

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

## UCLA Bruins

## Coach Mick Cronin

## Eric Dailey, Jr.

## Trent Perry

Media Conference

UCLA 75, UCF 71

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA head coach Mick Cronin and student-athletes Eric Dailey and Trent Perry.

MICK CRONIN: Congratulations to Johnny, Coach Dawkins. Robbie Laing's assistant. I know those guys from my days at Cincinnati. What they have done at Central Florida is really, really, really impressive. Like I said the other day, it was a mid-major program before Coach Dawkins got there. Now he's banging away in the Big 12, winning games. I didn't ask him this, but I would doubt that he's got half of what the teams at the top of that league's got and he beat some of them.

Congratulations to them. Their kids never gave up. They fired in some tough shots, especially Burks, late. Crazy stuff happens in March, like Trent missing three free throws. Never happens. But he's human. I still want the ball if his hands and believe in him. We got, what? Almost -- Skyy didn't get to double figures because of foul trouble, Got his tooth knocked out, no call. A couple of times. It was a wild game, man would call, man.

But a lot of guys stepped up, obviously, with Tyler not being able to go tonight. Before you guys ask, he had a good practice yesterday, woke up stiff today. I didn't like the way he was moving in shoot around this morning. He wanted to play and I said no. If you want to know why I said no, then you should probably never coach. You got to be responsible for the people underneath you and try to do the right thing. You might see me being hard on guys, but when the rubber meets the road and they need somebody,



I'm the guy, so they can take it to the bank. I'm not going to put that guy in harm's way. Hopefully, he has a good day tomorrow. Before you ask, we'll see how he is on Sunday. All right, guys.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for student-athletes.

**Q. This one for Eric. Eric started the game a little rough, missed the first couple of shots, and then you really got into a rhythm. What was going through your head after missing those first now and how did you get bang on track?**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Nothing was going through my head.

MICK CRONIN: I knew that was coming! Supreme confidence. He never hesitates. He wasn't even worried. The odds are I'm going to make the next one.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: I'll make the next one, for sure. I wasn't worried about it. All right. I got two up. Let's keep shooting. No problem with that.

**Q. You guys got a big lift from Xavier tonight. Can you talk about what he did? I think he had four blocks in addition to the points he scored.**

MICK CRONIN: 15-8, yeah.

**Q. And rebounding, everything. How big of a lift was that?**

TRENT PERRY: It's huge. Coach has been telling him. He's worried about his activity more than anything. Just defense, blocking, he's offensively very talented. Just to see his activity tonight, especially in a game like this, it's huge for us.

MICK CRONIN: We talked about it at halftime. Their lineup was struggling to stop us. They were going to go small again. Johnny did a great job. They got back in the game by going small and switching everything. We didn't throw it to Xavier inside against the switch at the last six minutes of the half. We talked about doing it, and he was able to get four interior baskets. We threw it to him. We need that. He's an offensive player. He can play on that end. I was mostly happy with his eight rebounds, though.



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But we did a better job of finding him in the paint in the second half. A lot of people in here, somebody has to have a question.

**Q. Trent, you made six of eight in the final minute from the line. Were you surprised that the other two didn't go in?**

TRENT PERRY: 100%. At the end of the day, just be confident. Trust in the work, trust in the process. It's something I have been doing for a living, so never lost confidence in that.

**Q. Was it the fact that you have done this before? So when you get in situations like this, in a game like this with so much on the line and so much noise and everything, is it just routine to be able to block it out? Or are there things you have to deal with when you get in a line in a game like this?**

TRENT PERRY: A game like this, in an environment like that, just stick to what I have been doing for the past years, honestly, just trust in the work. That's really it. It's routine.

**Q. Building off Jim's question, but you started the half one for five, and then I think at the end of the half one of those last possessions, Coach looked like he told you to shoot the ball. What does it mean for a coach to have confidence in you like that and respond the second half, especially with those late baskets when UCF made that run?**

TRENT PERRY: For sure. It means a lot just to have the backing of my coach. At first I didn't really want to take bad shots at all, especially in a game like this, but when he told me to be aggressive, I just saw the light and trusted my work.

MICK CRONIN: He was hesitating the first half a little bit because he didn't want to take a challenged shot, but he's got to pull it, let it fly. We worry about defense.

**Q. You get the big leads a couple of times and then what happened? And then after they made their run, how were you guys able to respond?**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: How were we able to respond?

**Q. Got it from 14 down to 3.**

MICK CRONIN: We got it back up to, like, 8 or 10.

**Q. What was the key there?**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Yeah, just stay playing defense, honestly. Stops are going to convert to offense, then not turning the ball over is big, is a big key for us. During the year, we have been in games where we have been down and come back. All that was practice for this moment. The defensive side of things just keeps taking over.

MICK CRONIN: We talked about it pre-game, to answer your question. They have five wins this year, but they came back from ten down or more. We talked about with our team and although at times it didn't look like it, we worked all week on our press offense. We knew it was coming. We started breaking the press and scoring.

**Q. Did you teach them how to (inaudible).**

MICK CRONIN: Them or us? We missed them too. The missed free throws, I would tell you, who's shooting them? Don't ever under estimate the game plan, my friend. Don't give them easy baskets because they're not a great free-throw shooter. So that might remember in our game plan, to foul certain players.

**Q. If you're playing Connecticut (inaudible).**

MICK CRONIN: These guys go to UCLA, man. You can't get them. These guys go to UCLA, Adam. Come on, man. You know how smart these two guys are? You and I couldn't take the classes they're in, brother.

**Q. For either of you two, did you see the tooth fly out?**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: No, I saw him smile and it was bleeding.

MICK CRONIN: He looked so good in the locker room. Looks like a boxer. Keep trying to talk to these guys about my old days. He just looked tough. Looks tough. In the locker room, smiling. There's blood.

**Q. He's got what, Eric?**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Aura.

TRENT PERRY: Got a little lisp too.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Mike Tyson.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll let the student-athletes go back to the locker room.

MICK CRONIN: I'm not Coach Patino, this is an energy drink. I'm not hiding.

**Q. I think in the first half against Michigan State in the**



**tournament, last week you guys had 25 deflections. How many did you have?**

MICK CRONIN: 27.

**Q. How many did you have tonight, and what went into that, Tyler, to come out with that defensive intensity? I think nine steals in the first half.**

MICK CRONIN: We kid around, we're way better without you defensively. We were just kidding, but we end up like 47 or 48. The game plan, mathematically, under two minutes, if you're up eight or more, you can't lose if you don't give up threes. If you do two things: No threes, don't turn it over. It's literally like a 1% chance you could lose and we failed that miserably.

A contested three is still a three, especially with the guy who was hitting him, Burks, so we got to do a better job with that. Plus, it's March, man. Crazy stuff happens. Kentucky banked it in today. I was sitting in my room and saw that.

**Q. Coach, what's the main thing you can take away from tonight going into Sunday?**

MICK CRONIN: We win and we play Sunday. I keep it pretty simple. I think it was good for us to win a game. The guys, they didn't know, because Tyler practiced yesterday, so they thought he was going to play. Then he woke up this morning stuff, and I saw the look on their face at shoot-around. Eric is a super confident kid. He gives us the toughness we need, but the key was Xavier Booker's play.

You have to make up for Tyler. He averages 17 a game. Book had 15 tonight. Book had 15 and Steve had 2, so we got 17 out of that position. Nobody else got hurt. I don't know what we're going to do with Skyy. Need -- what is it? The dental stuff. An oral surgeon. We need a late-night oral surgeon. I'm going late night Joe's steak and sodas. Is that the name of it? We had Delassandro's. I never had my team so happy with me. Delivery. I got to watch the game.

**Q. You talked about how your guys got a little better with the press break.**

MICK CRONIN: Well, we worked on it. I don't know if we got better at it. We did not put on a press offense clinic tonight.

**Q. True. What I'm asking is, when a team throws on a press, do your guys kind of get accustomed to it after a few possessions and kind of figure it out?**

MICK CRONIN: You would hope so. Skyy got sped up on the last play and the game was over. All he did was hole the ball. Had two time-outs, he took off. They're athletic. Like I said, Coach Dawkins did a good job, kept coming after us.

In this situation, in an elimination game, you have nothing to lose. Once they got the game got down under 10:00, and we pushed it back out. I told them, they're coming now. They're just going to start running and trapping the ball, even in the half court, which is unusual for your team to play against. We weathered it all. Skyy's 86% coming in tonight. Trent's 87%. They missed five free throws late or even with the made threes, it's a ten-point game, so.

**Q. I was going to ask about Joe's steaks, but you already answered it.**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, yeah, Dick Sarardi put me on that. I'm hoping to get it delivered. I'll give you a review tomorrow.

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