

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Texas Tech vs Alabama

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Alabama Crimson Tide

Nate Oats

Latrell Wrightsell Jr.

Aiden Sherrell

Amari Allen

Media Conference



**team like that with a lot of options, how do you go about defending them?**

AIDEN SHERRELL: I would say we've just got to get adjusted to how they play really. We play so many teams throughout the season that have a great guard play, and at the end of the day, we had to get adjusted. We're going to have to do the same, especially when it's a game that's win or go home.

**Q. It seems like you've really emerged in the second half lately. What do you think is creating these slower starts in the first half?**

AMARI ALLEN: I'm not sure. Typically I let the game come to me. I don't try to force things. I'm not too focused on scoring or any of that. When I feel like I can get in the flow and get some points, obviously it helps, but my main focus is coming in, trying to play great defense, rebound, all that, and what comes with the scoring comes with it.

**Q. A bit of a slow start in yesterday's game. Is there anything you guys think you can do to kind of prevent that and bottle up what you had in the second half to start out tomorrow?**

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: Yeah. I think we came out with a sense of urgency and I think we dropped it when they went on a run. But I believe just keeping a sense of urgency throughout every possession, and just taking one possession at a time, no matter what the score says, just winning each possession is how we're going to overcome that, and if we do that, then we'll be pretty successful.

But Coach Oats always emphasizes that, just take one possession at a time, and sometimes we let it slip, but if we continue to take one possession at a time, we'll be right where we want to be.

**Q. What did the last week of practice look like as far as obviously most of the focus being on Hofstra? How much have you guys looked at Texas Tech before today?**

AIDEN SHERRELL: Our coaches, like they had a plan for who they figured we were going to face in this tournament, so they had us prepared for whatever situation. Our

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alabama.

**Q. Amari and Aiden, you guys have obviously had ups and downs on the glass, but how did you feel about the performance on the boards yesterday?**

AMARI ALLEN: I'd say at times we can always rebound better, but Rell gave us 15 rebounds and pretty much all season long that's been one of our weaknesses and he's carried us pretty much every single game in that category. I feel like I can step up and give him a little more help on that but it's a point of emphasis and we're really focusing on it.

**Q. Do you think playing a slower team yesterday against Hofstra leaves you better prepared for facing Texas Tech on Sunday?**

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: I feel like we're prepared for many situations. We try to practice many situations, and Hofstra, they played slow, and Texas Tech is like a really good team, and they can mix it up. We're just pretty much prepared for everything.

We try to do different scenarios in practice to emulate each different play style, even though we like to play really fast, we know that teams like to play slow, and there's teams in our conference that do that. So we're kind of used to pretty much a lot of play styles.

**Q. Texas Tech has a deep guard group there. All of them can score it. When you're facing off against a**



practices going up into this tournament has just been very competitive, like we're competing, and although we had that loss in the SEC Tournament, we had to look away from that and gather each other together and focus on making a long run in this tournament.

**Q. Aiden, you had two double-doubles all season. You come into the first game of the NCAA Tournament and you post a 15-15 double-double. What will be the key to replicating that type of performance in the round of 32?**

AIDEN SHERRELL: The key will be just trying to make the winning plays for sure, just doing whatever it takes to help my teammates succeed and help us win. Just giving that second effort on every possession.

**Q. Texas Tech kind of had a bit of a wild card performance yesterday from Josiah Moseley. When you see a guy who only played 12 games in the regular season have a big performance, is that tough to game-plan against? What do you guys think about that?**

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: I mean, there's a lot of things that happen throughout the season. They had a big injury that happened to them, with one of their best bigs. Guys step up throughout the season, you don't know when but they do, and we're all really good basketball players. So you have to respect every person on the floor, and if they're playing, they're obviously really good and they're equipped to play.

We know that, understanding and taking an understatement on anybody is the wrong thing to do. So just respecting each and every person, as we respect ourselves and coming in and giving them the ultimate respect, and playing hard against each person and not taking one person lightly.

**Q. Latrell, I keep hearing you talk about gratitude, and I've heard it a lot throughout the postseason, going back to Nashville. You and Houston being two of the kind of senior leaders on this team, what are the conversations like between you guys where both you guys' college career could end any day but you also have a leadership role to fill? Is it a special dynamic between you two?**

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: Yeah, it really is. Houston is really good at organizing a lot of stuff. He's a really good organizer, and he kind of organized a team Bible study, and we really got close from that.

We have a team chaplain, Scottie, who does chaplain

before every home game, and our big emphasis was Galatians 6:9, and that's just don't grow weary in doing good because at the proper time you'll reap the harvest if you don't give up.

Like you said, we've faced a lot of adversity, so just to be grateful for this opportunity is a blessing in itself, and for us to be able to be on this stage is a blessing that we can give all of our glory to the Lord. I'm just happy to be here.

So I think we all use that as a fill of motivation to just be grateful for the opportunity because you never know when it's taken away, and when we go out there with that, we seize the moment and we capture the moment and where we are, and we have a good time playing, and we all love to be here and playing for each other.

**Q. Latrell or Aiden, how much bigger of a role do you feel like faith has played in this team specifically compared to last year?**

AIDEN SHERRELL: I wouldn't say it's like a difference, but it's a different team for sure that we're with this year, and we've got a lot of guys who are from different schools and different programs, and we just brought them in, into our culture, brought them into our core values that we have as a team, and faith plays a big part for all of us.

We can all collaborate with that, and that's pretty much it.

**Q. Nate, how did playing in that Players Era Festival Tournament back in November prepare you for postseason with playing back-to-back days, playing late games and playing the caliber of opponent as well?**

NATE OATS: Good question. We try to put ourselves in different spots that will help us later. I do think we didn't get to play multiple games in the SEC Tournament. We didn't play very well Friday. That was the one time where we did play, and I thought our -- we didn't play great the first time. I thought we were much better games 2 and 3 out there.

Hopefully we were good enough in the second half to beat Hofstra. If we play the way we did against Hofstra tomorrow night, we won't win the game.

But I did think we got better as that tournament in Vegas went on, our Maryland, UNLV game -- now, Texas Tech is better than Maryland and UNLV, but we played better in games 2 and 3. So hopefully our guys go back to that.

It's been a long time, but I think our guys have done a good job so far, getting off their feet, resting, being locked into



video. Hopefully we have a sharp practice here. It won't be a hard practice, but walk-through, we'll get some stuff done in practice and just rest, shoot. Almost feels like you've got two days between games. The game doesn't start until 9:45, so got a late one.

These guys are used to playing AAU games, playing early morning, late at night, whatever. So we should be all right.

**Q. What have you emphasized to your players about the threats that Texas Tech continues to bring without JT Toppin?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, their guard play is really good. Christian Anderson I think is top 3 in Division I in assists. He's averaging almost 20. He doesn't miss many shots. He's good. There's a reason he's on a lot of NBA Draft boards. They've got the kid Atwell that doesn't miss very many open shots. He's an elite shooter.

I think Petty can score at a high level. Petty is averaging almost as many points as Anderson is the last five games, kind of since Toppin went out. Feels like Petty has taken on a little bit of that scoring load.

I think Watts is really good at the 4. He's going to put some pressure on your 4 in the post; can you guard him? What do you do on ball screen coverages if you want to switch, which is a great way to take away threes, then all of a sudden he's posting.

This team does as good a job as anybody as I've seen at hunting mismatches.

We've gone over their personnel with them. We're going to have to have multiple coverages ready for these guys. But we played some pretty good guards in the SEC, haven't always done great with them all, but we've played them.

Christian is a little bit different than all of them in that he's an elite shooter, catch and shoot off the dribble, mid-range from three. And he is an assist guy, so if you choose to put two on the ball all the time with him, he gets it out of his hands and you really pay for it if you can't get Atwell an open shot, you don't want to give Petty an open shot.

So they put some stress on your defense for sure.

**Q. How important is it going to be for you guys to dictate the pace of play tomorrow, considering the differentiating styles between the two teams?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, we'd love to get the game going up and down. They'd love for the game to walk it up. Although they score it at a high level, they just don't play

fast. Their efficiency numbers are very high.

But no, they're not as deep maybe as we are, although both of us are playing seven guys the bulk of the minutes, and then a couple of the guys they have on there.

But Christian is playing dang near 40 minutes a game. It would be great if we could get it going up and down a little bit. We're not playing anybody 40 minutes a game.

I think we're going to push tempo. They're going to walk it up. We're going to try to push tempo. The best way you push tempo is running off stops. Our defense has to be elite to get the tempo where we'd like to get it. If we're taking the ball out of the net all the time, the tempo is going to favor them.

A lot of this is our defense, our focus on defense, our effort, and we're going to have to be great at all that stuff.

**Q. Similar to that, the pace is a lot different, but you guys have a similar approach, at least from three and the volume that you take. How challenging is that to take things into the equation?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, like I said, their pace isn't necessarily an NBA pace, but they're hunting mismatches to then create open threes, a lot like the NBA.

We like to shoot threes, they like to shoot threes. You look at the three-point rate, we're two of the highest in the country.

They've got three guys that are elite shooters, Atwell and Anderson, and then Petty gets it going. Look at the way they shot it against Akron.

We like to get threes off; so do they. If we can get more good looks off than them, I like our chances. If we all of a sudden can't guard them one-on-one and keep having to help and we get in a rotation all night and they're getting some open threes, we're going to be in serious trouble because they've got guys that make them at a high clip.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk the last couple days about the lack of mid-majors being able to advance in the tournament, getting harder. A lot of people kind of attributing it to the portal, NIL. As someone who was at that level, who has seen sort of the transition and the way that rosters are built, if you attribute it to those things, or how do you see the changes in the Tournament taking place, and why do you think it's happened?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, it's definitely different. This is my



seventh year at Alabama, so it's been a little bit since I've been a Buffalo, since I was there. You can now transfer every year. You can now get paid. That team I had when we were 14th in the country and we were a 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament, we won a first round game and won a first round game the year before but we were a 13 seed.

I think it's going to be hard to -- I think there's still mid-major teams that are going to win games. It's just going to be hard for a mid-major team to end up as a 6 seed and be favored in your first round game like we were that year.

I go back to the guys I had; CJ Massinburg could have played at a high major school. If they had a lot of money back then, you could transfer a player away. I had a great relationship with CJ, I love him, I'm sure he would've loved to stay and play for me, but it's going to be hard for him to turn down the amount of money he would have been offered back then.

I do think that these mid-major -- now, I will say with a lot of the high-major programs taking transfers, it does open up the door for some mid-major coaches that can be great at evaluating high school kids, because a lot of the freshmen that would have in the past gone to a high-major school to then develop, the high majors are taking transfers instead. So maybe the mid-major schools are going to have younger guys that got looked over by a high major.

I still think there's going to be upsets. The Tournament is great with that. Shoot, we just play them, look at the kid Edmead, the freshman there. He killed us he was their leading scorer. Obviously some high majors overlooked him because he's playing as any guard we've seen all year. The mid-major coaches that can evaluate well, recruit those guys, maybe convince them to come play well here, handle the new wave of college basketball a little bit better. Honestly if I was at that level I would think that I would be selling -- I had a kid come here and do X, Y and Z and able to move up to whatever school it may be and get paid this amount of money. Come here, develop us, and we do it with the NBA here, come here, we'll develop you for the NBA. We play an NBA system and you can move up.

That may be what it has to be.

I'd say, too, when I was at Buffalo, and I know some of the mid-major coaches have said nobody would play them, I think if you try hard enough -- the only mid-major schools we turned down are ones that aren't good enough. When we look at our bye games, they need to be good enough because I don't want to be playing Quad 4 games. To me, I want to play really good ones.

I think if you call around, some of the mid-major schools that we're talking about not being able to find games played multiple non-Division I games. I'm not sure how hard you tried if you're playing three non-Division I games.

I think you have to play games in your non-conference to be ready to play these NCAA Tournament games. Like my last year at Buffalo, we won at West Virginia, we won at Syracuse, we played at Marquette when they had Howard who destroyed us but we lost. But we played at Southern Illinois who was really good, we played at St. Bonaventure. We played very good teams. We were ready to play in the NCAA -- the year before, we lost at Syracuse. We played other high major teams, so when we get the Arizona game, we've already played some high-major teams.

I think you're going to have to do a great job evaluating young talent, you're going to have to play some high-major teams, and you can whine and complain about high-major teams not playing you on a neutral, they're not going to do it. It doesn't really work that way.

When I was at Buffalo, I didn't complain about it, we'd just go play them, take the money, get bought, that's where you're going to play them. Play them, if you lose, you've at least got experience playing high-major teams that you're going to have to play in the NCAA Tournament if you want to beat them.

I think it's going to happen. I think it's going to be harder for mid-major teams to make deep runs. It's going to be a mid-major like Buffalo to be a 6 seed, but I think there's still going to be upsets in this tournament.

**Q. Just talking to Taylor in the locker room, he talked about how difficult it's been for him working through his injuries this year, that he feels really good now. How's that hindered him this year and how different is it when you have a healthy Taylor on your team?**

NATE OATS: It's true, Taylor was great yesterday. Look, I think I'm as happy for the guys that have been through adversity, that come through it and find their way as I am for anybody else.

I think Baron has gotten all kinds of attention and deservedly so, shoot, he almost had a 30-point triple-double yesterday, so he's been really good for us.

He's had a little bit of adversity, too. He's had to go through some injuries. He wasn't able to play the second half at Vanderbilt, there's been some other stuff.

But Wrightsell with everything he's gone through to get player of the week the second to last week of conference

play and everything he's been through, I'm super happy for him.

Taylor, to go through everything he's gone through this year, with all the injuries, man, not playing great, coming back from some -- people don't take into account, you can get healthy and get back to where your body is 100 percent, but if you're not able to practice, you're not at 100 percent. Your body may be, but you've got to get back in the flow and groove.

I try to tell our players, in the NBA, when some of these NBA starters come back off an injury, they go to the G-League and get some games in sometimes before they come back up. Well, there's no G-League here. We can't put them on the JV like in high school or whatever. It doesn't work like that. You've got to go back and play and then they don't play well and it messes with their confidence.

I think Taylor has done a very good job getting his head exactly where it needs to be, and I couldn't have been any happier than I was for Taylor when he was playing so great because I think his mind has been right for about a month now and he just needed to get back in the groove and flow.

This is his first NCAA Tournament game. These guys that transferred from some other places that weren't able to play in the NCAA Tournament didn't have this opportunity to play in these games, I think sometimes our freshmen don't realize that -- don't take this for granted. This doesn't happen even at Alabama all the time. I think this is the first time in -- tied for the first time in six straight NCAA Tournaments.

These other places, you don't always go to the Tournament, so you get to play in a tournament, get to play in this type of environment. Taylor was over there stretching in warmups talking about how cool it all was. I was like, the arena? He's like, no, March Madness. We've played in big arenas before. Played at Madison Square Garden, super cool, played up at the United Center in Illinois, great.

But I think the March Madness part of it to Taylor is super happy. To get him to play that well makes us a totally different team. When our front court has depth and they're playing extremely well, we're a different team, and hopefully he can take the confidence from that game and keep building for tomorrow's game.

**Q. You guys out-rebounded them by 12 yesterday. You guys have had rebounding issues at times this year. How important was that to set the tone for how you want to be on the glass during this tournament?**

NATE OATS: I thought it was huge, and we were not out-rebounding them to start the game out. We're down 10 and we've got this history of getting double-digit deficits, and if we keep doing that, it's going to make it tough to win some of these games.

But I think part of us turning the whole thing around send of the first half, second half, Aiden Sherrell ends up nine O-boards, 15 and 15. That's not easy to do.

We've got to continue to rebound it really well. That's part of when Taylor is playing his best, he's rebounding it, London. Shoot, Labaron ends up 29-8-7. We need to him double digits on the glass. Amari needs to help rebound.

I do think part of what makes Texas Tech good is all the hustle plays. I think if you look at Grant, everywhere he's coached, he's won. Will not sure it's been the same style offensively, but there's one consistent thing about his teams is they play really hard, and all of them effort plays and margin plays, if you will, winning plays. His teams are good at. Some of that is your guards going in and getting offensive rebounds. Our guards are going to have to rebound this game. We're going to have to make all those winning tough -- we call them blue-collar plays because they're good at it, and it helps make them -- there's a lot of reasons they're really good, but that's one of them.

I thought the rebounding margin was huge to winning the game. We're going to have to continue to rebound the ball well.

**Q. How important is it to get Amari Allen going in this first half tomorrow?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, I think Amari is key to what we're doing. We need him to come out of the gate, he kind of waited until the second half this last game. Hopefully that gave him some confidence, the way he played in the second half, and we can get him going earlier. I think it's important for all of our guys to just be locked in to all the stuff they do have full control over, the effort plays, the defense, the rebounding, all that stuff, because if they're locked into that and just playing aggressive on offense, I think it'll come.

And yeah, Amari is a big piece of what we're doing, so it would be great if he could put together two halves tomorrow because he was really good in the second half yesterday.

**Q. We just spent time with Coach McCasland and he talked about your experience coaching USA Basketball last summer. Coaches borrow from each other all the time. What's one thing you noticed from him during**



**that experience that you maybe implemented in the program this year?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, his intensity, coaching effort plays, defense, his attention to detail on the defensive end, and he was -- I was just a court coach for those three days that I was with them. He was actually with them the whole time as a full-time assistant under Coach Lloyd, and those guys did a great job. They won the gold over there in Europe.

I've talked to him. I've known Grant for a while. He's good. Like I said, his teams win everywhere he's been, they win. They win at a ridiculously high level at Texas Tech.

I'll be honest; we didn't get into a whole lot of schematic stuff in the three days I was there as a court coach. A little bit. Coach Lloyd put in the offensive system, some of the defensive system a little bit, but it was very basic. I'm sure Grant got his hands all over the defense and maybe the offense a little more, but when I was there, it seemed like he was focused in on just building the relationship with the guys. He's good with that, too. You can tell his guys want to play hard for him, but he coaches his guys hard, he holds them accountable, and I think he did a good job of that there.

I've got a lot of respect for him and what he's done at every level he's been at, and he's a guy that's kind of climbed um there. JuCo, mid-major, been an assistant at a high major and he's doing a really good job there now.

**Q. Latrell Wrightsell said the team has had a Bible study every Thursday throughout the season. What role do Latrell and Houston play, these faith-based leaders for your team?**

NATE OATS: You know what, it's pretty cool. We've got kind of two chaplains this year. Scotty Hollins has been our team chaplain ever since I got there. He's got another younger guy as an intern Dre, he's been great good relationship with the guys. I wasn't even aware they were having the Bible study every Thursday with the team, which is great. It's awesome. I know there's a lot of guys that take their faith seriously.

As a matter of fact, I went into Trell's room last night saw he had a Tony Evans book about manhood on his night stand, which is pretty cool. I've listen to some Tony Evans podcasts and read some of his books. So I thought it was great. He left it at breakfast this morning. So I knew whose book it was when I went there to make sure we had to move from breakfast to video, the book was sitting there on the table and I knew exactly whose it was.

It was cool, he told me he got through the first couple

chapters. I think maybe his mom had given it to him or somebody had given it to him.

Yeah, I think Houston is great with all that. I know the guys go to church together a lot. I've gone with some guys in the past myself.

But it's not something, obviously, that you're going to require. It's more something that they kind of get attracted to and do, and I think it's great. I think it brings the camaraderie with the team -- honestly, the stuff they learn with that is a lot more important than the basketball stuff I teach them, when you think about life.

As we've gone through all the different adversity, some of it injuries, some of it other stuff outside of just basketball that we've had this year, I think Houston is one of those guys that kind of brings it -- the other day when we got this latest news. We're usually in practice, somebody break it down, it's usually Houston or Trell. Houston said, hey, I'm going to break us up together with a word of prayer, if you guys don't mind.

It's great when all that stuff is player led. That's how it needs to be, and those two guys have done a good job. They've obviously been raised by great families. The Wrightsell family is here. His mom and dad are great people. Houston's mom and dad are both here and been following us through the SEC Tournament. They've come to a bunch of games. His mom lives an hour and a half away and his dad works at South Carolina. So he's able to make most of these games. You've got kids that are raised by really good families and they come in and put their imprint in your program and those two guys, seniors.

I just hope I can keep coaching these guys a long time because I think they're about the right stuff. It's great that they've been able to have influence within the team that way.

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