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