

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Furman vs UConn

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

**Furman Paladins**

**Coach Bob Richey**

**Cooper Bowser**

**Alex Wilkins**

**Tom House**

Media Conference



Tournament going out, so I think we're playing our best basketball now.

ALEX WILKINS: All the injuries coming in, obviously, during conference play, We struggled a little bit, but we we're definitely playing our best basketball right now. It's exciting to see that. Us at full strength is a championship-caliber team and excited to show the world what kind of team we are.

TOM HOUSE: Yeah, back up what they said. I think some teams that don't see some of that adversity throughout the year might get a little bit complacent, but I think it helped us and our best ball showed up in March.

THE MODERATOR: Right now we are joined by Furman. They're 15th seed in the East region. This is their fifth appearance in the NCAA Tournament and second in the last four years. They won an automatic bid after winning the Southern Conference Championship. This is their first appearance since 2023, when they upset third-seeded Virginia in the first round.

Questions for athletes.

**Q. Alex, as a guy, a kid who grew up in Boston, I wondered if you were at all not too far from Connecticut, were you a UConn fan at all or were you familiar with their history growing up in Boston?**

ALEX WILKINS: Yes, sir. Growing up in Boston, they have a great program there. Watching them growing up for sure. I wouldn't say I was a fan. We had Boston College and BU and all these schools back in Boston, but definitely respect their program for sure.

**Q. This is for any of the players. Do you guys feel like as a team, you're better than your record? How would you compare how you're playing right now compared to earlier in the season?**

COOPER BOWSER: I would say to start the season, we had a really good nonconference slate. We started off really strong. We ran into some injuries mid-way through, and it took a while getting back adjusted, and we started playing our best basketball in March, which is what you want to do. We got a nice streak going from the SoCon

**Q. What is your favorite March Madness moment growing up?**

COOPER BOWSER: My favorite March Madness moment growing up would probably be the Chris Jenkins buzzer beater. That was such a great shot, especially the shot from Paige before that, which is arguably even crazier, watching that at my house. He's also a DMV guy, so it was cool to see that.

THE MODERATOR: That's a good answer here. Go ahead, Tom.

TOM HOUSE: Like a specific moment, I would say the Virginia run, like that Kyle Guy team that made a run. But then other than that, just watching March Madness at school, putting it on the Chromebooks and sitting in the middle of the class, maybe staying home a couple of days to watch the games.

ALEX WILKINS: Probably Kansas State's run and Oakland. Obviously Furman, playing Virginia, watching that game. But probably Kansas State run, for sure. I really like watching them play.

**Q. Cooper, I want to ask you a little bit just about your DMV background and what you feel that brings to the table in a March Madness environment.**

COOPER BOWSER: Yeah, starting out, my dad is from D.C., born and raised, so he's always emphasized to me and my brother about just how basketball wealthy the DMV



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is, and just playing on teams like Prospect U, Team Takeover, and team Durant growing up. It's just different. These guys will never understand how serious basketball really is in the DMV and how many great players we have from the DMV.

I definitely have a chip on my shoulder coming from that area playing against those guys growing up, so, yeah, it's just different.

ALEX WILKINS: Boston is a city of winners. I don't know what he's talking about. (Laughter).

**Q. For any of you guys, talk about the excitement and anticipation of play against UConn, multiple national championships, playing them tomorrow night. The challenge that lays ahead and how excited you are.**

TOM HOUSE: Yeah, I would say tremendous respect for the program, but they have to play 40 minutes just like we do, tie their shoes the way we do that, excited to show that.

ALEX WILKINS: It's competing. It's a childhood dream. If you have an edge to you, just excited to play a good team, and two good teams going out there to play basketball for 40 minutes to play basketball, so it's exciting.

COOPER BOWSER: Yeah, like they said, we're excited for the challenge it presents, and it's a dream playing UConn in March. This is amazing. This is stuff you dream of. We're excited to go out there and give it our best.

**Q. For Cooper, what's your sense of the match-up with Tarris Reed, as well as potentially Eric Reibe, who you will be facing, what makes them tough to go against, and what's going to be key for you to succeed down low?**

COOPER BOWSER: Funny thing about Eric is when he was coming up, he went to Bullis in Maryland, so him and my brother used to play a lot and I used to always watch him growing up. So it's cool to be facing him tomorrow.

They're both tremendous players. Their offense is really, really good, and they're great down low. They're great rebounders. They're great passers. I'm real excited to face them, and I'm excited for the challenge this presents.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student athletes? Great, thanks. Good luck tomorrow.

MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Bob Richey. He's in his ninth season at Furman. This is the second time he's lead them to the NCAA Tournament.

BOB RICHEY: Well, first of all, I'm thrilled to be in Philadelphia, and it's been a great host so far. I'm a big history guy, and to be in the city and be around Philadelphia, it's been a lot of fun. We were in warmer weather three years ago in Orlando, but this has been a great experience so far.

So thank you NCAA and Philadelphia for hosting us. We're excited to play tomorrow night. Got to wait until about 10:00 at night. Feels like AU days having to wait around. We used to play a couple of games, and you would play a night game. Our guys are really, really excited to be out there. We know we're up against a great opponent, and one of the best programs in college basketball, especially here in this recent decade of what Coach Hurley has been able to do at UConn, and we're very aware of the challenge we have in front of us.

Our guys are really excited. I think we're playing, by far, the best basketball of the season right now. It was really, really fun to see our group come together, really when our best was required, and to put it all together after committing to playing three freshmen in our nine-man rotation, and also managing through a lot of injuries in January and February.

But when we had to go to the tournament in Asheville, it was fun to see what was, clearly, our best basketball of the year. So we know what our best looks like, and fortunately, we were able to find it toward the end of the season, and we're going to try to lean into that and not try to trick this up or change anything up at this point.

We're going to try to continue to play with the connection, the belief that we did at Asheville and know that this is going to be on a bigger stage with a really good opponent, but we're looking forward to getting to the game.

**Q. You have been able to win in this tournament before. I'm wondering what you were able to take from that game and how much have you talked about that game in preparation for this one?**

BOB RICHEY: That was an unbelievable moment in Furman history, to win in Orlando three years ago, and the way we did it was not easy. If you look at the game zone, if you have a moment to be part of March Madness and to be able to experience beating a team like Virginia, you're going to have to play really well. You're also going to have to deal with a lot of different adversity, and you have to stay connected, and we definitely have drawn on some of those moments. It's funny. A lot of times when you think for us to do that, we have to play perfect. That wasn't the case that day. I looked at the box score this morning. I think we shot about 46% maybe. I think we were 10 for 28

from 3 and 12 for 28 from 2. It wasn't like we shot the cover off of it. We shot it well enough, but we were able to endure hard moments.

We got down 11 in that game with about ten minutes to go, Ended up taking the lead and lost the lead and down 4 with about 25 seconds to play. We had a few things go our way. We made two free throws, and then we got a steel, and we hit the three, JP hit the three at the buzzer to win the game. But when you look at the game, our lead scorer fouled out. We had a lot of adversity that went into that game, but we had a group that kept believing.

As cliché as it sounds, one of the most important things to get out there is to have the respect that's necessary, but you also have to have the belief that's required and you have to be able to play with that belief. You've got to be able to shoot with that belief and go out there and understand that at the end of the day, if we go out there with the burden of, man, we have to do this or go do this, you just have to go play.

You're in the middle of a dream. This is what all these guys, for us at this level, to get to the NCAA Tournament, is the dream. When you're high major and you're expected to go to the Final Four, sometimes these early round games, it's not that it's not a big deal, but for a school like Furman, we have only been in this game eight times in our program's history, and we only won two of them. For our guys, it's really important that we realize that, hey, this is a fulfillment of the dream, and there's a certain joy and excitement that we have to play with. And the way that -- we know, the way that UConn plays, they're going to try to make that really hard and they're going to try to make it as miserable as they can for us.

The charge for us is going to be to keep our spirit, to keep our fight, to continue to endure and as we go up against a very, very good opponent --

**Q. How did getting here three years ago help you in preparation for what this will be? How did that experience prepare you personally and individually as a head coach for this one?**

BOB RICHEY: Well, I'm pretty routine-driven as an individual and it gave us a routine. It gave us a sense of we knew what we did three years ago. We document things pretty heavily, and being able to kind of rely on that and not everything being new. I remember three years ago, I'm calling all my friends and calling everybody that had been in the tournament and trying to figure out what do you do here? When do you do with practice? What do you do with Selection Show? What do you do with travel? We had a system in place for a lot of that.

Three years ago, we finished up about right now. We played on Thursday earlier in the day. This is a Friday game, so we ended up getting one extra day of prep. But I think any time you have a system in place where, you know, this is how we're going to scout it, this is how we're going to manage it. Maybe there were a couple of things we felt like going through it we wanted to adjust, so we made those adjustments, but you had something to fall on.

When you get here, you can't describe from a professional sense or a basketball sense, the dream of being here. I think three years ago, as I was talking to people in the business and asking them about it. You had half the group that said you better keep them edgy, and you better know how hard this game is going to be, and you better not celebrate all week, and you better make sure they're locked in, urgency.

But then you had another group that said, hey, it's really hard to get here, and you better enjoy the heck out of it, the Powerade tastes different and the towels, soak it all in. The joy of it, the excitement of it.

And I remember thinking which one of these two are we going to do? And it came to me, we're going to do both of them. At these moments, when we have a practice, and if you were at our practice last night, you saw it. It was an urgent practice. If you came into the hotel and saw the guys, they're going to enjoy this, and I want them to enjoy it this. To be able to combine these two things, that's the sweet spot in life. Can you operate with an urgency, but as you do it, can you have a sense of joy about you? That's the trick in those moments, and we want to continue to live in those two things.

**Q. Last night, getting to practice at the Polestra, the place that you guys won your very first NCAA Tournament game, practicing in a place of history hoping to make more, what was that like for you?**

BOB RICHEY: It was really neat. I haven't been in there before. That was my first time in the Palestra and really nice of Penn to host us there last night and later today.

It was just a reminder to me just how good the game's been to me individually and to our program and to our players, and you just see all the history there and just to realize that you're part of it. It's those moments that you just want to soak it in and we had a pretty spirited practice.

I'm usually a person who likes to practice before we travel. A little bit of an audible to that call two nights ago. We were supposed to practice in Greenville yesterday morning before we flew out. I just -- since we hadn't really played

since last monday. Practice was getting a tad bit monotonous and I just felt like we needed to change the energy.

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So I called our ops got Rett, one of the best op guys in the country and I said hey, I hate to do this to you last minute, but see if we can get in the Palestra tomorrow night. Just walking in there and seeing it and seeing all the history there, you just can't beat it. That's one of the things I keep trying to remind myself.

Like I said, we're clearly aware of the challenge in front of us. We know that we have to go out there and we have to play very, very well tomorrow and we're going to prepare in a way to do that. We're going to focus on our details but at the same time, these things are hard to get to.

I was reminded of a great story this week, I have a friend, Drew Brandon who does all the psychology stuff for the University of Georgia football and has been part of national championships and when we get in these moments, I kind of kick some ideas back and forth with him. He told me a story the other day that I kept in my head. He said we were preparing in Kirby's first national championship -- and one thing Kirby likes to do is, he likes to take walks with the team on game day. So the team will all leave and go outside the hotel and just take a walk.

Drew was walking around, and he got by Todd Monken, who is the head coach of the Cleveland Browns, and he said What's on your mind? He said, I just had breakfast with Jim Donlin who used to be the head coach of the University of Georgia, and he said, what did he tell you? He looked at me dead and he said, I want you to call the game tonight like you'll never be back again.

I think there's a sense of some of this, that's how we've got to go play tomorrow night. That's how we've got to go coach tomorrow night, right? There's got to be a sense of, man, we got to be part of this and we're playing a really good opponent, but we have to go let it fly, and we have to go play and have a sense of freedom and relief and joy amongst ourselves to, hey, go out there and call it like you're never going to be able to do it again.

Instead of it being this burden and is it all going to be a perfect play call? Do we have the script set right? Are we missing something here? Do we have something here? Those moments last night at the Palestra, those are just reminders of that, that this is what you dream of, and we're fortunate to be part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Coach? Anybody? All right, great. Coach, thank you so much. We appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

