

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

**Alabama Crimson Tide**

**Coach Nate Oats**

**Taylor Bol Bowen**

**Aiden Sherrell**

**Labaron Philon**

Media Conference

Alabama 90, Hofstra 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll hear from Coach for an opening statement.

NATE OATS: Give Hofstra a lot of credit. That's a very good team that came ready to play. I thought we did a good job starting the game out well. Speedy called the time-out. They kind of regrouped. I think they went on a, what is it, 18-2 run there in the middle of the first half. We didn't do a great job.

Once we built the initial lead, we did a good job closing the half. Somehow ended up up 2, as bad as we played in the middle of the first half. I thought our start to the second half was great. He calls the time-out, just like the first half. Our discussion that time-out was we did this in the first half. They came out and went on a run. We've got to continue to get stops. They've got a lot of talented players, particularly Edmead and Davis. Can't let them get going.

We came out, I thought offensively we were pretty good there in the second half. A lot better than the first half. But defensively, we let Edmead get going way too much. I thought we did a pretty good job on Davis for the most part.

We did a great job on the glass. Aiden has 15 and 15. It's not easy to do. I thought Taylor's energy was great. Look, he's got three blocks. I think he's worried about playing hard, the right stuff. He ends up going 3 of 5 from 3, one of his best shooting nights in a long time.



When you get worried about losing yourself in the game and playing hard with all the effort, blue collar, tough plays, I think you're a skilled player, the other stuff takes care of itself.

And Labaron told me he wasn't going home, and he's pushing a triple-double. Ended up with 29, 8, and 7. That's a pretty solid night. Him and Wrightsell both end up plus 22 on the plus/minus. A lot of good things from a lot of our guys.

March, you've got to win or you go home. We were able to figure out how to win here, particularly in the second half. Now we face a really tough team in Texas Tech on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions of the student-athletes.

**Q. Taylor, for all three of you, starting with you, the hardest game to win is the first. Survive and advance. How important was it to get to a point where, okay, we got this handled?**

TAYLOR BOL BOWEN: It was really important. I felt like there were multiple times in the game that we came together. We played well as a team and made a bunch of great team plays. I'm super happy and proud of our guys for how we played today.

AIDEN SHERRELL: It's win or go home, so we had to come up with a different urgency. Had to go out there, execute our game plan.

LABARON PHILON: For me, I would just say the flow of the game, you kind of felt it. We made a little run. They called a time-out, made a little run. Everybody said it in the huddle, in the second half. When we went on the run, they called a time-out. We told the guys, we can't let them go on a run. We stopped them from going on a run, we went on a run. They caught another one.

From that point, we said the same thing. The same result happened. That's what led to us pull away. We focused on just getting stops and pushing our pace. They were trying to slow the game down.



**Q. Labaron, you guys obviously overcame some adversity in the game. Was there a specific moment where you guys felt like momentum flipped, or was it the halftime adjustments slowly coming together in the second half?**

LABARON PHILON: I would say being ready to make adjustments, for us, listening to the coaches, the coaches got great adjustments. They do a great job of getting the game plan ready and have multiple things we can throw out there.

We're not just based off one thing. We've got multiple things we can do. Once everybody locked in, it shows the second half our pace broke them down a little bit. We started getting out and running.

**Q. Labaron, it seemed like you were off your game offensively in the first half. You had the missed open lay-up, which, of course, we never see from you. Then you turn it around. You get 21 points in the second half. What triggered the scoring binge for you?**

LABARON PHILON: I think not just worrying about scoring. I missed a couple open shots, but I don't really bank myself on that. I try to get guys involved. I ended up with seven assists, and I was just mainly focused on getting the ball out of my hands when I needed to, getting it back if I needed to.

So all the guys were ready to play. Amari did great attacking the slots. Taylor hit open shots. Rell got rebounds. It's a collective thing. Once we play like that, it's hard to contain it in the full and half court.

**Q. Taylor, there at the end with that altercation with Victory Onuetu, was there anything that was said beforehand that led to that moment?**

TAYLOR BOL BOWEN: No, we're going to leave that on the court. Just playing hard and competing hard.

**Q. How was your mindset different with not having Aden available with you in the backcourt?**

LABARON PHILON: I would say mindset-wise, got to be the same. Being a leader, I think I did a great job getting these guys ready for the game. It was a great feeling to get to Tampa and focus on basketball, focus on winning an NCAA Tournament game. We have a lot of young guys on the team. We had to prepare them, get them ready. The veteran guys, be ready to step up and lead those guys in the moment.

The young guys did good for their first game. We've got to

continue to build from here.

**Q. It was kind of similar to Ole Miss where you were down double digits, make your run at the end of the half. This time, you were leading at half. How did you learn from that game to come out with more energy in the second half?**

AIDEN SHERRELL: When that happened, we learned from our mistakes. We came out, we gathered ourselves and just went out there, executed the game plan in a better way and had a lot more urgency defensively. We cleaned up our loose ends.

THE MODERATOR: Fellas, thank you very much.

We'll take questions for Coach.

**Q. Coach, after the shove on Bol Bowen late that he commented on, he goes on a scoring binge after that. Coincidental? Was that related? Were you trying to get him the ball?**

NATE OATS: We weren't necessarily trying to get him the ball. He happened to get it. I think he got locked in. Look, I'm super proud of Taylor. He's gone through a lot this year with all these injuries. At different points, get frustrated. Man, he's locked in for the last month.

I think Hofstra is a team that's been on a big winning streak. They came in expecting to win, and you could tell that. So I think they got frustrated a little late.

And then Taylor, I don't know what was said. You okay? Happened to me before at the EYBL.

But I thought Taylor got himself really locked in and was about the right stuff. Three blocks tonight, playing really hard. You look at what he's able to bring. Defensively, we were 20 points per 100 possessions. Better with him on the floor.

I just told him to focus on that stuff. So let's lose yourself in stuff you have full control over. Sometimes he gets a little too worried about making 3s and missing them. But made some, missed some tonight. Just keep doing what you're doing.

So, no, we did not try to get him the ball, per se, after that. But it was nice Labaron found him on that lob. What, did he hit a 3 in a lob? Yeah, it was a good little run for him there.

**Q. I'm sure you're still focused on this one, but I want to ask about Texas Tech. A team like that who has had**



**changes throughout the season, how do you go about preparing for them? Do you focus on the now? Do you draw back to the past? What's the way to go with that?**

NATE OATS: You go with from when they lost Toppin on. When you lose one of the players in the running for National Player of the Year, you'll have to play different once you lose him.

I don't even think we'll spend a whole lot of time on anything before Toppin went out because they had -- I mean, if we were going to lose Philon or whatever, you'd have to make an adjustment. I think we'll spend most of our time looking at their games since Toppin went out, and they're still very good.

They've got a lot of shooting. They've got very good guard play. They've still got bigs that they play a very slow, methodical style that could cause problems if we're not locked in on the defensive end with a quick turnaround.

We play in two days. So you've only got one day between games. We have to get locked in because they do a great job running their sets. We've got to be good.

**Q. Coach, when you're playing a mid-major, the usual M.O. is you'll see great guard play and a lot of toughness because you're playing men. These kids are experienced. Was that the case tonight too?**

NATE OATS: Yeah. I was at Buffalo. It's been seven years now at Alabama. You're right in a way, but it's changed a little bit in the regards that anybody can transfer whenever they want. Some of those men that you would see at the mid-major level all of a sudden are now transferred up when they get really good.

So, yes, we did because they've got some tough guys for sure. I mean, any team Speedy coaches is going to be built on toughness, physicality. If you knew him as a player, that's how he coaches.

Their leading scorer tonight was a freshman that's very talented, very skilled. But I wouldn't call him, like -- he's not some tough, physical 23-year-old. It's a freshman, Edmead.

So they're tough, they're good, they're super talented. They've got great guard play, like you said. Their leading scorer wasn't a fifth-year senior who's been there for five years. It was a freshman that's pretty good.

**Q. Seemed like you guys really were able to control the glass today, something you did in the win late in**

**the year against Auburn. Just being able to get offensive rebounds, second chances hadn't really been a strength all year. Has something changed? Was it just something that happened lately?**

NATE OATS: We've tried to focus on it throughout the year. We were not great at it, like you said, for large parts of the year. We have shown that we're capable of it at times. I think about what Taylor did against St. John's. The whole team is built on toughness.

We've done it in somewhat bigger games. We've also gotten drilled on it in somewhat bigger games. Arizona, Purdue, just got destroyed. We've challenged our guys. We've made it a bigger point of emphasis, and it's great to see Aiden Sherrell come up with 15, Philon come up with 8, and a lot of other guys pitched in.

In the first half, the only guy that had no offensive rebound was Sherrell. So we challenged everybody else. I think he had six in the first half and nobody else had one. Second half, we had guys, Amari ends up with two, Philon with two, and Taylor gets one. We end up with 17 O boards. They had 13, which we did end up winning the glass by 12, but the second-chance points, we're only plus 5 on it.

We've got some room to improve on that, but it's better than it was, like you said, in some other games.

**Q. Amari was scoreless in the first half, had 11 in the second half. How did you see him get involved and contribute and step up in the second half?**

NATE OATS: We needed him to get going. He's one of our better players. He ends up playing 32 minutes. A guy that you're going to play 30-plus minutes, he's got to be out there, he's got to be a threat. He's talented enough to be. We called the first play of the second half to get him going. Got him downhill.

I thought Philon did a really good job, setting a stack screen on their big and got Amari downhill. Philon was smart, thinking the game. The next time we had a chance to run a set play, he wants to run another play for Amari. We just worked. So it's downhill again.

I thought it was really good. The one we called initially, he got in the paint, drew it in, threw it, London missed the 3, and Amari gets the put-back. It's not necessarily the play Amari scores, but it gets him aggressive, downhill, paint touch, in there, gets a board.

We needed him to continue to play like he did in the second half. He's a big part of what we're doing.

**Q. A lot of coaches talk about the middle eight; the last four of the first half, the first four of the second half. How much do you emphasize it in your program?**

NATE OATS: We've got to start and close halves. It was great tonight. Closed the first half, I think we were down 10. Final 6:20 of the first half, it was a 16-5 run. Plus 11 the last six and some change.

Second half, we started on a 12-4 run before they had to call a time-out. So take those two runs together and 26-11 is pretty good there. Something we do talk about, focus on. We've had struggles starting halves and sometimes closing halves. It's good to see we did a great job with that tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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