

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Hofstra vs Alabama

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Hofstra Pride

Coach Speedy Claxton

Cruz Davis

Preston Edmead

German Plotnikov

Media Conference



Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Q. Cruz, how does it feel knowing first of all (no microphone), but then also what they alluded to with Lebaron, you guys going head to head in a matchup between two guys who have put up such big numbers. How does it motivate you? How does it feel going into that matchup?

CRUZ DAVIS: It's just another game. Don't look at it any different. Just try to win the game. That's it.

Q. I was wondering if each of you guys could talk a little bit about what kind of a coach Speedy Claxton is and what he brings, what his attitude is towards this team.

GERMAN PLOTNIKOV: Speedy is a great coach. He was a great player throughout his whole career. It's a blessing and we're extremely grateful to be playing under his wing.

It's a funny story, when we won the NCAA championship, I came up to him, why haven't you won yet? You've got the NBA championship, a high school championship. Now you've got a college championship behind your back. It's very good to play under a person like that.

PRESTON EDMEAD: He's a guard, I'm a guard. He gives us the most confidence you can play with. Coming in here, it was the best decision of my life because he gave me so much confidence to come out here and play my game.

CRUZ DAVIS: Same thing. He developed me a lot as a player. He's helped me be the best version of myself on and off the court. So he's just changed my life, helped me out a lot.

Q. Obviously the message from Speedy very much is this is another game and not to make it bigger than it is. But how difficult is that to do since you're all here for the first time, first time for the school in 25 years? How do you do that and get your mind focused on that, that it is just another team?

CRUZ DAVIS: I would just say embrace the moment. It's just another game. Don't get too high, don't get too low. Stay focused.

Q. German, you played in over 120 games for Hofstra now across four years. Being here at the NCAA Tournament now after kind of the trials, tribulations, seeing all these different teammates, can you put it into words what it feels like?

GERMAN PLOTNIKOV: It feels great. Again, we fell short a couple of times in the NCAA Tournaments, but in the end, I guess it all paid off. We all learned from it, and here we are, man.

Q. Preston and Cruz, I'm curious what your impression of Lebaron is over at Alabama, their guard. How difficult is he to deal with from what you've seen on film?

CRUZ DAVIS: He's a good player. He shoots the ball real well. He's a really good offensive player. Just got to limit his attempts and play good defense on him.

PRESTON EDMEAD: I would say the same thing. We know he's a good player coming into this. So just follow the game plan and try to limit all of his attempts.

Q. Cruz, you've been on this stage before. What are some things you've taken from this journey this year, years previous in this tournament, and bringing it forward?

CRUZ DAVIS: I would say don't take the opportunity for granted. Like it's really hard to get to this point in the season. Really just take it all in, enjoy every moment.



PRESTON EDMEAD: I would say the same thing, soak everything in. But it all goes away the moment you step on the court. You're just playing basketball.

GERMAN PLOTNIKOV: Exactly like that. Embrace the moment. As an unc of the team, we're coming in here with a lot of confidence. We're coming off winning the championship. Being at all these practices and participating in the past few practices, I think we're going to come in with a lot of confidence and be ready to play.

Q. Preston, I remember when I interviewed you at the beginning of the season, you said you had a lot of areas you want to improve on as a player. Now sitting here at the NCAA Tournament, where would you say you've grown the most throughout your freshman season?

PRESTON EDMEAD: I would say being a leader, and I feel like I grew a lot on the defensive end. I feel like my coaches really helped me on that side of the floor.

Q. Cruz and Preston, you guys have already faced great guards this season, now going up against Philon and you're on the same stage as him in the NCAA Tournament, is there added pressure kind of to match his performance, or is it just any other game?

CRUZ DAVIS: It's just another game. I played good players and stuff before. Don't treat it any different way.

PRESTON EDMEAD: I would say the same thing. We always look for opportunity, and now that we got it, we're just going out there and trying to play our best.

Q. German, as you said, you're the unc, you've been here so long. You've come home from D.C. many times with a loss. This is the first time you've come back with a win. What have you noticed from the Hofstra fan base and the community that has really jumped out at you since you guys came back with a championship?

GERMAN PLOTNIKOV: Ever since I won a championship, I always say it's not just us who won it. I always say it takes a village, man. I was grateful to the coaching staff, the whole Hofstra community, the people who came out the whole year to support us. I feel like everyone stepped up in that area.

It was amazing to see the Selection Sunday party. There was a lot of people who showed up. It was pretty packed. It's just amazing to see how we've grown, and it feels also great to win a championship for the community.

Q. Alabama is one of the fastest teams in the nation based off of tempo. You guys adversely like to slow down. Has Coach Claxton talked any about that? How can that come into play when the game comes?

PRESTON EDMEAD: He has. We're just going to stick to the game plan and follow what coaches have to say. We're just going to go out and study our scout, yeah.

Q. For anyone who wants to answer, you guys heard about Aaron staying close to the team. Obviously he has been part of the Alabama program. Do you guys hear anything about the Tide or anything from him in particular this week?

CRUZ DAVIS: No.

GERMAN PLOTNIKOV: Not really. Just wonder who he's going to support. Somebody ask him who he's going to go for.

Q. Preston, you're a freshman, but you have some of the biggest shots in this program's history. How do you come into this stage just pushing that aside and continuing the momentum you built in D.C.?

PRESTON EDMEAD: Just being grateful for the moment. I pray for opportunities like this, and now I'm here on this big stage. I've just got to be grateful that I'm here. By being grateful, it's just going out there and playing as hard as I can.

Q. I've got to start with the shirt, the quote on the shirt. Where did you get the idea for it?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: Well, it speaks for itself. We've had a ton of great guards here, starting with myself to Desure Buie, Justin Wright-Foreman, Aaron Estrada, Tyler Thomas, these two guys that I have now in Preston and Cruz, Charles Jenkins. Hofstra has always been a place that we've raised good guards. I'm the one who kind of started that, so I'm the Guardfather.

Q. Speaking of the guards, what do you make of the matchup between your guys and Philon? How good is he, and what makes him so good?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: He's a great player. He can score at three levels. He's an NBA player. We're definitely going to have our hands full, but I feel like I have good guards myself.

I think it's going to be a really good game. I think it's going to be great guard play from both sides.

Q. When you're playing against an Alabama team that's so high tempo, how has the scout kind of gone? How are you preparing your guys? Is anything being done differently to counter the offense?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: We're going to instill the same game plan that we have against William and Mary. They play a similar style tempo. We told our guys think of William and Mary on steroids, more athletic, bigger, faster, stronger.

It's not like we're not used to seeing this play style. Definitely going to try to control tempo. I think it's going to be a big key to the game.

Q. Speedy, can you tell us a little bit about when you first started to think about coaching and how you got into this business?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: Yeah, it was pretty much my last year that I was playing. I was with Golden State Warriors, Don Nelson was the coach at the time. One day after practice he pulled me to the side, and he asked me if I ever thought about coaching. Up until that point, I hadn't.

I said, no, not really. He was like, you should think about it. I think you would make a helluva coach. That's what prompted the idea.

I was like, well, here I have a Hall of Fame coach tell me that I should think about coaching, so I said, all right, let me start thinking about coaching.

Coach Mihalich got the job at Hofstra, I went to him the AD at the time, Jeff Hathaway and I asked to be part of the program.

Q. (No microphone.)

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I did not. I'm not going to lie, my first years it was kind of rough. It's different, going from being a player to being a coach and being in the office from 9:00 to 6:00, 7:00. It was a change in lifestyle for me, but once I got used to it, I loved it.

Q. This season has had a lot of ups and downs, a lot of ups. What's the biggest area of growth you've seen in your team from the start to where we are right now?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I would say confidence. As the season has gone along, my kids' confidence has grown after each and every game, whether we win or lose. They believe they should have won if we lost, and if we won, they're excited. So I would say confidence.

These kids, they truly believe whoever's in front of us, we can win the game.

Q. I know one of your messages to all the guys is to not look at this as anything bigger than it is. How do you impress upon them -- obviously you played at all the levels and gone through this before. How do you get that through their minds not to make where they -- it's the first time in 25 years --

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I'm sorry. Honestly, I want them to embrace everything, enjoy the moment, because this is truly special for myself, the program, the university, the community. It's been a long time since we've been here. I want my guys to embrace the moment.

Q. One of the guards you talked about as being a big time guard matchup, but Alabama has Jalil Bethea, who's going to have a bigger role in this game. What do you make of Jalil and how big of a role he's going to be playing?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I know Jalil. I knew him in high school. I'm sure he'll have a bigger role if Holloway doesn't play. We're going to prepare as if Holloway is playing, and if we get news that he's not going to play, then we'll adjust.

Q. Nate Oats had some praise for you earlier in the week. Talked about the interaction you had while he was pursuing Aaron Estrada. Talk about those conversations and what you've seen out of Nate as a program builder and the job he's done.

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I have great respect for Nate. He comes from the mid-major ranks. He was at Buffalo, had great success. I know he's not going to overlook us because he had success when he was at Buffalo being in Arizona, I believe.

Truly respect what he's done at Alabama. He's done an unbelievable job there. Definitely looking forward to matching up against him.

Q. Was it a surprise when you saw Coach Mihalich on the trip with you guys, and what's it been like having him on the trip with you?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: It means everything having one of my biggest coaching mentors with me here in this moment. Coach Mihalich is the one who taught me the college game and to see basketball through a coaching lens. I'm happy to share this moment with him.

Q. Of your two starting guards, what characteristics for each do you like the most between Preston and

Cruz?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I'm going to say with Preston just how competitive he is and his confidence. Like that kid is well beyond his years. The things that he's doing right now as a freshman is truly remarkable. I don't think he even understands fully what he's doing right now.

Then with Cruz, it's just his approach, man. He had a chance to leave us after last season and go out in the portal for a significant amount of money. To his credit, he wanted to stay and get better. I'm just thankful that he's seeing the fruits of his labor come true because hard work truly pays off.

Q. You were robbed of this experience in 2020. What has it been like this whole experience leading up to tomorrow?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: It's been a whirlwind. Like you said, our experience kind of got cut short during that COVID year. So finally being here in front of you guys and being in Tampa and hopefully being able to play because I've still got -- you know.

It's just been great just to go through the whole experience, the whole week, going out to restaurants, receiving standing ovations, getting texts, DMs, e-mails from family, friends, even people that I don't know that's wishing us well. It's been truly an amazing week for me.

Q. You talked a lot over the last few years about the ever-changing way college basketball is with NIL and the transfer portal. I was wondering if you could touch on what are the biggest challenges for you at your school in terms of dealing with that every year?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: Obviously it's keeping my good young players. Yes, it's forever a changing landscape, but the biggest thing for myself and my program is being able to keep a Cruz Davis, hopefully being able to keep Preston Edmead.

But we have a great culture here, and our guys they truly love being here. That's the only reason Cruz stayed last year. He passed up a lot of money to be here.

Q. Obviously Syracuse and Pitt didn't quite have the best seasons this year, but when you look at your bigs and the experience they got playing against those high major teams, how do you think that carries over into this kind of matchup with Alabama?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: I'm not worried about my bigs at all, because honestly I believe we have bigs that are more

sued to go up against high majors than mid-majors. When you play against a mid-major team that plays with a smaller five, that's where we struggle as a team, and that's where my bigs struggle guarding.

So going up against a high major team, I like my bigs' chances against those guys better quite honestly.

Q. Speedy, just kind of going back to what it means, there are a few coaches that get to coach for the school they played for, and now you've delivered a conference championship as a player and a coach. Is there any extra meaning behind that for you?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: There's always extra meaning for me. We're talking about legacy right now. Obviously, like you said, I've won here as a player, now as a coach. So it means so much more to me.

Hofstra is a very special place, always will be a special place. I just want to thank President Poser, Rick Cole for giving me the opportunity to come back and lead this program. I keep saying Hofstra is a very special place because of the people that's involved at Hofstra. It starts at the top with President Poser and just trickles all the way down. Everybody falls in line after that.

Q. Coming back to the bigs, Alabama's team struggled on the boards a lot. You guys have had success with offensive rebounds. How do you evaluate that matchup with Alabama with Aiden Sherrell, who's had some big moments. What have you seen out of him?

SPEEDY CLAXTON: That's what we do. We try to attack the glass on the offensive side of things. We know they're bigger than us obviously, but we're not going to change our style of play. We're going to go and try to get extra possessions. It's not going to be a check the box type of a day for us. We're truly going to go out there and try to pursue the basketball.

Sherrell is a big time athlete, but we're going to go after him.

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