

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - St. Louis vs Michigan

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Michigan Wolverines

Dusty May

Nimari Burnett

Elliot Cadeau

Yaxel Lendeborg

Media Conference

Michigan - 95, Saint Louis - 72

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome Michigan in here.

DUSTY MAY: I'm extremely proud to be a part of this team and the way they played ball today against an excellent basketball team, well coached, and to see how well they play together, how well they cover each other, even through the mistakes, they just have each other's backs.

Just glad that we're able to extend the season with this group. I may coach another 30 years and may not ever be around a better group of people and a more connected group. As a staff, we're cherishing that every single day.

Q. My first question, great game, first of all. After spending two years at UAB, how has this experience been in the Big Ten in March Madness?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: It's been a lot different, physicality, speed, just overall game of basketball-wise, it's been a lot different than what I've been used to. That's why I have such an appreciation for teams like St. Louis or Howard, those mid-major, low major teams, because it's hard to get here.

I've learned definitely to slow the game down, don't get too high or too low, no matter what's going on. The most important thing I learned is lean on my teammates whenever something is going bad.

Q. Playing under Coach Andy Kennedy, UAB, playing



under him, very storied coach, how has that helped you thrive on this stage today?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: It definitely helped me be more aggressive when need be, and it helped me have a better ear for hearing coach throughout the game. He used to yell at me pretty much every possession. Eventually I got used to hearing his voice and nobody else's at a moment.

There was plays in the game where Coach told me to cut, and I definitely wasn't thinking cut. First instinct was go. It helped tune me up and definitely to be more aggressive.

Q. Nimari, this is about Yaxel, when you saw him drive and split those two guys and finish off with a dunk -- he's already laughing -- what was your thought? That seemed to really bring a boost to your team.

NIMARI BURNETT: Dominican LeBron. It's as simple as those two words, but also just his aggression going to the basket. At that point in the game, we were up 10 or so, but it gave us another boost to extend the lead and continue to have good defensive intensity. But like I said, those two words, Dominican LeBron.

Q. Elliot, you guys have been under your turnover average the last two games. What's been the key to keep that below your average, and how can you keep that going forward?

ELLIOT CADEAU: I would say just patience on offense. These last two games, we felt like offensively we could get anything we wanted to. We didn't have to make any home run plays. We could just hit singles and score every time. That was our mentality going into the game those last two games.

Q. Yaxel, it seemed like you guys really separated in the second half. What's been the message at halftime, and how can you kind of dominate in the second half?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: All season long we struggled coming out aggressively in the second half. Thursday kind of shifted for us because we really needed that second half for us to separate. We're just learning from our mistakes against Purdue. We let them step away.



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We're going to start coming out more aggressively in the second half from now on. When they started going on their run, it went back to learning on each other and playing poised and believing we can compete with anybody.

Q. For Yaxel and Nimari, can you speak to Elliot's ability to spark the offense when he needs to and to take over and the way he set the tone today?

NIMARI BURNETT: I would say that he does an amazing job dissecting the offense. He makes it so much easier for us all around the court that played with him, just getting us easy shots. We're taking eight-plus shots every single time because his patience, also his speed and deceptability and he just makes the game easier for all of us. I'm just joyful to play with him every single game.

YAXEL LENDEBORG: The difference between him and last year, he was more pass first. He's still pass first now, but he's become way more of a scoring threat. You can't guard him anyway. So having to compete with him and trying to stop him when you think he's going to pass, it's good night pretty much honestly.

If he's having a bad game, I feel like it's not on the defense, it's on him. He's done a great job of controlling the tempo and being instant offense whenever we need it.

Q. Yaxel, first of all, Dominican LeBron, have you heard that before? Is that new?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: No, it's just funny every time they say it. It started with L.J. during the summer, but it started clicking, I guess.

Q. You've talked before the tournament about being more aggressive, especially that second half. Did you feel it kick in, your eyes lit up, and did your teammates feed off that when you kind of took over?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: This goes back again to E. He was feeding me pretty early. Just the ball was moving a little. The ball was hot honestly. I just started feeling a lot more comfortable and a lot more just aggressive just because of how the team has been playing. I thrive off of the team's energy.

I just got opportunities to make plays, and I made those plays.

Q. For any of the guys, Coach May had mentioned that toward the end of the season teams started to try to maybe slow the game down a little bit and muck things up a little, and it led to different types of results. It seems like here for the last couple of days you've been

able to play a little bit more free flowing in your game. Certainly St. Louis doesn't want to slow things down. Did you guys feel like you were playing more like the style that you want to play and that you were playing at the beginning of the season?

ELLIOT CADEAU: For sure, we definitely run a fast paced offense, and we definitely want to be scoring in the high numbers because we've got so many talented players.

The last couple games in the Big Ten, it was like low possession, low scoring games, and we ended up winning that, but we think our play style is more high scoring and faster. So we tend to like games like this.

Q. Nimari, going back to the Sweet 16, how would you compare this team and how it's playing, expectations going to Sweet 16 this year versus last year when you guys advanced to the Sweet 16?

NIMARI BURNETT: I mean, super great group we had last year. We were connected, especially around this time. I think the little bit of a difference is we've just been so connected with this group this year all season long. We have Aday and Rez, then Yax and Elliot, going down the list, Trey McKenney, Roddy Gayle, Will Tschetter. I think with this group, our size, our length, our speed, you combine that, and we're going into Chicago, looking forward to the matchup and ready to come out with the win.

Q. What was it with the Howard game the other night and tonight, your team looked so much more comfortable tonight. What was it that you guys seemed to have difficulty the other night, but tonight their offense flowed through Elliot, Elliot seemed to really make some plays for you and distribute the ball efficiently.

DUSTY MAY: I thought we had some problems tonight as well. There were several times that St. Louis was on the verge, and we answered. We looked more determined, we looked more comfortable.

Obviously I'm a young head coach, so my only feelings have been a few tournaments at FAU and a few tournaments here. All the feelings about it being different, it is. When we went from FAU, especially the first year, we're going in there with house money. We're letting it fly, we're hooping, we're loose. Then human nature kicks in whenever there's expectations and all the other stuff that comes with it.

We've tried to do a good job of not playing to other people's expectations and not playing a seed line. Just go out and play ball one possession at a time. Also I think



Howard played really well. We were up 11 with 30 seconds to go in the half, and we completely botched our last 35 seconds. Poor coaching, poor decisions, whatever the case. That gave them life.

I don't know how many we ended up winning by now, but to beat that Howard team since February 1st is one of the best shooting teams in the country, they found their stride.

It's tough because some nights the ball goes in, some nights they don't. I think our ability to make open shots tonight was the biggest difference in the discrepancy in score.

Q. For those who have not been familiar -- who are tuned into March Madness just to watch and not familiar with the Yaxel's game, how would you describe what he did today and just how he punctuated with that transition dunk?

DUSTY MAY: The first half, we thought that he played an average game for him, and we looked at the stat sheet. I think he had 11 and what -- filled up the stat sheet like he always does. He just has such a high ceiling. The one play that was -- he obviously had about 50 great plays, and man, he's a special player, special person, but to see his growth and to see how great of a teammate he is for the situation is even more impressive.

There were two plays, the first being he had an open court right after half. He had a busted floor one-on-one versus Robbie Avila. Robbie had a couple fouls, and he pulled it out. I think everyone on our entire bench -- coaches, players, everyone -- literally screamed at him to attack, to attack. Every time he got it in the post, you could hear guys saying attack, attack.

If he has one-on-one coverage -- also, part of it, if he's playing with Rez and Aday, he doesn't have space to go in the mid-post. Everyone is asking him to be more aggressive. We're asking him to be on the perimeter when those two ultra talented players are in the game and be more of a spacer and a post feeder and a cutter, and then when one of them checks out, to play a different role and style. It's not always easy just to say be aggressive. Be aggressive can mean a lot of things. Drive into hornet's nest, spacing, and you turn it over, that's bad aggression.

I think he's done an unbelievable job of giving what the game has given him and playing smart, practical basketball all year. That's not easy to do to play two different styles and especially learning a new system. We play in flow 90 percent of the game. We call out of timeouts. Other than that, our guys are playing off of each other. For him to go from a set offense, 1-3-1 defensive team to a switching

man and a free flowing offense, he's had to learn a lot, and he's had to be two different people for us.

Q. Dusty, a couple days ago, we talked about perimeter defense and the need for that from Trey and from Elliot and Roddy. To me it seems like they were just shelling that, pushing that perimeter shooting out. Could you address that, and was that emphasized the last couple days?

DUSTY MAY: I thought our guys, with a quick turn, it's tough. St. Louis plays a lot of guys, and they're all uniquely talented, and they all play to their strengths so well.

They have three elite shooters that, 25, 30 feet in, on the move, as soon as they can see the rim, they're letting it go. Then they have a couple of really good percentage shooters that have a little bit closer to that green light, and they've got some others that basically only shoot paint touch 3s, but they're drivers and cutters and play so well off of each other.

I think our guys did an A-minus as far as understanding who they were guarding and what we were willing to live with and making great decisions from there.

Q. What I did notice is that when your team finally figured out just throw it to the big guys because they couldn't really guard them down low. Even though you said they had spaces to go through, once they figured out, and your point guard to boot, just go down low. How did you get them to recognize just go low, fellas? Because you got them.

DUSTY MAY: If you look at our 3-pointers early in the game, we shot it well. Trey hit a big one. Nimari hit a couple. Elliot shot the ball well. When we're making 3s, now the floor spaces, and now we can throw it in. If they're packing and they're leaving this guy. There are a couple guys that typically are off ball players for us, we put the ball in their hands because they're the guys being guarded the least amount and made them the feeders and tried to make sure we space the guys that have made shots.

Even, whatever your percentage is, if you get in a game and you're making two or three 3s, no matter how they're playing you from the tip, they usually adjust. We tried to move guys around based on how we thought they would be guarded. At the end of the day, you look at being on a play over the top of the defense, the post feeding, the cutting, and they changed their coverage. I think it was smart, sound basketball, by a bunch of guys who know how to play ball.

Q. After reaching the Sweet 16 last season and then



coming up short, why do you think this team is different, and what are some of the keys to getting a couple wins next week?

DUSTY MAY: I think we're a better basketball team, we're more talented. Last year we were still laying the foundation, and the last couple weeks of the season, we came to the realization that we had to change and we had to get tougher and we had to play better together.

We played well against Auburn. We ran into a buzz saw. We ran into the top team in the country on the home court. That's the first time, guys, when you're coaching at tough jobs, you're never thinking about home court in the NCAA Tournament ever. It's never crossed my mind.

Here when we were up double digits and Auburn hits a big 3, Tahaad Pettiford makes a big 3 to cut it to 8 or 9, the place erupted. We thought that was a very pivotal moment in us not being able to advance to the Elite Eight last year. We went into this off-season thinking, man, if we could do our work throughout, we need to be better earlier so we have a chance to earn some form of home court.

We've earned the right to go to Chicago and hopefully pack that thing with Michigan fans and see where it goes. We're just a better team. We're better coaches. We're better players. That's just part of the growth process.

Q. Coach, St. Louis came out in that second half, and I think they scored 15 or 16 points in those first few minutes. Really it was after that media timeout that you guys left your mark on this game. I just want to know if there were any changes made during that break, and what you think the overall difference was over the rest of the second half?

DUSTY MAY: They made four difficult 3s. The elephant in the room is, when you play a 7'4" center that blocks everything at the rim, you're going to give up some contested 3s if the other team's center is essentially a point guard.

In the game plan, we planned to emergency switch some, we planned to get late contest some. I think there were a couple times when we didn't execute our late switches. I don't want to get into basketball psychobabble, but there were a couple times we didn't execute our late switches very well, and Avila got going.

I happened to watch the George Washington game from the tournament -- I think it was a tournament game -- last night just trying to pick teams. I know the GW coach, and I'm familiar with how they play. They played really well against them. Same thing, Avila came out and banged in

three 3s in transition from about 25 feet. We felt like that's what they would do out of half, but they executed better than our defense did.

Fortunately, we were able to adjust on the fly and force some tougher shots. But they made four 3s in the first four minutes. Luckily we were able to score on the other end just to hold the margin.

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