

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

UCLA Bruins

Coach Mick Cronin

Eric Dailey, Jr.

Media Conference



Let's start with an opening statement for coach and then we'll go to questions for student-athletes.

MICK CRONIN: Before I talk about the game, I want to thank Dr. Jeff Goldfine for going above the call of duty Friday night at 11:00. He's a 76ers dentist, oral surgeon, and fixed Skyy Clark's tooth, which he was in massive pain as well. We really appreciate that and the people here at the Xfinity Center.

It's our second trip here. Not successful, but the best venue and I think the best run venue I have ever played in, so it's been first class. Congrats to UConn. They were better tonight. Our guys gave the effort. Can't score, can't win. That's a lot of their defense. You got to give them credit and they get to play next week, and we get to go home, so let's get -- it's midnight so let's bang out some questions.

Q. I think it's fair to say you guys have been playing your best basketball this last six weeks or so. How hard is it for it to end now? You don't want to make excuses about not having Tyler, but to end now just when this team was really putting it all together.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: It's tough, man. Definitely tough. You feel like you're so close to getting everything, all the pieces flowing and to come out like that tonight, it's hard. Obviously, like you said, we didn't have Tyler, but we can't make excuses. It's still five-on-five.

XAVIER BOOKER: These last two to three weeks, we put a lot of work as a team, we have come a long way, building on and off the court, growing closer together on and off the court, especially defensively. Today it just wasn't enough, but...

Q. You think it's more that you guys just weren't able to do what you wanted or were they just too big and too -- obviously, you didn't have your guy, and I don't know how much that changed things.

XAVIER BOOKER: At the end of the day, like Eric said, it doesn't matter if we didn't have Tyler or not. It's still five v five. We still have guys capable of winning the game. Just didn't get the job done today.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Same thing Book said.

Q. Eric, we talked about you being a vocal leader on the team, what was your message to your teammates?

ERIC DAILEY JR.: I just wanted to comfort my teammates, honestly. It's hard for our seniors. Those guys are crying in the locker room right now. It's not a good feeling. I just want to be there emotionally for my teammates right now. That's all I can do.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks you guys. Congratulations on a great season.

We'll take questions for Coach Cronin at this time.

Q. Just talked to Trent in the locker room, pretty sad, just really blaming himself for the defeat tonight. How did you see him perform and how do you console him after a challenging game?

Well, I think it's -- when you're a young player, it's good to be upset. That means you care. Right now is not the time to coach. Right now is the time to try to be a father figure for those guys. It's tough on them. My message to our team is no excuses. Ben brought up Tyler. Somebody else brought up not having our guy. We didn't bring it up. It's five-on-five. Sadly, I got a lot of practice in dealing with that in NCAA Tournament play, but it sucks for him. That's the -- at the end of the day, Dan said to me if you would have had your guys, you know, you never know.

I thought the bottom line was it's five-on-five and they played harder than us. Their defense was better than our offense, and I take responsibility for that. Got to have your guys ready for the opponent and what the opponent's

going to bring to the table. Not just with what they run offensively, but what they do defensively. And their physicality defensively was the difference in the game. I don't have the stat in front of me, but I do know that we're 14-36. I don't know how many -- from two. I'm going to guess 20-25 of those were at the rim. We could not finish at the rim.

There was a lot of physicality, but I told the guys early in the game, we talked about it, but I didn't get the job done with that. It bothered Trent for sure.

Q. One question about the game and one bigger picture question. About the game, to your point about the missed shots at the rim, it felt like that fouling three-point shooters three times and then some sloppiness we don't normally see.

MICK CRONIN: If we had practice tomorrow, we'd be running. We don't foul jump shooters. It was destructive to our chances, given that we were struggling to score. Guys taking shots they have no chance to make, twice we fouled them. Lack of discipline. Goes on the coach.

Q. And big-picture, third consecutive season not getting into the second week of the tournament. I know different seasons, different reasons, but do you feel like anything nodes to change with the approach, roster construction?

MICK CRONIN: I have no -- right now I'm worried about tonight consoling the guys. I would like about five more million. There's my answer.

Q. Watching Tyler on the bench --

MICK CRONIN: Not for me, for the players.

Q -- having to sit, did it feel like -- how much was it bothering him? How hard was he taking this?

MICK CRONIN: I don't know. How do I answer that? I'm coaching the game. I can sit here and say, yeah, it's really hard. I'm sure he's devastated. My answer to Tyler is if this is the worst thing that happens to you, you'll have a hell of a life. If this is the worst thing that happens to him, he'll have one hell of a life.

Q. Coach, it seemed like the official gave that technical really quick. Did he give an explanation?

MICK CRONIN: I have no comments about any of that.

Q. Can you just talk about your guys' experience having this tournament game here in Philadelphia?

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, it's great. Like I said, what I said, this arena has been awesome.

Q. The logistics, the way everything is handled here. We got some good weather. We're used to travel. That's not why we lost. It's been great being here. I got to see Adem Bona before the game. They got back from the road trip. I got to see some of my guys that work for the Eagles, Connor Barwin and Joe Pannunzio, people I love dearly. It's been a good trip.

Sadly, we couldn't pull it out tonight. It's a zero sum game in this tournament, guys. You got to play well. We didn't play well enough. Blame me, but we didn't play well enough. You're not going to score 57 points and beat anybody in this tournament, let alone UConn. That's because we didn't finish at the rim.

Q. Alex Karaban posted a season high tonight. Is this something you saw he was capable of. It seemed like he was more assertive than normal.

MICK CRONIN: I can't assess what he did all season. I apologize. I coach at UCLA. I have seen his career and I have respect for him and his loyalty to his program, what he's accomplished at UConn. He's everything that's good about college basketball. As far as performance tonight versus the rest of the season, it's hard for me to say. For us, I knew it was a tough match-up for us because he runs around like a two guard. Our guy wasn't used to guarding somebody that does that. We play in the Big Ten and mostly you got guys spotting up or they're power players. He was a tough match-up for us.

If I had to do it over again, I probably would have put a guard on him and try to have our guy that started off on him guard somebody else on the wing. But I congratulate him and I'm rooting for him.

Q. Tyler's injury has probably a big impact to this, but can you talk about how Xavier Booker has handled the extended role?

MICK CRONIN: He started most of the year. It's been a good year for him to get better. He sat on the bench for two years. So just playing 32 minutes versus playing six minutes or no minutes. Last year he didn't get into their Big 10 tournament games or their the NCAA Tournament games. Didn't get it, now he's playing 32 minutes. Great kid. He's come a long way. Learning how to push himself.

Q. Coach, you just talked a little bit about it with Karaban, but how difficult is it to defend UConn's offense when they have players like Karaban who are

constantly running off the ball, especially when you have --

MICK CRONIN: He was the biggest problem for us in that match-up. If I had to do it again, I would try to put a smaller guy on him. Again, all due respect, our offense got us beat, or lack thereof I should say. Got to be able to finish at the rim or get fouled. We just couldn't do it. It just puts way too much pressure on your defense. You're not going to shut them out. The fouls on the three-point shots, somebody brought that up. That is mind-boggling. That is sickening to me. That is sickening. I have certain pet peeves, and that's one of them.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate you taking the time.

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