

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Miami (OH) vs Tennessee

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

**Miami (OH) Redhawks**

**Travis Steele**

**Coach Peter Suder**

**Brant Byers**

**Luke Skaljac**

**Eian Elmer**

Media Conference



right way.

EIAN ELMER: Going off what he said, definitely a quick turnaround, but, you know, it's a nice experience also. I don't think anybody is really too upset about it. It's something we dreamed of. We wanted to come to Philly, and we're here. We flew in last night, so we got in pretty late.

**Q. Brant, I have one for you, and then I will ask any of the other guys. Brant, for you, in Philadelphia, in this building, everybody was talking about it, knowing it might happen. How does it feel to be sitting in this building in front of the other guys? Do you let yourself sort of ride this wave that you're on and take it in and enjoy it, knowing how much of this country is rooting for you?**

BRANT BYERS: Yeah, it's definitely very special to make it to the round of 64. The journey that we have had has been very special and we want to keep it going.

PETER SUDER: Yeah, we do such a good job at celebrating the wins. We have been doing it all year, but the best thing we do a move it on. It's business at the end of the day. You have to go out there and stay consistent every single day through the process, and we have a game coming up here, so we're going to be excited for it.

LUKE SKALJAC: Yeah, obviously, this is really cool. A really nice arena. It will be super fun to play Tennessee tomorrow.

**Q. For any of you or all of you, speaking of riding the wave, what do you think of the Speedo fans you have there? For some of the home game this is year, I talked to one of them, he said he's going to try to, hopefully, get some more out here in Philly tomorrow, but do you know any of them; Number one? And number two, what do you think of the concept in general? Do you think it works?**

BRANT BYERS: I personally don't know any of them, but they got a missed free throw out of SMU yesterday, so we'll definitely take it, and the support they have given us all season has been pretty special.

THE MODERATOR: All right. So we now have the Miami of Ohio student-athletes. This is their 18th appearance in the NCAA Tournament, but their first since '07. The RedHawks are the first team in MAC history to earn an at-large bid since 1999. They are 32-1 after a perfect 31-0 regular season. They won their eighth tournament game last night defeating SMU in the First Four. We will take questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. What does your last game really symbolize with all the outside noise you were hearing from the Selection Committee and all that being able to win the way you did?**

PETER SUDER: Yeah, there was a lot out there, a lot of hate, a lot of doubt that we couldn't accomplish what we did yesterday, but we do such a good job as a group and a whole of just blocking that noise out, just going out there and competing as much as we can. We have a group of guys that collectively, like I said, we do such a good job of ignoring all the outside noise and getting it done on the hardwood floor.

**Q. Did you guys get any sleep? What has it been like? The game was over at 10:00. What's it been like since the game ended?**

BRANT BYERS: Yeah, it's definitely a really quick turnaround, trying to get as much rest as possible, but, yeah, it's time to move on and approach the next game the



EIAN ELMER: Yeah, I don't really know any of them, but honestly, they're a great group of guys. That's pretty awesome how they support us all the time. Also, they're very effective. We'll make sure we return the favor and show up to some swim meets.

**Q. Guys, you have a game tomorrow and have an opportunity, a lot of people are calling you guys a potential Cinderella story just because of the seeding number. What are you hoping to continue to prove to those who have been doubting the story and historic run for the program and also just mid-major basketball as a whole?**

PETER SUDER: Yeah, I would say we're super fortunate for the opportunity. The thing that we would look forward to is don't count us out. I think we do belong here. I think we showed that last night especially, but just don't count us out. We're super excited for the opportunity ahead of us in the future.

LUKE SKALJAC: We're not really trying to prove it to media, fans or whatever. We all know inside the locker room who we are as a team. It's not really anything we're thinking about. We're just taking it day by day.

**Q. Brant, I know Chambersburg is what? Three and a half hours or so from here and you spent a year at Perkiomen. How many ticket requests from friends and family and how many of them will be here? I know Ethan is from here as well, even though he hasn't gotten to play very much. What have you heard about how much of his friends and family are going to be here?**

BRANT BYERS: Yeah, I know a lot of friends and family of mine will be here. I got a ton of ticket requests and had to turn a couple down because I didn't have enough. It will be a really cool environment to come back and play close to home.

**Q. You haven't had much time since you were focused on the other game? What do you know about Tennessee? What is it you have to do to beat them?**

EIAN ELMER: They're a good team, solid. They're huge. They have a huge size advantage. We know that they're probably the best offensive rebounding team in the country, so we have to match their size with our physicality, same thing we had to do last game, and we just have to go out there and be ourselves.

LUKE SKALJAC: Yeah, what Eian said. It definitely all starts on the glass. I think they're number one offensive rebounding, like he said. I think they get, like, 45% of their

misses back, which is insane, but we have to do a good job on the glass and just keep playing how we are.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student-athletes? All right, great. Thanks, guys. Appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we're now joined by Miami of Ohio head coach Travis Steele, his fourth year at Miami. This is his first appearance leading a team to an NCAA Tournament as a head coach, and he's 1-0.

Coach, do you have an opening statement?

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, excited to be here. Came off a good one last night against SMU, thought our guys played really well. A great environment, one of the best NCAA Tournaments I have been part of. It was like a home game for us. Appreciate Miami nation turning out for us tonight. With Tennessee, we have a really formidable opponent, got a ton of respect for coach Barnes and their program. They got a real identity. Super tough, got to block them out. We got a lot of a lot of challenges for tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, last night we saw the swim team in the back and they helped get the missed free throw for SMU. Can you speak to what it has been like to see the fan base and that specific part come together and any conversations of them coming to Philly and how to maybe get them on a flight to help that same respect, what happened last night?**

TRAVIS STEELE: We need to get them back here, don't we? Number one, I saw -- in the game, you're really locked in. Then all of a sudden, you see a group of young men in Speedos coming down the stairwell right there in the end zone, and the place just absolutely erupted when it happened.

I know if I was distracted, I know the young man at the line was distracted. Obviously, it worked. He missed a free throw, but it's been just super cool across the board, man, the support we've gotten like from where we were my year one, we were getting 200, 300 people at a game. This past season, we're at 10,640 selling out. All of sudden, tickets are going for \$200 or \$300 on StubHub or SeatGeek to see the crowd we had last night. I'm happy that our guys were able to get that experience as well.

**Q. Talk about how happy you are to have the guys get the experience, it can boost a team, especially a non-power conference team. It can be a little bit too much in a young player's mind, and it can go all ways psychologically. How do you want your players to take this all in? Because it's going to be all again**

**tomorrow.**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, number one, have fun. Enjoy it. Dude, this is what you work your lifetime for. These are dreams you have as a little kid. You fill out all the brackets, all the tournaments, all the March Madness over the years. This is it. When you get to be part of it. It's really surreal.

At the same time, our guys know our level of expectation are to advance. I recruited each guy in our locker room to try to get to the NCAA Tournament. That's when anything can happen. You're 40 minutes away. The best team doesn't have to win. This isn't the NBA series, best of seven. It's 40 minutes. Our guys are really confident. We know we have to create our separation with our preparation. It's a quick turnaround, but they know we have to be prepared to beat a formidable opponent like Tennessee.

**Q. Antwone Woolfolk, we covered him over in New Jersey for two years. What did he bring to your program when he arrived to beginning of last season and what is his role? How important is it to what you're doing this year?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Number one, Antwone is a terrific young man. Unbelievable. He has such a unique personality. So glad he joined our family when he transferred from Rutgers. His high school coach, Chet Mason, was a former player here at Miami. That was a big reason we were able to get him here. Thank God for Chet, too, but Antwone is our enforcer. He can bang inside. He can guard on the perimeter. He's very unique defensively because of his feet and his strength. He rebounds the ball really well.

In a lot of ways, he's a hub for us on the offensive end. We play through a lot of him at the elbow, the high post, the low post. He scores, but man can he pass. He just makes our offense go with our skill set and his versatility and his IQ. He's been a great player for us, he's an even better young man. Couldn't be more proud to have him in our family.

**Q. Can you talk about Kirby and Perry and the development from the beginning of the year to now and what you've gotten out of those freshman guards?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, I'll start with Trey Perry. Trey has gotten so much better. He's learned how to play with other really, really good players. He's learned how to play the point guard position. He can really score. He's got a gift to score the ball, and we want him to be him. But he's also starting to understand space, how to be more efficient with the ball. He's also understanding the defensive side of

the ball. It's a two-way game, and he's really, really gotten better off that send better on the ball.

And then Justin Kirby was red-shirting the first half of the season. He didn't play in any non-conference games, and what idiot was red-shirting him, is what we got to ask. He's so athletic. He's fearless. He rebounds, he defends. He can shoot open threes. He cuts. He does a lot of things where he doesn't need the ball to be effective, which makes him just an easy kind of -- you can just plug him in any time, no matter who is on the floor.

Super proud of his growth and his mindset that he's had this year. That's difficult to go from, Hey, we're red-shirting. And then we have a young man, Evan Ipsaro, who is arguably the best point guard in all mid-major basketball go down with a season-ending injury halfway through the season, Kirby gets thrown to the fire and to do what he's done, man, it's been really, really impressive.

**Q. After the disappoint in the conference tournament, how did you mentally reset with the team to have the kind of performance you had last night?**

TRAVIS STEELE: I hate when coaches say, hey, it's good to take a loss. That's complete coach speak. That's not true. We try to win. Championship level teams learn from wins. It's unfortunate, right? You outplayed us, it's totally on me. I told our guys right afterwards in the locker room, locker rooms can be emotional. Our guys were upset, shocked. I said, hey, let's shower up, get back to the hotel so I could gather my thoughts a little bit. I just said, Fellas, listen, our season is not over. I can't have any doom and gloom around our program, Debbie Downers, whatever you want to call it. I don't need any sad faces. We have to move on. We have to own this performance. Watch it, get better from it, learn from it, and we have to push it, and we have to be who we have been all year.

We have a lot of joy in our locker room in our process, our practices, our guys love each other. We can't lose that. If we lose that, then we're not going to get the result that we want in the NCAA Tournament when that opportunity presents itself. So we had to flip the script real quick. I don't know if our guys knew how I was going to react. Was I going to throw a tantrum like a two-year-old in the locker room, all that? I will win, lose, draw with our guys. I love our guys, but our guys were able to move on very quickly and learn from the loss to UMass.

**Q. Sorry, I'm just stepping in so if you have answered this, but the swim team has become such a story line, tell me about that moment and the impact it had.**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, it was in the second half, going

towards their bench, SMU, and all of a sudden, we foul the young man. I think his last name is Washington. Good player. He's going to the free-throw line and all of a sudden, man, you see these guys all in Speedos sprinting down the stairwell right there at UD arena in the end zone, and it's like, oh my God. Like I said, if I was distracted, I know he saw it.

**Q. It almost seemed like he was laughing.**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, it was like, oh my goodness, and then the place just erupted. It got really loud in there, extra loud. It was an amazing environment overall, but just appreciate their support. It's been awesome to see all the athletes and just our whole Miami community support each other. It's been really cool.

**Q. Do you think they will be able to make it for tomorrow, do you think?**

TRAVIS STEELE: I hope so. We're going to see if we can find a way.

**Q. Coach, going into tomorrow, a lot of people have looked at your team as Cinderella and given you guys credit for the season you guys have gone on in the regular season and all that. What are you hoping maybe your team wants to prove to those not going into Selection Sunday on the fence or do you think you guys have anything to prove in general?**

TRAVIS STEELE: It's funny. I don't know if we necessarily have anything to prove to others. We have stuff to prove to ourselves. We block out that outside noise. I told our guys if we're not asking for those guys' opinion about our team, I'm not calling them for advice, then why the heck should we listen to them now? We know how good we are. We know we deserve this opportunity. We knew we were a team that could advance. We're very confident in that. We're going to go showcase that.

I'm happy that our guys are able to do it on this stage. We love the stage. Our guys love the bright lights, and our guys will be ready.

**Q. Brent Byers is from a few hours from here. He said he's going to have a lot of friends and family here. Ethan Wright is injured; right now, he's not playing, but he's from Philadelphia. He will have a lot of friends and family from here. In a moment like that, how does that feel for you?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Awesome. A couple of our guys had that last night being in Dayton. You had Eian Elmer, Cincinnati; Evan Ipsaro, Cincinnati; Trey Perry, Luke

Skaljac, Cleveland; Antwone, Cleveland. Now closer to home for Brant. His mom and dad come to every game. They're so passionate, they're awesome, but he's going to have a lot of family members here.

It's cool when you can do it closer back to home in a moment like this, NCAA Tournament. The stage doesn't get any bigger, man. This is the best tournament in the entire world regardless of sport.

**Q. Tennessee, what is the key here? Your guys were talking about their ability to hit the glass and get offensive rebounds. Is that something you have to focus on?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, you hit the nail on the head both ways. How do we make what makes us really special come to life, right? We have to look at that first and foremost. How do we attack them from an offensive standpoint? How do we take away what they do great, which is the offensive glass, and their spacing makes it very conducive for them to offensive rebound, right? They're in a three-out-two-in space on the floor, so they have both spots filled with their bigs, and all their bigs are extremely physical, strong, and big.

So we know we're going to be in an absolute war down there. We have to gang a rebound. We got to limit them to one shot and one shot only.

And listen, they got other guys. They run a great offense as well. Gillespie is a phenomenal guard. Ament is super talented. We know we're going to have our hands full.

**Q. (Inaudible).**

TRAVIS STEELE: First time I have coached against Rick Barnes but, listen, I have watched his teams a lot over the years, huge fan, studies his teams. He's a Hall of Fame coach.

**Q. You talked a lot about the growth of the team, but I want to ask you about you're personal growth as a coach, kind of a different, you're living the dream now in comparison probably to the rest of your career being out here in March Madness. I want to ask you about what have you seen from -- what's made Miami a special place for you to grow and get this buy-in from the players and continue to improve?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Number one, I'm really appreciative of the opportunity I've had here from our athletic director David Sayler and President Crawford. I think I've grown just as far as -- you are your experiences. I have been around some great coaches; Chris Macks, Kelvin

Sampsons of the world, and they've all had a huge impact on me, but I've got to be me. I'm not Chris Mack. I'm not Kelvin Sampson. I'm not Sean Miller. I'm Travis Steele.

I think number one how to build culture is really important, especially in this landscape. I think it helps with retention. I think also just developing your system. How do you become a better teacher? You want to make it seem very, very simple for your guys, but you want it to be very complex, right? For your opponents.

I think that's what great teachers have the ability to do, to make things complex seem so simple. And then focusing on the things you can control. That's the messaging that you give your guys on a day-to-day basis, how you lead and how you steer your ship is so, so important on the journey. The journey, the season's a lifetime.

**Q. Just the game Eian had last night and stepping up and embracing that moment, especially when Peter wasn't having his best shooting night, what is it about -- it seems like he's the emotional heartbeat for your team, Eian is. What is it about him and his ability to step up in that moment?**

TRAVIS STEELE: Yeah, super proud of him, too. He was in foul trouble for the whole night. He played less than 25 minutes, and he had 23 points. His freshman year, he mentally would not have been able to handle that.

Just growth, man. Again, super proud of how mature he's become. He makes plays on both ends... defensively, offensively. He can shoot. He can score. A big block, a big dunk, a big three. He's confident. He can guard multiple positions. He's just grown so much, man.

From where he was, like I said, when he first came in to where he is right now, it's almost unrecognizable. He deserves all the credit, as well as our assistant coach, Khristian Smith does a great job with him as well, his position coach. But, man, Eian is playing at a really, really high level right now.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. Appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

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