

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - UCF vs UCLA

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

**UCLA Bruins**

**Coach Mick Cronin**

**Donovan Dent**

**Sky Clark**

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: All right, we're here with the student-athletes from UCLA. UCLA, the seventh seed in the East, 54th appearance in the NCAA Tournament, winning 11 championships, have reached the Final Four 19 times. The Bruins earned an at-large bid after finishing the season 23-11. UCLA has won 116 games all-time in the tournament, reaching the Tournament five times in the last six years.

UCLA also played here in Philadelphia in 2022 facing North Carolina in the Sweet 16.

Questions for the student-athletes?

**Q. When you guys just hear what he said, what goes through your mind knowing that kind of legacy, what you're trying to follow?**

SKYY CLARK: Absolutely, it's definitely a blessing just to be part of this, be part of the history, part of the tradition. It's a lot to carry for sure, But it motivates us to go out there and just do what we can.

DONOVAN DENT: Yeah, what he said. A lot comes with these four letters we wear on our chest. We just want to make our names and the history of it. That makes it great.

**Q. (Inaudible).**

SKYY CLARK: I wouldn't say extra pressure, but we know there's definitely a standard that needs to be held, so.

**Q. What did you first... (inaudible).**

SKYY CLARK: We both grew up in Cali, so ever since I was little, UCLA was always around.

**Q. Coach talked about having Sunday and Monday as reset days. How much of a luxury was that, and what did you do during that time to prep for today and ramp up the process?**

DONOVAN DENT: We did a lot. We watched film on UCF, and we had a lot of rehab time, get our bodies right for the rest of the tournament, and I think those two days were very helpful for us.

SKYY CLARK: Yeah, just watch film, relax a little bit. It was a nice day in Cali, so went and chilled out by the pool, just to get a reset.

**Q. What's the ramp-up process been like for you, specifically getting ready and how you're feeling now, entering into tomorrow?**

DONOVAN DENT: I feel good. I had a lot of time getting back to one 100%. We watched a lot of film. They're a good team. I think we're just ready, all ready to go.

**Q. You said you had some time to watch film on UCF. I know it's not a program you're familiar with playing, but what did you notice? What stands out about the Knights and their brand of basketball?**

SKYY CLARK: Yeah, they're super athletic. They have a lot of scorers. They've got some really good guard play. They have a super tall center, and they're super aggressive. The iso ball, they can really take it off the dribble and everything. They have a really good point guard as well, so we have to lock in on really staying in front of the ball.

DONOVAN DENT: Yeah, they're a really heavy iso-oriented team, and we have to guard our yard, basically. A lot of one-on-one defense in this game.

**Q. I know you mentioned being Cali guys. I wanted to ask you about what that truly means to have that UCLA on your chest there and put on for your state. Does it really give you extra motivation to turn up on these stages?**



SKYY CLARK: Yeah, absolutely. Just growing up in LA, playing for UCLA has always been a dream for me. Now that I'm here, playing in March Madness, I don't think you need anymore motivation than that.

DONOVAN DENT: Yeah, being from California, having to go away first and then getting the opportunity to come back, I think we both had that. It's a great feeling to be able to play for your hometown school and kind of represent for them.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student-athletes? Great. All right, thanks guys.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We're now joined by UCLA head coach Mick Cronin. He's lead the Bruins to the NCAA Tournament five times. He's guided 16 teams to the NCAA Tournament, including his time at Murray State and Cincinnati.

Coach, any opening statement?

MICK CRONIN: Tried Dalessandro's today. It was excellent. Going for Joe's next. Happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions in the front?

**Q. So no worries about cholesterol on this trip?**

MICK CRONIN: No. No. Look. Whenever this is over, I had a talk with my dog. My dog, as you know, is my stress relief, friend. We both got to get in shape. I treated him all winter, so we got to both lose five. So definitely no concerns. When in Philly, you don't eat cheesesteak, you don't show up. It would be un-American. Come on.

**Q. Nuts and bolts question. Tyler and Donovan, how are they?**

MICK CRONIN: They looked good today. We already practiced, so we'll do some shooting here in our court time. So knock on wood.

**Q. When it comes to Trent Perry, did you see this elevation in his game and getting a bigger opportunity helps, but what else has gone into the way he's played since moving into the starting lineup?**

MICK CRONIN: We foresee a lot of things as coaches, and a lot of guys get up here and act real mart. Sometimes we're right. Sometimes we're wrong. This time, I was right. That's one.

Two, I give him all the credit. I think in coaching the one

thing we believe in is player development. The guys that are good guys, that listen, have always developed in our program to a high level and on to the NBA, but I give him all the credit because the coaching works more for guys with the right attitude. Some guys you can coach them for 20 years and they would be the same player. They would be. Experience tells me that.

I thought it was paramount to keep him on our program because, not just his talent level, I thought his acumen, his apt constitute for basketball was going to help him grow faster and his life habits. I think there's a correlation between if you're responsible academically, you're responsible on the court. It was only a matter of time for him.

**Q. Mick, you coached against Johnny Dawkins for years in the American. What does that familiarity with his teams do for you tomorrow?**

**Q. Look, I said to my staff, somebody go to their public workout and make sure Taco Fall ain't out there. (Laughter) Because if he is, I'm not coaching. We're outta here. Make sure Taco's not out there, man.**

No, Johnny's a great guy. Like I said the other day in our media session, Central Florida was mid-major basketball and he's taken Central Florida, obviously, from the American Conference to the Big 12, which is a massive jump. I coached in the American. Massive jump.

For them to have the year they had in the Big 12 and to here speaks to the job he's been able to do, and it's not easy, right? He lost a lot of players, whether it was to the transfer portal or graduation last year. Almost all of them, right? But Johnny's a great coach. He does a great job. He's one of the good guys in our business. I'm happy they made it. We to play again, and I can't tell you how grateful I am Taco is not on his team.

**Q. I know you said Monday was a reset day, so to speak. I wanted to ask what the prep process has been like since then and what does that ramp up look like?**

MICK CRONIN: We're done. The hay's in the barn for us. We'll shoot today, and we'll have our game day stuff that's normal over at Drexel. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday practices are over with. Try to do a little bit more each day, but you got to -- the more experience you get with this, you realize you have to have your guys ready to play on game night, and they only have so many games left in them. I don't know if they have any hard practices left in them. I'm a believer in once we get to doing something really hard really well, stop it. Get to the next thing. Next thing, next

thing, stop practice. This time of year. If you have to build habits by over practicing on March 18th, you haven't done your job all year. Better be ready to play on game night. We played three games last week, so.

**Q. (Inaudible) especially depth-wise, you have Donovan Dent. You have Donovan back. You have Tyler back healthy. Is he going to be, depth-wise, entering the Tournament?**

MICK CRONIN: We're desperately in need of a high-level second defender that rebounds because Skyy Clark's an excellent defender and nobody has really said this. I said this when he came back. It's going to take Skyy Clark a long time to get back to normal. Since he's been back in the starting lineup, we have been a top-ten team in the country metrically in almost everything. That being said, it coincides with Eric Freeny's development. Both of our defensive players, especially on the perimeter, but in my opinion, period, has made us a better team. Having Skyy healthy and Eric Freeny playing more, which he's earned the right and he's built trust.

With coaching staffs, any coaching staff, it's all about trust. He's earned our trust and he wants to go in there and guard somebody, like guard the other team's best player. It's changed us, it's made us a much better team, to be pointed in my answer to you.

**Q. As a coach who has pretty much lived in this Tournament, always getting teams to the post-season throughout an ever changing landscape in college basketball, what do you feel has attributed to your ability to not just adapt but also thrive as the environments change?**

MICK CRONIN: You got to have players. If you can't coach, you're not going to be in those tournaments. If you're not able to adapt to different rosters, the better players you have, the further you go. I think we're 10-4 in my time at UCLA in the NCAA Tournament. A lot of NBA players, Ujes, Hawk, Clark, Bona, although Bona got hurt, and only got to play in one game in the NCAA Tournament. If he played in the next one against Gonzaga, we would have won that one, And Peyton Watson. I'm missing names, but players is the key.

At the end of the day, I saw my man, the great Geno Auriemma, somebody said, what's been the key for him? He said, I got a lot of great players' phone numbers, meaning because they played for him. That's the whole key to getting in these things and advancing in them.

But perseverance. If I was to give advice to somebody, you can never be easily defeated. Times will get tough.

It's not always easy. You can never be easily defeated. Never.

**Q. Good to see you again.**

MICK CRONIN: I thought I saw that, what's that A on there.

**Q. The athletic.**

MICK CRONIN: I thought it was like an Angel's thing. I'm a SoCal guy now.

**Q. Donovan has been so good and so efficient of late. Were there any adjustments that he or you made to help him take off lately?**

MICK CRONIN: Did he tell you to ask you this?

**Q. He did not.**

MICK CRONIN: Did you ask him this?

**Q. No, I didn't.**

MICK CRONIN: You need to ask him this. It hasn't been easy on him. I bring intensity every day to practice. I believe in giving everything you've got to your players. But it's hard for me if a guy's not used to giving me everything he's got every day, and that was an adjustment for him, definitely, the standard of our practice intensity every day.

That being said, the nicest guy of all time and could coach the team if I got hurt. That's how well he knows basketball. That's how well-versed he is in Xs and Os, and he's quick on his feet with it as well. He was coaching the Purdue game from the bench with the guys in the time-outs. The things he was saying were all right on point. He really knows the game.

But, yeah, a huge adjustment for him and a lot of pressure, too. If you cover any baseball, a high-priced free agent, right? Whether it was when Stanton went to the Yankees or when Freddy Freeman came to the Dodgers or Shohei a couple years ago. We got a lot of them... Mookie. But it's a lot of pressure when you're that guy. I tried to help him through that. So it's definitely been an adjustment that he's -- I kept telling him, my analogy is you have to keep throwing bunches. You're still in the ring, man, Just keep throwing bunches. You'll get better. It will get easier.

The last part of this answer is, look, the league he's playing in had one bid this year. He's playing in a league this year with nine NCAA teams, and some really good teams that didn't play it. I'm talking about multi-million dollar teams

that didn't make, \$12 to \$20 million teams that didn't make the NCAA Tournament in our league. So that's another adjustment for him, so I'm proud of him.

His assist to turnover, 13-1 over the last whatever games is crazy. Crazy. He's got a calf strain that seems to feel great the last couple days. I hope it doesn't rear up on him. We're going to need him at his best to make a run.

**Q. A couple things, talking about Central Florida, what is it they do that you are concerned about and how do you attack whatever their weakness is, and also just the legacy of being a UCLA coach and all the things that's been done over the decades?**

MICK CRONIN: Well, Central Florida can score. They're athletic. They're old. Fulks keeps me up at night because he can get in the lane whenever he wants. He's great off the pick and roll and he doesn't even need a pick and roll. He can go left to right. He makes good reads. He does a great job of getting in the lane while under control, doesn't play out of control. He's a problem. I have seen Riley Kugel since high school. He played for a friend of mine in high school in Orlando, Ben Witherspoon. So I know he's a very good player and has gotten better as he's gotten older.

They can shoot it. They've struggled of late which means law of averages, that's going to flip. They're an athletic, aggressive team. We're talking about a team that wins over Texas Tech, Kansas, BYU, Texas A&M's in the tournament, they have some serious wins.

To answer your question, the reason -- I had a great job. I was close to being the winningest coach ever at Cincinnati, and I left because I had a chance to coach at UCLA which I regard as the best job. To sit in Coach Wooden's chair and coach at the best university in the country, arguably the world, and everything that goes with it. I thought it was going to be a better move for my daughter. So on a side note, we got to win two games. I'll see her Monday, and she goes to American, so.

**Q. More pressure?**

MICK CRONIN: I can always get my ass beat and fly down and see her, so, you know, but I would like to spend a week with her. She goes to AU but anyway.

It's tremendous. I have been very fortunate. To coach at my alma mater, which is a great basketball school, Cincinnati, and to be the head basketball coach at UCLA following so many greats, whether it was Ben Howland and three Final Fours, Coach Wooden, Larry Brown. Coach Harrick won a national championship. Just an honor of a

lifetime.

**Q. If you have a long weekend here, trust me, John's roast pork, it's right around here.**

Jack is local for us, and I want to give him a little link. What's he done for your scout team?

MICK CRONIN: Jack's a great guy. That came through Coach Sovino, who is a big-time coach and his connections. Obviously, we're close to Jersey, but Jack's headed for the other side of the tracks, you know. Has he told you that?

**Q. No.**

MICK CRONIN: He's going for the agent. Well, he's in LA. He's going to be an agent. We call him Jerry Maguire. My players are younger, I had to make sure they saw the movie or go watch the movie, and Jack is Jerry Maguire.

No, he's a great kid. That's college sports, to be able to be around somebody four years, that's what I miss the most about what's going on. Most walk-ons don't go in the portal, so that's the good piece of that.

The second piece of that, as we did the roster expansion to 15 scholarships, if you take 15, you lose guys like Jack. But we need to save some money, and we only had I think, 12 on scholarship to save some money to pay so our athletic department could use some of the money for rev share to pay the players. So we have a few guys not on scholarship that are great guys.

Jack Seidler, he's just been awesome for us. I don't have an agent, but I've already told him, no, I don't want one. Stories like that, those kind of guys and they're managers, they're what makes us different than the pros. He's the best.

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

FastScripts by ASAP Sports...