

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

Monday, March 23, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Nate Oats

Latrell Wrightsell Jr.

Houston Mallette

Noah Williamson

Media Conference

Alabama - 90, Texas Tech - 65

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Alabama head coach Nate Oats and student-athletes Latrell Wrightsell, Houston Mallette and Noah Williamson.

NATE OATS: It was a fun game to be a part of. Texas Tech is a very good team, and they've done a lot to win the amount of games they've won and beat the team. And they lost a national player of the year candidate in Toppin, and then figured out a win against get some really good teams, I mean Iowa State's Sweet 16 team, dominated Kentucky (indiscernible) fastest today. And this Tech team went to Iowa State and beat them without Toppin.

For us to win in the fashion we did, I've got a lot of respect for Grant. I think he's one of the best coaches in the country. Total class act. I got a lot of respect for what he did when he lost Toppin. For our guys to come in and do what they did in this game, I've got a lot of respect for these seniors. They came ready to go.

Trelly's defense on Anderson -- Anderson's one of the best guards in the country -- but Trelly's defense on Anderson, 2-for-11, 1-of-7 from 3, seven points, one rebound, three assists two turnovers -- I don't know if he's ever had a game that bad because I think he's one of the best guards in the country. You've got to give Wrightsell a ton of credit.

All three of these seniors came with the mentality we're not going home. And you could tell it. And I tell our guys all the time, just be about the right stuff, lose yourself in the



game and the other stuff takes care of itself.

So you kind of go down the list. Houston wins the hardhat tonight in limited minutes. Noah was right there. And Noah had nine, Trelly had 13. They were some of our leaders. You look at the three of these guys, what they shot from 3, Trelly goes 6-of-9, Houston goes 5-for-7, and Noah goes 2-for-2.

I think they just bought into being about the right stuff. These guys hit 13 threes between the three of them, go 13-of-18.

When you lose yourself in a game, lock into playing defense, making the effort plays, getting stops, getting rebounds, that stuff takes care of itself. And I think this game exemplified it as much as any game you've ever seen.

I thought these guys were about the right stuff. I'm super happy for these seniors. This is the fourth straight Sweet 16 we've been to. These guys know what winning takes. Trelly has been here three years, been part of a Final Four and an Elite Eight, now a Sweet 16 team, we're trying to make a deeper run.

Houston came in, was part of that last year's Elite Eight run, even though he wasn't playing at that point. And Noah came in here to win, and he's been all about the right stuff. Super happy. He's 3-for-3 in the tournament. And I've seen a different side of him.

He ends up with eight points, plays well. Thought he made some big defensive plays. Had a steal.

Really happy for these guys. Really happy for the entire team. I thought these guys really brought the right stuff.

Q. Could you address what Coach talked about, this not being your last game. What got into your mindset, what went into tonight to make sure that tonight wasn't your last night of college basketball?

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: I mean, you know, you never want to stop playing. You don't want it to end. I think it's self-explanatory. You go out there and just fight to move on, and that's what we did. We came out there with



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energy and effort that wasn't matched today.

And we played for each other. We played to move on, but we also played one possession at a time. We didn't take it for granted.

We just wanted to get a stop and a bucket each possession at a time. It was never looking at the bigger picture, never looking at the score, just one possession at a time.

And I think over time it built up a lead for us. We're thankful we made shots. But at the end of the day, it was really a focus on defense and our mentality to get stops. And that's what we did. Once we got stops, our offense took care of itself.

HOUSTON MALLETT: To piggyback off what Trely said, our team has real Mudita. We cheer for others' success, each other's success like it's our own success. You can see it with our team with our program I mean.

We've dealt with probably more adversity than any of the other programs in the country this year. I think we've been really well equipped in not focusing what's happened to us but more so our response.

I think the way we've responded time after time after time and the way we've prepared in practice -- like our last week of practice was probably the best week of practice we've had. Our film numbers were the best they've been.

We're doing all the right things, I think, and I think it's showing off. And we just -- the big thing is we love each other. I told Trely today, I love you, bro.

I told everybody I don't want to leave Alabama. I will die for this school and this place. These guys love it as well. That's been our whole motto this year.

NOAH WILLIAMSON: We had a long day leading up to this game, a lot of time to think about the finality of it. If we lose today, that's the last college basketball game that us three are going to ever play. I think that led into us having the right disposition coming out, playing hard.

I think the scoreboard kind of took care of itself. I wouldn't say we really stopped to look at it too often. It's just enjoying yourself, playing as hard as you can. It's the joy of basketball.

Q. Noah, I'm assuming you saw what happened to Florida. They came out, didn't get after it right away and it became a problem. Did you talk about that, like, we've got to put the pedal to the metal right away?

NOAH WILLIAMSON: We talked about, right off the rip, we've got to come out with the right disposition, play hard, turn them over, not turn it over ourselves. And I think we did just that.

HOUSTON MALLETT: I think it all goes into our preparation. I think we've been incredibly prepared, and we've focused on the things we can control and the things we need to focus on.

I want to give a shout out to Trely because Trely is the senior starting for us. And I don't know, the way he started, like, our senior night in Auburn, the way he started against Hofstra and the way he started tonight, you felt a presence.

He's incredibly physical. He's been our point of attack defender like easily. And I think that's kind of what we've been focused on, is just everything we can do to try and win.

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: And for me, I'll just say I think it starts with the top guy, our coach. Our preparation through film, through everything we do, walk-through, through everything, it's just detailed to a timely manner. And I think he instills in us to just play hard, work on our effort and everything else will take care of itself.

So when we have our coach believing in us and -- it starts with our top guy doing everything right. We just follow suit. Once we follow suit and stick to his game plan, I think everything else works out because he's a really good coach and he prepares us really well.

Q. Houston, would you address, talk about all season long with rebounding, and yesterday Coach Oats talked about the guards needing to rebound well. Your first 3 came off a double offensive rebound -- you got the first one and someone else got the second one, kicking out to you. What was working for you guys on the board and what was your mentality attacking the offensive glass?

HOUSTON MALLETT: I mean, we play this thing called the possession game. It's one of our main things. Coach Oats probably talked about it. We just want to get more possessions, because we've got the shot geography figured out. If we get more possessions than the other team we'll be in pretty good shape to win that game.

So with that being said, just being out there and just playing with a reckless abandon. I tell these guys all the time, I play basketball the way I live my life and that's with passion, and I think these guys do as well. We just come out there the and compete to the best of our ability.

And rebounding is a big thing, especially in our next game, I know that will be a huge point of emphasis. But also we knew their guards were playing heavy, heavy minutes. And so just crashing and playing fast were two big points of emphasis for us.

Q. Latrell, Coach talked about you guarded Christian most of the game. What were the tendencies you tried to take away that he did well? And what things did you exploit to try to get him into this game?

LATRELL WRIGHTSELL JR.: I think with a really good guard like that you make it tough and put a body down each time and make him feel your physicality and presence there every time. So that's what I tried to do, just disrupt his timing a little bit.

But with a good guard like that, sometimes you just gotta pray for some misses too. I think I just did a pretty good job just getting into the ball.

And I don't know it wasn't just all me, I think as a team, collectively, our guys, our big man Rale (phonetic) and Noah telling me coverages in the ball screens and stuff, they ran a lot of ball screens and helping me out from the backside of the coverages of what I need to do and then getting the ball and stuff like that.

And then we also prepare really well. And our coaches gave me a really good game plan on how to guard and what we need to do. So that's what I really did. I just tried to make it as hard as possible on them and make it difficult and I'm glad it worked out.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. When did you feel, my guys are locked in tonight and we're focused?

NATE OATS: You know what, we were all over the O boards right out of the gate. And I thought when Wrightsell, first possession, was really into Anderson. I liked our energy right out of the gate.

I told them before the game, too -- I'm pretty close with T.J. Otzelberger, he played at Whitewater where I coached -- I've known him since we were both right out of college. I watched parts of their game today. And he made the statement when they were down 12, I think, at the under-12 media timeout, he got interviewed and Kentucky was up. He said, they're making some shots that they're not going to make as the game gets going, they get tired.

I told our guys their last meeting right before pregame

meal, the same guys tonight. They've got tough shot makers. They may make some shots, some very tough shots. Christian, Petty and Atwell can all make tough shots. We're not going to worry about that. We're going to play as hard as we possibly can play on every possession. They make some tough shots, they make them.

Iowa State ends up blowing them out by 20.

I said whatever happens early, just keep playing the right way, play hard. And the score will take care of itself.

I thought we were playing hard out of the gate. First half, I think we had 12 O boards. And this is a team that we showed, the game that they won at Iowa State on February 28th, in the first two possessions of the game, Texas Tech had three O boards and two of them were from the guards. Petty got one and Anderson got one.

I told our guys, we've got to outdo these guys on the effort stuff because every team that Grant's ever coached in his life is always based on playing hard and the effort stuff, like what we try to do.

I said, if we can outdo them on the effort stuff, we're going to win this game. And we chart, we call them blue-collar points, basically effort points. And we were dominating that stuff in the first half.

They came back, made it a little tight in the second half. They played a little harder. And I think our guys relaxed a little bit. Lead went from 24 to 18. Then we did blow it back up to 34 at one point there over about a seven-minute stretch.

But for the most part, I thought we kept just playing the right way, playing hard.

So I think right out of the gate, when we had the possession with multiple O boards, like we're here, we're ready to play.

Q. On that same note you talked about the guards needing to rebound to win this game. I believe I'm counting 32 rebounds from the guards today. What did you see out of them? What gave you the advantage, what do you think gave you the advantage on the glass?

NATE OATS: I mean, Baron was looking at a triple-double if he could have got four rebounds in the second half. If he would have got four rebounds in the second half, he probably pushes it, gets the one more point and four rebounds needed.



When LaBaron rebounds, our offensive numbers are ridiculously high. Because he's pushing it, they can't stop him. I think it's when they get -- Wrightsell has four, Baron has six, all in the first half when we started to build the leadup. Houston has eight, plays super hard, five O boards.

His effort, I love that kid and I love this whole team. We've gone through all kinds of adversity. You heard Houston. He loves the guys. Coaches love our team. I love coaching these guys. But man he plays hard and he deserves to have a night like this, 5-of-7 from 3.

I just kept telling him, you're about the right stuff. You worked too hard you played too hard for this stuff not to get rewarded. It's going to get rewarded. And it was rewarded tonight.

I'm proud of the way they fought, played hard. Really, everybody, you think about these three seniors, what did they combine for, 47 points? But Philon didn't score in double figures. I don't think he cared. He would have loved to get a triple-double. Maybe we can get him to rebound a little more.

But he averaged double digit assists, just had a career high in assists. He averaged a double-double here and take the 27 and nine. And he averaged 18 and 10. And his rebounds were up there, too, maybe, what, seven I think he averaged. I think he had eight rebounds. So 18, 10 and 7 is a pretty solid two game stretch for Labaron. I think everybody was locked into being about the right stuff tonight.

Q. You mentioned concerns at various times this season about your defense. Most recently against Ole Miss and Nashville what do you make of the team coming here and against Hofstra and now Texas Tech putting together back-to-back good defensive efforts?

NATE OATS: When we made the Final Four and our defense wasn't great that year. We finally convinced them, if we guard at the level we should have been guarding all year, we can beat anybody in the country. And we win four games, and I think if you go look at the statistics on those four games that we won in the tournament, the defense was ranked significantly higher than it was all year.

If we guard like we did tonight, particularly at the point of attack, with our guards, we can compete with anybody in the country. Now, obviously Michigan's looming, and they've got ridiculous size all over the place. We're going to have to rebound. Our bigs are going to have to bring it.

Without Toppin, Tech's front court was decimated. And I

thought we were able to go smaller, switch, playing Taylor and London in there a lot. It was great that Noah played well.

Sherrell ends up in foul trouble, took him out. They'd gone smaller. We stayed small. It's nice we were able to rest Sherrell. Hopefully he's fresh because we're going to need him to play as many minutes as he can possibly play against Michigan here.

But I think defensively with our effort we ended up with eight steals. We're a team that hasn't been able to force many turnovers as a team with good guards. We forced double digit turnovers. We haven't done it a lot this year.

I think if we guard it like on the perimeter our bigs are going to have to really step up here against Michigan. You know, we give ourselves a chance and Michigan's maybe the most dominant team in the country. Probably them, Arizona and Duke, those three teams have been the most dominant three teams in the country. We're going to have to be ready to go on Friday in Chicago.

Q. Fourth straight Sweet 16. Just you guys, Houston, and Tennessee are the only teams to claim that right now. What does that say about the program you've been able to build right here?

NATE OATS: I mean, you look at those two coaches. I've got the utmost respect for Rick and Kelvin. I think they're two of the best to ever do it. I'm not as good as them. I've got a long ways to go.

Both their teams play better defense on a consistent basis. If I can get our guys to guard like both those two guys get their teams to guard, we'll be playing a long time this year. That's the goal.

So that's a pretty good company to be in. We've done it a little different than those teams. Our offense is hard to guard, especially these -- we'll play teams and nobody in the Big 12 really plays like we play. And I think BYU did until they got hurt with a bunch of injuries.

We try to go through the schedule and see who plays similar to us on these teams' schedules. Big 12's the best -- SEC is good, I don't know how many SEC teams made it. Four out of the Sweet 16? Is that the most? Yeah, so is that the most of any conference? Florida got beat. Arkansas, us, Tennessee and Texas, right?

And, by the way, Ole Miss lost to Texas. We lost to Ole Miss. Ole Miss woke two teams up. Got them -- so thank you to Coach Beard and company -- us and Texas both got a wake-up call at the SEC Tournament.



But we've been able to be a little better offensively and a little different than what a lot of these teams see. We've got to get our defense better on a consistent basis. Two of the seven years we've been here we've got in the top three in the country in defensive efficiency. But this year, I thought Coach Adams does an unbelievable job. I thought he put together an unbelievable great game tonight. He works tirelessly.

He's an NBA guy that's really fell in love with college. He's great. I love him. It's on me to get more effort, better buy-in from the guys on the defensive end, but to be in the same category as Tennessee with Coach Barnes and Houston -- I think Houston's the only one to make more since we've been here.

We made the one the first year that they had the tournament, which would have been our second year. Houston's made every one and we missed the one year and the second time they had the NCAA Tournament after that Sweet 16 run with, what was that, '21? We missed '22, and he didn't miss '22. When you play as hard as they play every night out, you're going to be in the Sweet 16 pretty much every year.

Q. Talking not only about the results, but to be leading a program that has guys who talked about themselves and you in the way those three guys just spoke about themselves as they just did and as how they just spoke about you, what does that mean to you?

NATE OATS: It means a lot, because, look, I got into coaching at the Division III level as a volunteer assistant for five years, I didn't make any money. I just coached because I wanted to coach. And I took the high school job back in Metro Detroit, Romulus.

It's interesting, a former principal, Hal Hurd (phonetic) was in the building tonight. Pretty cool. I had some good people I worked with at Romulus.

And I used to tell my assistant, Josh Baker, who was with me a long time and he took his own program (indiscernible) Christian, won five state championships, was super proud of my former -- Bryan Hodgson was in the building, super proud of a lot of former assistants that do it.

But it's the whole family. I try to run it like a family, like we did in high school. But I used to tell Josh all the time if all we do is teach these guys to put this round ball through this ring, man, we're wasting an awful lot of time in the gym. Because we spend an awful lot of time in the gym. Too much. To be honest with you.

But I still try to run it like a high school program, and have the guys out to the house. Spend a lot of time with them. Build real genuine relationships. People can question different things we do, but I think the one thing that everybody will say about us and our program we've had starting Romulus Buffalo (indiscernible) that we love our guys.

We have three core values. One of them is selfless love. We get out of ourselves. We get into the team. You heard Houston talk about Mudita. We teach our guys how to love each other, love the community, love the program. Nobody's perfect. I'm not perfect. Neither are they.

But I want a real relationship with these three. Everybody that's played with me for 30, 40, 50 years, like I want to get invited to their weddings. I want to them be close with my daughters. I want a family atmosphere, and I think we built that. And I think you see it from those guys. It means a lot more to me than winning games.

So I think when you build it like that, you're doing it the right way, you're coaching for the right reasons. And that meant a lot to hear what Houston, Trely, Noah said tonight. It meant a lot to me.

Q. When you look at the stat sheet, almost a third of your points come from the bench. You don't fall off. You reload when you sub, right?

NATE OATS: Yeah, not all the time. But tonight we did. Houston's 15 certainly helped in that. And Noah hasn't played like this, maybe, but all he keeps telling me is, I don't want to be the reason we lose. Like, he just is such a good kid. I'm going to give you everything I got, Coach.

For a kid that maybe didn't play as well through the course of the year as maybe what he wanted -- he doesn't really care. And I think that's the culture that the program's built. It's not about him. It's about what he can do to help us win.

And Houston's never been about himself. I mean, he goes 5-of-7 from 3, has 15 points, eight rebounds, and he was most excited about the fact he won the hard hat. Finally. He finally wins it. Five O boards. He plays so hard.

The greatest thing is you have to figure out who wants to slap the Alabama on the thing for TV and whatnot. The guys had Noah do it. They were so excited for Noah because he's been about the right stuff, sets great screens, rebounds, played hard. Noah, Taylor and Noah were the two guys they picked in the two games.

So Taylor's been about the right stuff. So proud of Taylor. His scoring wasn't what we wanted, but he didn't care. We

won. They're calling them Tournament Taylor because we see a different side of Taylor in the tournament. Noah's come alive.

So I think when you build a culture where the guys -- these guys built the culture with us, they're a part of it. You go back to Herb Jones and Jordan Bruner and Alex Reese and all those guys that helped us build it when we won the SEC regular season tournament in year two and made a Sweet 16.

You started like that and you got guys that continue to build it the right way, and they just make it about the team, I think good things happen to them. So the bench production, all those guys care about was helping the team. So really the bench production was Taylor, Houston, Noah.

None of them care that they don't start, just whatever they can do to help the team. I love when you get production off the bench. I love when all the guys just care about winning the game and having real Mudita.

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