

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Iowa vs Florida

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Ben McCollum

Bennett Stirtz

Tavion Banks

Alvaro Folgueiras

Media Conference

Iowa 73, Florida 72

BEN MCCOLLUM: First off, congrats to Florida on their season. Obviously very well-coached, very physical team, defending national champions. In Division II I was fortunate enough to win a national title and then we actually got beat in the first round, which was pretty rough.

But they got back to the 1 seed and had a spectacular season. I've got a lot of respect for their program.

As far as my guys go, it's just tough. That's all it is. It's just tough kids. They fight. They compete. They stick with it. They exemplify everything that we've wanted in Iowa basketball. They've established the foundation that we've desperately needed, and couldn't be any more proud of them.

Q. Tavion, only the people in that locker room thought that wasn't an upset. What did you see on film that made you think you were going to beat Florida?

TAVION BANKS: The physicality. We're in two different conferences; we're in the Big Ten they're in the SEC. But I just know we're more physical. And after just watching the film and just seeing what they were doing, I just knew that we had an opportunity to win the game.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I just thought we were five grown men against five grown men and we were going to show who wanted it more. We've got to make sure that's always us. Then things we cannot control, we don't even think



about it.

BENNETT STIRTZ: You can prepare for them as much as you want, but when the ball tips, we aren't worried about them. We know what we can do as a group, and we were just focused on what we can do. Like you said, we were the only ones that believed in us, the coaching staff, our families and us as a team in the locker room. That's the only people that believed in us, and it's going to stay that way for the rest of the season.

Q. Alvaro, can you take me through that last shot? What was the play call, and after it went in, what was the emotions like for you there?

BENNETT STIRTZ: Yeah, the play was drawn up for me to get downhill, and then this dude came up to me and he's like, I'm going to be ready and I'm going to make it. That's what he actually did.

BEN MCCOLLUM: Did you say that?

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I did. That was me.

BEN MCCOLLUM: He's got --

BENNETT STIRTZ: Ultra confidence.

BEN MCCOLLUM: Irrational confidence.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I mean, I work a lot, so...

Q. Bennett, the confidence you have in Alvaro, where does that come from?

BENNETT STIRTZ: It's just the journey we've been on this season, and it started in the summer. It's just a bond we have throughout however many months we've been together. Six guys came from Drake, and we just bonded super quick and we just love hanging out with each other. I don't know, we're unselfish, too, so we like seeing other people succeed more than ourselves. That's what also makes it so special.

Q. Alvaro, I saw you run over to hug your mom. What words did you exchange with each other?



ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: Well, we didn't say much. She told me I love you 100 times. I said I love you 100 times back. It's super special having my mom here. She's everything for me. Where the world would be without the moms. She's super tough. She's been through a lot of things in life.

Sometimes when I struggle through basketball, and basketball is life, I think of my mom as an example of resilience, and that really inspires me and gives me confidence. Because she's not just a fighter, she's a super special person. I'm so lucky to have her as a mom.

Q. She hasn't seen you play in two years?

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: Yeah. Yeah. She saw me with the national team this summer, but in college basketball, she came to one game when I was a freshman, and I didn't play much.

Coming back after two years, and seeing where I am right now and how much I worked to be where I am right now, for her it's a great feeling. Because she's sent a 16-year-old kid to America without knowing any English, with us only, without anything but dreams and hunger. And this one is for her and my dad. He's watching up there.

Q. Bennett, for you, talk a little bit about the pace of the game and how you guys really controlled that. Your patience with the shot clock and taking shots late in it, even when the Gators were making a run, how did you stay so patient and force them to play your style?

BENNETT STIRTZ: We can play fast, but I think we just play to our strengths, and that's just getting the best shot we can and slowing the pace down. We don't play a lot of guys so maybe that's part of it.

We kind of saw it in the tournament last year after we played Mizzou. And then some teams in the Big Ten like Michigan play fast. It wasn't nothing new to us. We knew we had to prepare, and I think it started on the offensive end if we got a good shot. That's why we play slower. If we get a good shot we can get our defense set, so those are just some things.

Q. Alvaro, you mentioned that you had a lot of confidence. What gave you the confidence for that? You didn't shoot it a ton tonight?

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I don't trust in confidence. It's as simple as that. I'm the same player. I make it or I miss it. With that mentality, I just don't let mistakes affect me a lot. Sometimes I do a better job than other times, but that's the intention.

Q. Tavion, a friend of mine texted me if Iowa wins, Coach McCollum could run for governor. Would you vote for him?

TAVION BANKS: Hell, yeah.

BEN MCCOLLUM: He would be my right-hand man. He would be whatever he wants.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Yeah, I'd do it too.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I didn't understand anything really.

BEN MCCOLLUM: If I was governor, would you vote for me?

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: I would vote for you. I don't know -- I'm an immigrant so I don't have a vote. That's first of all. But yeah, I'll vote for my coach. I can say that.

Q. Alvaro, can you take us through the double technicals there, just the whole sequence where you're trying to get the ball. And I don't know if a punch was thrown. From your side what happened there?

BEN MCCOLLUM: Don't overexplain this.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: It's as simple as we were fighting for the ball. We both fall and we kept fighting for the ball, and people kind of overreacted. I didn't throw any punch. It was just a thing of the game.

It's March Madness, everyone wants to win so bad. And they're a tough team. It's just something that sometimes happens in basketball. But I've got to make sure that my intentions are the right ones. I'm never going to try to make any pain on a player even less without playing basketball.

That's not who I am, who we are, and that is just something of basketball. I don't give much importance to that.

Q. Alvaro, I asked you about your mom a few minutes ago and you started to talk about your dad. I wanted to give you an opportunity to speak more about him and the impact that he had on your life.

ALVARO FOLGUEIRAS: Well, he passed when I was nine years old. He left us with my mom and my brother in my house. It was kind of hard. We didn't really feel it as much because my mom always made sure that we didn't need anything, absolutely nothing. So I cannot say that I grew up in an environment where I needed some things. No,

that's not the truth.

Sometimes I can say that because I feel his absence. I was just going in the court and playing to get away of my house to be with something else. But I can say that I had a happy childhood. Something that we all said, and everyone has these kind of things on their life. It's that we are not victims. I never let things like that make me a victim. Not to me and not to my brother, not to my mom.

We are like that because my mom was showing out every single day. Yeah.

Q. Coach, the play there with the tangle up, obviously the emotions and everything got raised after that. Did you have to kind of change how you were coaching at all after that situation or what were the emotions like after that tussle there?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, it's two guys going for the ball. It probably got physical. I haven't watched it, so I don't know. I thought they got tied up. I thought he kind of pulled it away from Al. And then Al, I think, didn't like that very much, and that's what I saw. They just kept fighting for the ball. And then it was just a melee and then we tried to break everybody up.

No one wants somebody to be out of the game and no one really wants technicals. Sometimes that just happens. That's just part of the game.

Q. Can you take us through the final play, what you drew up and what actually happened?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, we drew it up where Bennett got free, and he got downhill. I think Haugh, he had to help up because Bennett had a head of steam. When he had the head of steam, it was the right read, he got enough depth, gave him a wide open shot, and he caught it in rhythm and buried it, and didn't hit anything but net. And it was surreal like oh, my gosh, he just made that.

Obviously the clocks, we were going to call a time-out there to make sure that nothing happened, but then they had to check the clock. They were able to draw something up. Kind of knew they were going to drive when I saw Haugh down the floor, and I figured they were going to try to pass to him, and they did. And fortunately it wasn't in time.

Q. That's two games in a row you've been the most physical team, you're getting the 50 balls and you're controlling tempo. Is that the MO for Iowa basketball?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, that's the MO for us right now.

That's who we have to be. We have to get 50/50 balls. We have to make sure we increase our possessions. We do have to be physical. We just have to fight. It's hard because it puts so much onto Bennett where they put the whole game plan on him and he's kind of our main scorer.

So they're really physical with him, so we have to rely on other things when that happens, and I thought our guys did a good job of relying on it.

Q. I know your guys talked about different leagues and just Iowa's physicality, but to outscore four in the paint, they hadn't been outscored in the paint since the Arizona game, which was in November. Just kind of what went into that, and discuss how you guys were able to kind of impose your physicality.

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, I thought we did a good job of really executing what we wanted from an offensive standpoint. We actually just put it in this morning, the few packages to be able to get what we wanted to get. Late last night at probably 2:00 or 3:00, oh, there it is. It's a heck of a deal. Then we put it in this morning.

And it was in our normal stuff but there was a few reads, a few movement patterns that we thought would really affect their ability to defend our ball screens. We knew they'd stay home on Bennett, so we put him in different spots, because then you're playing a 4-on-4 and sometimes 3-on-3 depending on who they're staying home on. We just have to use it against him and hope that your other guys can finish and do some other things, and our guys did.

Q. Bennett kind of mentioned the culture and six guys coming over from Drake. Did you feel like that culture was built already enough to a point where you'd be headed to the second weekend in your first year?

BEN McCOLLUM: No, I don't really think about it like that because I don't know that winning necessarily dictates what kind of culture you have, per se. I think over time you create a culture. Culture to me is just the people involved and it's unwritten rules that everybody follows. You don't just create it. You have to get the right people to be in the system.

We do have the right people. Probably still can't sustain itself yet. We've got to keep getting the right people. Did I know we were going to win like this? I didn't think we were going to lose. It's like the old deal of -- it always drove me crazy and I said this last year at one point: Did you expect to be 23 and 11? I said, no, I didn't expect to lose those 11 games. You shouldn't go into a season and expect to lose a game. That's not what it is.

That's probably my mentality. I'm a realist still. You don't just go win every game. Sometimes you do, but I think our culture is getting there.

Q. Coach, every coach wants to play fast. They want to play up-tempo, they want to play 10 guys. How hard was it to sell to your guys, hey, this is what we're going to do to win?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, we don't sell that. We sell efficiency on offense. We sell if you want to be in the NBA, you want to be in wherever, you have to be able to defend your position. So we sell defense.

Then we sell the fact that we are going to love the heck out of you. Like, that's what we sell. We're going to take care of you. We're going to make you a better man, better father, better husband, whatever you want to be in life. That is really honestly what we sell.

From a basketball perspective, we feel like it speaks for itself depending on what you are. If you're a point guard, obviously you're really good. If you're a big guy, we can use you. If you're anything, we can use you. Anybody that's a recruit that hasn't signed yet, we need you, too.

Q. I see your athletic director in the back. You're 3-0 in Tampa. Are you coming back?

BEN McCOLLUM: Heck, yeah. I think she probably is. She might move Carver-Hawkeye down here, I think. Tampa is nice. It's beautiful down here. But I like Iowa City. I like Carver-Hawkeye. That's home, so we love it there.

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