

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Mike White

Marcus Millender

Jeremiah Wilkinson

Media Conference

Saint Louis 102, Georgia 77

THE MODERATOR: Coach, start with an opening statement and then we'll have questions.

MIKE WHITE: Disappointed in our effort starting with myself. Obviously we weren't very prepared to compete at the level that I thought we would. Did not see this coming. Tough way to end a season. Didn't give Saint Louis much of a game.

Again, just being honest with you. I did not see that coming. I expected to win the game. These guys have practiced really hard all week, been locked in in our preparation and played as disconnected as we've played all season.

Really proud of our regular season. We broke records. We did things that have never happened obviously in the history of Georgia basketball, but our plan was to come here and play well and compete and advance.

Just a tough way to end it. That said, I thought Saint Louis was terrific. Obviously we knew they were really good on film, but in person the way that they executed in their tempo and their flow offensively and their offensive connection, the way they shared it, the way that they spaced it, their split-second passing decisions 1 through 5 to one another, you didn't know who was going to get the shot. They just took their shot.

It's something I've talked to you guys about all year, and we've done that at times even though we're not the best defensive team. Unfortunately, we're sitting here in the 80s



as the season ends, which is something that we don't want to stand for at Georgia. We've got to be better than that defensively, but at times we've been a really good offense and fun to watch and sharing it and flowing. That was not us tonight.

The ball stuck early. We took a lot of shots over Saint Louis defenders while their guys were open, and again, Saint Louis, just credit their entire program starting with Coach Schertz.

They moved us. They executed their concepts. They found the open guy, and he made shots. They made the game look simple.

And again, unfortunate. Great regular season. We come here and did not play well. So I'm disappointed for our couple of seniors. They're done. Justin Abson and Justin Bailey, Uncle Skill and Uncle Motor. Great kids, great young men. I hate that their college careers are over. I wish we could have finished it on a better note, but I am as ready to get back to work as I've ever been.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. It seemed like in the first half you guys really couldn't find a rhythm offensively. What did you feel like just didn't allow you to get much scoring going and get much of a rhythm on offense?

MARCUS MILLENDER: I feel like we just came out flat. The defense was being very disruptive. We wasn't getting our shots. We was taking, like, my turn shots. We wasn't really moving the ball. I think they had 15 assists. We had two at halftime. That's pretty much what that was.

Q. Jeremiah, how does this result impact how you guys as players view the season, given the success you had in the regular season, but once again, a disappointing NCAA Tournament showing?

JEREMIAH WILKINSON: We know what we have in that locker room and what we saw today on the court and what everybody saw, that wasn't us. Coach can say, you know, we could have been prepared different. That honestly wasn't the truth. We were prepared well for this game. We just came out flat.



I don't know exactly what it was in the locker room, like what happened, but you know, we weren't ready to play today, and we didn't act like we wanted to be here. You're not going to win a game in the NCAA Tournament when the other team wants to be here and we don't want to be here.

So we had a great season, but at the end of the day, when it matters, we didn't come through.

Q. Marcus, why would you guys be flat with everything on the line for the season?

MARCUS MILLENDER: I really don't know. I couldn't even answer. I don't know.

JEREMIAH WILKINSON: There's no answer for that.

MARCUS MILLENDER: I will say it's a lot of -- a lot of us, our first time in the tournament. Not that that is an excuse, but I really don't know. I couldn't answer the question.

Q. Jeremiah, when you say it was almost like you didn't want to be out there, kind of what did that feel like? What were you guys doing or not doing that was atypical from how you normally play?

JEREMIAH WILKINSON: I mean, we just didn't play hard at all. Turnovers, we're not getting back. I'm guilty of it a couple of times too. As a team, they got out and ran on us, and we couldn't get rebounds, and they went and got rebounds. We were the bigger team today, so we have no excuse for that.

We were probably the more athletic team, so you know, there's no excuse for what happened today. Really it's just -- I don't even know what happened.

Q. Jeremiah, what was the message in the locker room at halftime in terms of trying to get back into the game and the adjustments you guys could have made?

JEREMIAH WILKINSON: Pretty much the same thing we're saying here. We got to come out and play hard. Our will to win has to be higher. We took some bad shots. We got to find a rhythm.

But at the end of the day, when you are missing shots, you can't be giving up buckets on defense. If we're going to be off, there are ways to win games when you're off shooting the ball. We didn't give enough effort to win the game when we were all shooting the ball.

Q. Do you think you guys played hard in the second half?

JEREMIAH WILKINSON: No, no, not at all.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes. Thank you. Questions for Coach White.

Q. Mike, I guess just going off of what they said, how do you reckon with trying to figure out how this went wrong where they're up here saying that they felt like there was a lack of effort?

MIKE WHITE: You know, I can't dodge that. We played with less effort than we've played in any game this season. It's not even close. Not even close.

That last group or two in the final, what, five or six minutes mustered up some turnovers and stops and shared it a little bit, fell into some open threes, made some, missed some, got a couple of offensive rebounds, but they were quicker to the basketball for 40 minutes.

I'll have to go back and re-evaluate everything we did. Did we go too hard in practice? Did we go too long? We went twice today. We went twice yesterday.

They played more fresh, for sure. So I always will look in the mirror first with our preparation. But our guys were juiced before the game, I can tell you that, with their body language and with what they were vocalizing to us and to each other.

These things happen more often in the NCAA Tournament than they do in regular season. They just do. Heck, we were more resilient and played harder through negative plays on the road in the SEC in front of 23,000 booing us.

But I agree with some of the things Jeremiah said. We didn't play very hard when we got off to a really tough start and not making shots and getting beat down the court and missed. We had some effort plays early, which we've seen all year. Our defensive rebounding numbers are atrocious. They're atrocious. They have been all year. We've been able to overcome it by better offense at times and turning you over, but they got second possessions early off just simple missed block-outs.

Credit these guys. Their wings, their attention to detail, you know, with blocking out, with screening for one, and all those little things that we're just trying to get better at every day. You wish we would have done it better down the stretch in this one and the SEC Tournament.

When you find yourselves down 6-8 double-figure points



early and the stage is big and emotionally you are really ramped up before the game, and it's not going well for you, emotions can get the best of you. Then all of a sudden it's like -- and I've been there before as a player.

You try to help these guys just stay in the moment and be where your feet are. Next-play mentality. I know we're down eight, and I know I just missed a shot. What is my next play? Turn around and sprint back. Who am I matched up with? Jump to the ball. Contest a shot.

We looked -- when we got down 10, 12 points, our body language was, oh, my gosh, what just happened, which is unlike this team. This team -- you guys know it. This team has been so resilient. We went in and watched some plays at halftime that I have never seen this team do, that I've never seen us do. Not them. Us.

With point-blank layups at the rim, with guys looking and not even jumping and trying to contest the shot, the lack of effort was really disappointing. I haven't experienced something like that in a long, long time. I don't remember the last time, and I certainly haven't seen this team play like this with that lack of effort defensively and on the glass. But at times we played really hard with the ball in our hands. And that's not the right recipe, as we know.

They were way more connected than us. We practiced better yesterday than we played today. But credit Saint Louis. They're terrific. I told Josh, Dusty will probably call me and try to get some tips, but he may not, because I'm not sure what we did really well, you know, to help Michigan, but we wish Saint Louis the best. We would have liked to have advanced, of course, but just obviously didn't play anywhere near where we needed to play.

Q. Obviously you guys ended a ten-year drought for the program getting to the tournament last year. You got back this year. The tournament results have been lopsided both the games. What do you make of that? How important is it to get a win in the tournament for this program?

MIKE WHITE: It's huge. It's the next step. The regular season we had was -- it speaks for itself. We'll finish with the highest this and the highest that and break this record and all that record, so on and so forth, but you do that for postseason opportunities like this.

Again, I expected to win this game. I thought last year we'll have to do these three or four things really well to have a chance against a team that -- and I shouldn't compare them, but I thought that they were under-seeded last year. It's a different story.

We anticipated coming into this one against a team that really Saint Louis hasn't been playing great at the end of the season. Earlier on in the year, they were playing -- they put a lot of it together today. They put a lot together today and played really well. Again, wish them the best. I thought they were terrific.

We anticipated having success in this one. I think we're a better team than a year ago, and I thought this was more of a better match-up for us, at least offensively. I knew it was going to be a tough match-up defensively for us. It was even tougher than I thought.

Yeah, I mean, just from a positivity optimism standpoint, from a building, culture standpoint, we expect to get back again and then get back again, but the next step is we got to break through. To have to wait -- my gosh, I'm sick to my stomach that we got to wait potentially for another year to have this opportunity again. If you lose 90-86 and you had a chance and you did a lot of good things and they just hit some hard shots, and we were really connected and were in character, you can live with it.

But this one is going to be hard for me, at least, to think about for a while. That's why I'm just ready to get back at it. I'm ready for spring workouts to start tomorrow morning if we were in Athens.

Q. What kind of impact do you think this will have as you continue to try to build out this program and turn it into something that comes next?

MIKE WHITE: It will be a factor. We already addressed it in the locker room with our guys. It's not our standard. That's not what we're trying to build. It's not acceptable, the effort.

We're in the NCAA Tournament. These kids have been preparing for this, some more than others, excited about this their entire lives. I remember watching the NCAA Tournament when I was 5, 6, 7 years old, and I'm blessed enough to coach a team in it.

To jog back in transition defense is unacceptable. It is sickening, whether we're up 10, down 10. I'm going to cut myself off, but we want to prepare for next year, not for the outcome of this opportunity if it provides itself to us next year, if we earn it, but to play harder and with more pride and to play with more excitement about being in the tournament.

Saint Louis played excited. We wrote down on the whiteboard before we came out the last message to you our guys was, let's play with joy, we've earned it. Let's play with joy, and let's play really, really hard. We've got



nothing to lose. We had a great regular season. Maybe we overthought it a little bit in the conference tournament, and we had already lost to Ole Miss and all these details and all these things you can get caught up with. Man, let's just play really, really hard.

Man, man, they just shot a lot of layups against a flat-footed defense, and when they missed shots, they got their own rebounds. They had way too high of a rate.

Q. You said it a couple of times where you're ready to get going and everything like that after such a loss like that to end the season. How do you, though, go through the process and swallow the pill of what just happened where you went in after this historic season and just falls flat?

MIKE WHITE: Communication with staff, with student-athletes. We'll have one-on-one meetings. We'll have group meetings. What's so unique in today's day and age -- and don't let me ramble for a while. It's so late. I know you are ready to get out of here. It's 1:00 a.m.

So many of these student-athletes playing in this tournament mentally might have a couple of toes in the portal. They might have a foot in the portal. They might have a foot and a half in the portal. They've got -- you know, they've got communication with relatives, with former coaches, and now with agents, right? First and foremost, where are we at with our roster? Let's try to figure that out as soon as possible. Unfortunately, we got to wait for the portal to open, and then we've got to go through that process.

We will hold workouts, but who wants to be worked out? How locked in are we going to be? Who are going to be your teammates next year? You know, and the guys we're working out, we might not even be coaching them. It's just different.

That's not all negative. It's just we're all adapting to a new landscape. It's our world now. So you wish you knew right now, so there's a holding pattern, right, and there's a re-evaluation of everything we're doing, and hopefully as soon as possible we know who our roster is. Really those summer workouts, June 1-ish, we'll get back to work from a practice standpoint.

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