

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - UCLA vs UConn

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Xfinity Mobile Arena

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

Media Conference

Q. This one is for Tarris. Looking at the game that you had yesterday, kind of the way you play in general gives me a lot of shades of another Shamanad, St. Louis guy, like Tyler Cook. Is he an influence in the game you have, and is there anything that you picked up from him that you were able to use yesterday to have the game that you did?

TARRIS REED Jr.: Yeah, it's crazy that you said Tyler Cook. He's from St. Louis. Me and his family are really close. I had workouts with him back in high school. He just worked out with my brother last summer. So it's crazy how small world that is. Yeah, T. Cook, been watching him a lot, especially playing at Iowa, a little bit of NBA, a little bit overseas. His pace in the post, his dominance was so -- he was so dominant in college. I feel like working out with him a couple years ago, being able to use my body, pace, and not really rushing in the post. Knowing I can get to any shot I want and being able to take my time doing it.

Q. Did you feel like last night was sort of a hostile crowd? For whatever reason, Furman was the underdog. The crowd tended to root for them a little bit. Do you feel like that was the case last night? If so, did that fuel you at all or affect you the are you hoping for a little bit more of a pro-UConn crowd tomorrow?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, you felt like moments they were cheering for Furman more than us, but we want UConn nation to show out. We want them to pull up. We're close and UConn the pretty close to Philadelphia, so we want them to make the trip and give us as much of an



advantage as they can. We were more so focused on getting the win, but you could hear the crowd and the cheers that Furman had.

SOLO BALL: I feel like, yeah, they traveled very well considering they're a mid-major team. I don't think that really mattered. Like AK said, we were focused on the game and doing whatever it takes to get that win and moving onto this next game.

Q. Solo, as a guard, can you talk about the importance of what Malachi Smith brought to the table last night with no Silas Demary and what he did well last night?

SOLO BALL: Yeah, that was big-time. Malachi, he always brings electricity to the court every time he steps on the floor. He always just controls the pace of the game. I think that's what he did a good job of yesterday. He's an experienced lead guard. He's been in this business for four years or however long he's been, but no matter what, he has so much experience in this game. You can see it every time he steps on the floor. He has that confidence and swagger every team he steps on the court.

Q. UCLA is real good backwards, especially with Donovan Dent and Skyy Clark. When you watch them on film, what do you see?

SOLO BALL: Yeah, just trying to make it difficult for them, but also they use a lot of ball screen, being prepared for that too. They have a talented team in general, so we have to be prepared for every single player that steps on the floor.

THE MODERATOR: You're not going to hijack this, are you, Bill?

Q. I hijacked it?

THE MODERATOR: That's true.

Q. When you made the decision to transfer, was that so far maybe the most, I don't know, toughest decision you have made so far in your young career? When you look back at it, clearly it's worked out, but how difficult of a decision was that?

TARRIS REED Jr.: Yeah, I feel like in my second year at Michigan, when I decided to enter my name in the portal, it was a tough decision. When UConn called me, reached out, they were going on their back-to-back run, ended up going back-to-back and went back on three. Looking back on it, it's been a blessing, a great opportunity to just see myself grow into a young man on and off the court. In a great opportunity to play with such great players and play under some great coaches.

Q. Alex, have you found in your career that shooting, particularly perimeter shooting, can be contagious for a team that once maybe somebody gets it going, everyone will heat up? Have you found that? Is that kind of what you're hoping going into this game?

ALEX KARABAN: I think some games are. Some games, you see your teammates start shooting and making shots. He gives the team confidence throughout the entire locker room. Why not let it fly, too? Through the good and the bad. I think necessarily with the bad, we have confidence in our teammates to let it fly and never hesitate with their shot, and we have so much belief in everybody in the locker room if your open to shoot. It's easy when you see five threes go in as a team. You want to continue that streak and really continue to let it fly.

Q. Tarris, UCLA plays two bigs that are completely different from each other. One's stretch big and one is more of a traditional big. Can you just talk about Bilodeau, who may or may not play tomorrow, and, of course, Xavier Booker who is a more traditional center and what you have seen on film?

TARRIS REED Jr.: Yeah, they have a very good and tall, elite front court. We have to set the tone from the jump knowing the stretch shooting, they have fives that can really step out and shoot it. I mean, me and E have been comfortable -- and AK -- been comfortable guarding guys who can step out and shoot. Like I said, it starts on the defensive end and setting the tone early.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else for the student-athletes?

Okay, thanks, fellas.

All right, we have Coach Hurley here. Start with an opening statement.

DAN HURLEY: Feel like I just left. That's my opening statement. Excited. Obviously, Sunday night UCLA, UConn. Exciting match-up. Got a lot of respect for Mick, Mick, his staff, the way they play, the UCLA brand, the tradition there. The UConn tradition. Just a great, great

game. Excited to have gotten through yesterday and be back here today.

Q. Is it at the point where you just kind of have to have confidence that some of these guys who struggle shooting based on their track records, based on their abilities, you just kind of have to believe that the shots are going to start falling for these guys at some point, and hopefully, for you Sunday night?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think so. I would be a lot more concerned if we weren't generating really good shots, like if we were missing really hard shots, really difficult, contested. The offense isn't generating open looks. I think we're generating looks that we're more than capable of making and getting hot and getting on a run here. It's like the law of averages, right? At least that's what we keep -- that's what we kind of keep talking about. The guys are such excellent shooters. Solo Ball is an excellent shooter. You watch him shoot, he's one of the best shooters in the country, Braylon Mullins, he's an incredible shooter of the basketball. They just get that first one to go in or get one of those early ones to go in, and you could have a team here that's ripping them off.

Q. Coach, I wanted to ask you about the mutual respect between these coaching staffs. The first one is, I just talked to Darren Savino and said he ruined your little league baseball career by smacking home runs off you. Is that accurate?

DAN HURLEY: I don't know if it was home runs. It might have been a three-run -- it was a big home run that I gave up to Darren. I don't think it was multiple home runs. Anthony Caldrillo hit multiple home runs off of me, but not Darren Savino. Anthony Caldrillo is out there. He's worked his way into the presser. Yeah, Appreciate Darren sharing that.

Q. Talking to Coach Cronin about similarities in intense coaching styles between the both of you, and he said this isn't little league, that's what it takes to get to the success that both you have. You've won back-to-back championships. He's coaching at UCLA. He's basically suggesting you have to be that way to get high-level results. Do you agree with that? What goes into the way, your intensity?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, when you look at the best programs, the best organizations, the best coaches, there's high degrees of accountability in those organizations. There's high degrees of responsibility, discipline, efficiency, productivity, work ethic and standards. So holding 18, 19, 20-year-old young men to those standards on a daily basis is what forges championship teams. It's also what helps



develop strong men that will enter the adult world and be successful people, be able to not only function at a high level, but be productive, be successful, lead productive lives.

When I look at Mick and coaches like Mick, they're all the coaches I have either modeled myself after or admired, is the ones who can balance holding their players to the highest standard where the players have that respectful fear of their coach, and they love playing for their coach, you know? I think it takes a special coach to pull that off.

If you look at most championship coaches, the Nick Sabans, Coach Cignatti, Jay Wright, they ran really, really, really tight ships.

Q. The last few years, there's been a pretty -- the gap between the top four teams and the teams they play in the tournaments growing wider and wider. The last two years, 16-0. Each year, the top four teams in the tournament, a lot of blowouts. I know you were in a close one, but overall, why do you think that is, and what do you think it means for the tournament going forward?

DAN HURLEY: Why do I think that is? The NIL. Obviously, the ability to stock your roster with sure things by going older, by going in the portal. The top programs are no longer throwing freshmen, like the big high-major schools are no longer throwing freshmen and sophomore, highly rated talented players out there against the low to mid-majors with the fifth year seniors, like those juniors and seniors that used to be playing at those lower seed teams, beating the Kentuckys, the UConns or whatever in those early round match-ups because they had freshmen and sophomores.

Those players aren't in those programs in their junior and senior year as grizzled veterans taking down a young and talented high-major team. They're going out and purchasing a ready-made roster of grizzled talented veterans. So the art of program building in colleges is over.

Now it's about roster building and money, and things are so volatile on a year-to-year basis, but certainly the new rules have -- there's no real program building. It's roster construction and do you got the cash?

Q. It's been a while since you and Mick shared a sideline together when you were at Rhode Island and he was at Cincinnati. A lot has changed in the sport since then, but can you take anything from that as you prepare for tomorrow? What do you remember about those head-to-head match-ups?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I remember the similarities just in terms of how well prepared Mick's teams are and how they play and the culture. Obviously, the things they do this year offensively. They play a lot differently than his teams played at Cincinnati when I played him at the AAC.

Just the culture, the standards, how hard they play. The quality of shots they take, the discipline that they play with. That never changes with a Mick Cronin team.

Q. Dan, can you relate to what Mick deals with and what he feels running a program with that kind of tradition? Obviously, you came to UConn, had that tremendous tradition. He's sitting in John Wooden's chair. Can you relate to what he's feeling and what he goes through there?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, definitely. I think coaches that do what we do as long as we've done it and had the success that we've been able to have for as long as we've had, you're internally motivated. There's a lot externally that you deal with. The criticisms, the critiques, the comparisons.

I would say in today's college sports, just having a great brand doesn't get you a whole lot in today's day and age. Obviously, the NIL and the portal have diminished the advantage of coaching at a big-branded school.

I certainly understand the microscope that you're under all the time.

Q. Coach Cronin talked about some of the improvements his defense has made over the past few weeks. Some of that he attributed some of that to effort, but he said they pushed some schematic buttons, too. What have you seen? Didn't have a ton of time to scout, obviously, but have you seen in terms of adjustments they've made?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I have been able to get in five games, which is pretty good. I would say the switching, sitting, and then sitting high side three-quarter in the post, backside traps when the ball goes in the post. I'd say going to the switching on ball, off ball, only doing it at times out of necessity.

They're pretty mobile. They're not huge at guard on the perimeter, but they're smart. Skyy Clark is a very instinctual defender. Dent is a very instinctual defender. They do a good job making plays on the ball. If you're not used to playing against a switching, it could disrupt your rhythm. We see switching a lot. That's a lot of what people try to do to us to affect our off ball movement so we'll have to rely on our experience with that.

Q. I asked Mick about this, but the both of you growing up the sons of high school coaches with the intensity that you coach with, how much of that is derived from being the son of a high school coach growing up in the competition business?

DAN HURLEY: If you don't like me, you'd hate my dad. I bet Mick would say the same thing. We're coach's kids. For me, growing up in Jersey, North Jersey, Jersey City, I coach the way my dad would be coaching this college. Again, whether you would like that or not. You just have a special relationship to your team, to your players, to the outcome, to the lifestyle of being a coach when you're a coach's kid. It's so personal for coaches like me and Mick, which is where you see, at times, emotional reactions to things that happen on the court because it truly feels like, personally, it's your world, your team. The outcome of the game, it manifests itself sometimes in how we behave.

Q. Add a follow-up to that. He mentioned that growing up with his father as a high school coach, he didn't realize how advanced he was in the coaching world just having been around it for so long. Was there a point in your career where you realized you were farther ahead because you had been in the gym for so long with your father?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, when I got to practice at Seaton Hall my first year and we were installing things, we were doing defensive breakdown drills, we were doing offensive installation, we were doing these things, and I was completing the sentences of my college coaches. New concepts they were learning for the first time, jump to the ball, midpoint, close out technique. And I'm kind of finishing -- when you're so well-coached as a high school player and the son of a hall of famer, I was finishing the sentence of my college coaches in my first college practice.

Q. This might go nowhere, but you were at Seaton Hall in '95 when UConn and UCLA played in the Elite Eight, UCLA won the championship. Do you have recollection of that from 31 years ago?

DAN HURLEY: Of the UCLA/UConn game?

Q. Yeah, they won 102-96. Ray had 36.

DAN HURLEY: I'm trying to figure out what bar I was at Seaton Hall (Laughter) No, but I certainly remember Ray.

Q. Coach, you talked about Dent and Skyy, but UCLA runs that three-guard lineup. What have you seen so far from them, and what is so special about those three

guards and the dynamic offense and defense that they bring, and how can your defense respond to that?

DAN HURLEY: I just think with Clark and Perry, the shooting, the two handlers, they have three handlers, three guys can really pass, can really handle. Perry and Clark are shooting -- trying to look at their -- 43. They're shooting incredibly proficient from the three-point line. Not at the highest usage or volume, but they're incredibly efficient when they are shooting a three, but just having three handlers. They got three guys with point guard type of handle. They just take a lot of pressure off of each other. And then the shooting scoring that they have been able to put around Dent allows him to just pick his spots when he wants to score it.

But that guy is like he has a Steve Nash readability to put you in closeouts and find shooters. We have to decide here correctly, we have to pick our poison with Dent and decide what we're going to do ball screen defense-wise quickly.

Q. Coach Cronin credited you earlier, saying it was one of your best coaching performances of your career, pointing specifically to the non-con. Do you have anything you can say about his performance coaching this year? The way he maybe turned his defense around throughout this season?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think for me for Mick, seeing how hard they are to guard offensively. Mick's teams, history of trying to get a rebound against them or to try to score against his times at Cincinnati, I know firsthand just how much of a nightmare that was and how they would beat you up physically. But his ability to adjust to his team this year, obviously, have one of the best offenses in the country, but now bring these guys along from a defensive standpoint, again, with the switching, which is not what they have been doing the whole year, the adjustments he's made at that end, to not play the defense that he would like to play, but adjust to his team from that standpoint.

And if they were healthy, I think he's got them playing their best ball of the year. It's not easy for them in the Big Ten with the travel they have to deal with relative to the regular season, but if they're healthy in the Big Ten Tournament, they might have won it. We know we're dealing with a team that has a chance of going far.

Q. Should Bilodeau play, UCLA plays to different types of centers, Bilodeau being more of a stretch big, and, of course, Booker is more of a traditional big. When you look at them on tape, I know you haven't had as much time to look at film, what have you seen out of them? What do you like about both of their

games?

DAN HURLEY: They're dangerous because they're all making threes. They can roll you and drive you. They can also take you into the mid-post and kind of back you down and create double teams, and now you have all types of situations on the perimeter. There's a lot of shooting on the court around Dent. I think just the construction of their offense is very hard to deal with and how do you match up with Tarris, how do we match him up? Do we match him up with Dailey? We have decisions that we have to make, primarily how are we going to handle ball screen defense with them is probably the biggest thing. That's going to trigger where the ball goes next for them.

Q. Tarris asserted his dominance early last night. What's your mindset as a head coach trying to get him involved early and replicate that early success?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think for Tarris, it all comes down to focus and focusing on your identity, like playing with the motor and the physicality and the pre-catch post-position. He's going to have to do that against UCLA. UCLA doesn't allow you to just throw the ball in the post.

When you do throw the ball in the post, like I said, they bring a second body. He's going to have to be a willing passer. He's going to have to work for deep position. You can't just allow that historic fight now and think it's going to be easy. Just give me the ball off the block, I got this. He's going to have to be really, really positional and smart, and obviously, it's a much different animal in terms of the size and the people around him that he's going to have to perform at a high level against. This is UCLA's front court tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thanks, Coach. See you tomorrow.

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