

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

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Xfinity Mobile Arena

## UConn Huskies Coach Dan Hurley Tarris Reed, Jr. Alex Karaban Solo Ball Media Conference



### you need to do to contain him?

SOLO BALL: We know about Wilkins. He's a great player with the ball, but off the ball, he's just as dominant. So we have to make sure we play the back cuts, make sure we don't let cut us, but also, they have so many good players on the floor that could also do the same things pretty well, too.

So just being locked in off the ball, and also, just with Wilkins, just making sure we blow up his handoffs and just fixing his ball screens, but that's the biggest thing going into this game.

ALEX KARABAN: I was just going to say he's fearless. As a freshman, he's fearless and he's super confident out there. So doing everything, he's got to earn everything tomorrow. That's what we got to do as a defense and really just make everything hard for him. But he's a really talented player, and we have respected him ever since we started watching film on them.

### Q. Solo, if Silas isn't available for these next two games, what does the back court have to look like and accomplish to be successful this weekend?

SOLO BALL: Yeah, biggest thing is just being ready for every single possession. We're really confident about Silas in general, but being ready for every single possession on offense and defense. I think just controlling the game. That's the biggest thing about being a guard, being in control of the game, whether it's going our way or not, staying in it regardless. That's just the biggest thing going into this.

### Q. Tarris, Cooper is coming off a big game in their conference championship. What do you have to do to contain him?

TARRIS REED JR.: Yeah, he's a long, athletic, five man, 77% on the year from two, so knowing that he's a left shoulder guy, right-handed post, has a good touch, touching the post, just be ultra physical. Watching the whole Furman team, they're a dynamic team. They love to run. They execute their offense at a high pace, high rate. They're just being physical, Big East basketball. We're in one of the toughest, grittiest conferences in the country.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we're joined right now by the University of Connecticut student-athletes. UConn, second seed in the East. Their 38th appearance in the Tournament, sixth straight. Huskies have 72 all-time wins in the Tournament with six national titles, including back-to-back in '23 and '24. UConn earned an at-large bid after finishing the regular season 29-5.

Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Alex, the vibe going into this game, the coach's messaging going into this game, is it similar to maybe the Iona game when you were a freshman, when it was 4 versus 13, there was a lot of tension there. I know the coach, these games kind of drive him nuts sometimes, but I was wondering if there's a similar in the vibe and the messaging.**

ALEX KARABAN: There's a similarity into where we've reached March Madness now. We have been blessed to be in this opportunity to play against a good team, and now it's just doing what we do best, controlling what we can control and having respect for everybody that we play, so never overlooking anybody.

That was similar against Iona, and it's the same right now with Furman, just going out there and being the best versions of ourselves, being sharp and doing everything in our power that we can control.

**Q. This is for Solo and Alex. Alex Wilkins on Furman, what makes him such a dynamic player, and what do**



Just going out there and focusing on what we have to do on the defensive end.

**Q. Tarris, you've been here before. What are the jitters like going into the first game? A lot of times, that's when teams maybe don't play as well or up to their capabilities because they maybe have some jitters, and if you have experience, you can deal with that. What's that process like for you?**

TARRIS REED JR.: Honestly, it's been a blessing. Last year, I was way more nervous. Because you know, you're a kid, you always dream to be in the NCAA Tournament. Last year, I was nervous, a nervous wreck. But I ended up settling into that first game, Oklahoma game, which I did pretty well.

Coming in my second year, my last year of college basketball, last year March Madness, I'm definitely a lot more poised this year around. So really just taking it all in, staying present and, you know, just ready to go out there, have fun and dominate, dominate with a great group of guys. And yeah, just have fun out there.

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

THE MODERATOR: All right. We're here with UConn head coach Dan Hurley in his eighth season leading the Huskies, led UConn to back-to-back championships in '23 and '24. This is the second program he lead to the NCAA Tournament. He led Rhode Island in '17-'18.

DAN HURLEY: '17-'18, that was...

THE MODERATOR: Long time ago.

DAN HURLEY: And now the women's team made the tournament.

Obviously, excited to be here. It's what you work for all year, and just really excited to get on the court eventually tomorrow night at 10:00. We'll get on the court and play a program and a team and a coach and players you have tremendous respect for, just the way they play, how it shows up on film. They're an impressive group and Coach Richey is, I think, an excellent coach.

Excited about the opportunity to get an opportunity to play in the best sporting event we have in this country on Friday.

**Q. Dan, you've been in these positions. You've been on almost every side of these. You've been the favorite and lost. You've been the underdog and won.**

**What's your level of anxiety, your level of -- your mindset, what's your messaging in the situation you're in right now?**

DAN HURLEY: I think, number one, the nerves will never go away. I think you think, man, if I just win a championship, I'll never be nervous again. The pre-game jitters, night before a game where you don't sleep. None of that stuff dissipates by accomplishment. If anything, it creates an even higher standard in your mind of what you want to achieve, which, you know, it definitely churns.

But I would say at this point of the year, you have more anxiety November, December, January where you worry more about losing a game and the domino effect that it could have now on dragging you through a miserable season, like you're in November, December, man, if we lose this game and I have this coming up, we could lose three in a row. Now the season is going to be a disaster for the next couple months.

Whereas when you get to this time of year, it's like, you know, win or the season's over is kind of, in a weird way, it's kind of freeing, where you just go out, you play your heart out, you coach your heart out, and the next day, if you win, it's survive advance and some level of joy. If you lose, you're not picking the pieces up the next day. The pieces are gone.

**Q. Coach, Alex Wilkins, really confident freshman point guard, what do you like out of him?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, he has great size and a really talented player. I think Coach utilizes him really well offensively. They do a lot of things on offense. In a lot of ways, it's like looking in the mirror offensively. We do a lot of the same thing.

They use him the way we use Silas, the way we use Tristan Newton at the point guard position, and he has that great size. You don't see as many freshman as productive as he is or can score on all three levels like he can or is dangerous as a passer.

**Q. Is Furman better than its record in your opinion, and what gives you that impression if so?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, the SoCon is an underrated league. I was surprised to see them as a 15. Obviously, everyone comes in here and is going to talk up their opponent. But I think just watching that league, I watched ten of their games. I went back to earlier into nonconference and watched some. I think I watched the last seven games they played, and you just see a tough league. A lot of good teams that kind of beat the heck out of each other.



There was a lot of balance. Not much difference between East Tennessee State, who won the league and the seventh place team in terms of record.

So it's a really good league, and they've got really good players. They've got an excellent coach. We got to be at our best on Friday.

**Q. Hey, Coach. Silas Demary confirmed just a few minutes ago in a tweet with Joe that he's good to go tomorrow. To what extent is that going to be? Is it fully available or is there going to be any kind of restriction on him?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I was -- how long ago was that?

**Q. Five minutes.**

DAN HURLEY: Okay. Yeah, I was getting ready to check the questionable box, so. (Laughter) It's good that we're all on the same page. I'll refer that to my GM, Tom Moore, the injury query.

**Q. Can you just talk -- I was just in the locker room, and Alex is talking about putting a lot of pride into the defense this past off season where it ended last year. Can you just speak to the growth of your defense and how you guys were able to get back to what it was like those two back to back title runs?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, just having elite defense is what sustains you, and I thought in New York, two of the three games, it was elite and we were victorious, and it was far less than that on Saturday and we lost. We know that we've got to do this with our defense. We have some, I think, some guys that are due, from a shooting standpoint, to get hot here. I think we've got some of the best shooters in the country on our team that, obviously, we need to get hot in this tournament, but our defense was top five for a while. In the games that we've lost, it hasn't been.

That starts with Silas and Tarris setting the tone, so, yeah.

**Q. Dan, you mentioned a minute ago about the freedom of the mentality of the win-or-go-home, what it takes off you, but some guys, veterans have been at this before. When you have a loss in a Big East Tournament final the way that one was, that does stick in your mind or does it not matter anymore? How do you play off that?**

DAN HURLEY: It kind of ruined Selection Sunday a little bit from that standpoint, but I think in terms of having your team's attention, having a team that's hopefully really to show some teeth here on Friday night relative to how hard

we're going to play. We got punked in terms of our effort, in terms of our will, in terms of our competitive character. That's not who we are as a program.

Also, too, when you come up small in that championship moment and it was the second time probably in about a ten-day span with the Marquette loss on top of that, there's also, you have to rebuild the psyche a little bit. You have to remind this team, we have beaten a one seed, we've beaten a three seed, we've beaten a four seed, we've beaten a two, five. You have to build them up a little bit, which is not always my specialty.

**Q. Is there a common denominator you see between the two national title teams and this one? Not on the court, of course, but maybe a little bit more -- are they similar in the way they are in the locker room? Are they similar in the way they approach the game?**

DAN HURLEY: I would say they've shown, and, again, it's like I got in trouble doing this earlier with the team, but the '23 team was inconsistent. It was dominate. It had some dominant wins. I would say you're hoping that we're able to turn -- we took a '23 semi-final loss to Marquette, we took a terrible January, and we were able to dominate the NCAA Tournament two years in a row. I'm waiting to see the personality of the group of those two teams. They take the court to shoot here, and you see that UConn swagger. You want to see that UConn swagger on Friday night at 10:00. That's what these teams had.

I didn't have to talk them into winning games in this tournament. They were in the tournament to kick some serious you-know-what. I want to see that from the team.

**Q. Dan, you said on Sunday that Jaylin Stewart was close. What's the status for tomorrow's game? And when you get him back, what does he bring that you haven't had the last six games?**

DAN HURLEY: Where's Silas? You want to ask him to Tweet it or whatever it is? (Laughter). Yeah, he's questionable to. We have another one in the questionable box. I don't know what time I have to drop that in the ballot in there. Yeah, he's going to be questionable for this, I would say. He's got a chance for tomorrow and if not, if we're still playing on Sunday, he'll have a shot for that, but I'm not sure. He'll be out there shooting today. You tell me what you think, how he looks.

**Q. You alluded at the beginning, and as you frequently have over the years, that this is the greatest sporting event or one of the great sporting events in the country. One of the reasons, probably, everybody tunes in the first couple of games to see games like**

**this and root for the miracle, right? Do you advocate keeping the tournament the way it is in terms of the automatic qualifiers? Do you still like that aspect of it?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I like the smaller. I think expanding would be a mistake. I think at some point here, the bubble gets to be kind of like a little bit weak, you know? So, yeah, I like it being a hard sporting event to qualify for. I think it makes it more exciting. I think it's at the perfect number. I don't know, what was Miami of Ohio? That were one of the last teams in, I guess, because of the incredible season, and then you watch them last night and you're saying the Tournament is perfect. Don't change it.

THE MODERATOR: Any questions for Coach?

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Alec Millender. Fans don't get to see him in those two-hour game windows on TV. A lot of teams don't know a lot about him, but your group of guys thinks the world of him. I'm wondering what you think makes him a good fit for the program and what this experience has been like for him, getting to the NCAA Tournament.**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, Alec had chances. I think there's some A-10 level schools I think that he would have been guaranteed to get minutes at. Definitely be a rotation piece, and I think he came to UConn to compete, to be in the rotation, and he's helped us win some games, especially early in the year.

He's a real guy. He's a special man. He's a strong man. He's a smart man. He's a great communicator. He really cares about the team and his brothers. He's not just the type of friend, either, to our players and to his teammates that he just tells him what they want to hear. Sometimes he's the mirror, he's the truth for him. Sometimes it's hard for those guys to hear, it but he's real.

Based on Silas' injury and Jaylin Stewart, you know, and Malachi with a little something going on, you may be seeing more of him than you've seen up to this point.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach, appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow night.

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