

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Yale vs Auburn

Friday, March 22, 2024

Spokane, Washington, USA

Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena

**Auburn Tigers**

**Bruce Pearl**

**Jaylin Williams**

**Denver Jones**

**Chris Moore**

Media Conference

Yale - 78, Auburn - 76

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach. The student-athletes joining us and we'll jump to questions for them.

BRUCE PEARL: I'd like to congratulate Yale on a great victory. We respected our opponent. We played 'em a couple years ago and they played us tough and we knew exactly what we were getting ourselves into. We knew we would have to play well to win. We did not take good care of the ball. We turned it over too much. But it was a great game. Obviously they made big shots and John got hot and we just couldn't guard him. He made some big plays and big buckets. That's what guys got to do at the end of things.

We were in foul trouble from the very beginning. Obviously, the decision to Flagrant 2, Chad Baker, that's a pretty tough call. He had got hit about five seconds earlier, got tangled up, got a little bit of an elbow, they let it go, maybe nobody saw it, and about five seconds later Chad hit him. It was inappropriate. Clearly a Flagrant 1. The fact that it was elevated to a Flagrant 2 was a decision that the official had to make, but it obviously had tremendous impact on outcome.

Chad is one of our best players, he's one of our very best playmakers, and was a huge part of our game plan, so to lose him in that situation was really, really disruptive to our team on both ends of the floor.



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Is Jaylin Williams.

DENVER JONES: Is Denver Jones.

**Q. Playing against Yale, the Ivy League, hasn't been to this tournament many times before. Did you guys expect this team to come out with so much grit and determination?**

CHRIS MOORE: Yes, we did. We knew it was March Madness, we know what the situation is. Everybody playing like their life depended on it and hat's off to those guys. They played a very great game.

DENVER JONES: Yeah, we expected them to come out, make shots tonight. Obviously, down the stretch they made some good plays and they pulled it out at the end.

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: So we know they won they're league, so they came in this tournament with a lot of confidence, especially first round playing against Auburn. A lot of people probably didn't think they were going to win the game, so they came in the game with a different step in their movements and making shots. They just played very well tonight, so....

**Q. Jaylin, obviously a disappointing loss, but can you talk about your time at Auburn and what it's meant to you to be an Auburn Tiger and to be able to play with these guys this year.**

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Yeah, so my whole time being here, I've been on about 10 different teams since I've been here. But this team is very special. We all get along, we all hang out, we all do all type of like different activities together, play the game, get along. We always stood together, no matter what. Even today in the locker room, we knew what we could have done better. But we stuck together still to this day and hopefully when I'm gone like I'll still stay in touch with these guys. These are going to be my best friends forever for the rest of my life.



**Q. Denver and Chris, just No. 4 for Yale, just talk about the challenges of guarding him, especially when he got hot like that early in the second half.**

DENVER JONES: When you're put in that situation, honestly you're just trying to defend 'em the best you can, make every catch difficult for 'em, make every shot difficult. But he hit some tough shots tonight. Obviously, that gave them a little bit of a run toward the end of the game. He just had a great night tonight.

CHRIS MOORE: Yeah, man, we knew the scouting report, we knew who was coming in the game. We stuck to it, for the most part, but like Denver said, he made some big shots and when guys are making big shots like that, it's kind of hard to overcome.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss the student-athletes and then return to questions for Coach.

**Q. Can you talk about this group of guys and what this season's meant to you as a whole?**

BRUCE PEARL: You know, it's tough to reflect on the season when you just go through one of the most disappointing losses in your career. I've been in the 12 spot. We've had these great wins. This is the biggest upset in NCAA tournament that I think I've experienced. I'm glad we lost to a really good team in Yale. Great kids, great coaches. As a Jewish-American coach, I'm really proud of Danny Wolf as one of the best Jewish basketball players in the country. Some people are afraid to sort of point that out, get uncomfortable with it. I'm just not. So I'm proud of him.

But Auburn had a historic year. We were picked in the middle of our league, we wound up being one game out of first in the regular season, we got hot late. The last game we lost, I think, was at Tennessee three weeks ago -- I mean, four weeks. I mean, this team has done so many great things.

So I'm very proud of 'em. Like these guys said, they got along really, really well together. They made history. This is the fourth different team at Auburn that has won a championship in the last seven years; two regular season, two tournaments. They represented Auburn really well.

**Q. Throughout the season, you talked to us as the media and called basketball a game of matchups. How did losing Chad Baker-Mazara change the way you matched up with Yale today?**

BRUCE PEARL: It was huge. They have a great defensive guard in Bez. Bez is a great defensive guard.

The other guards are better offensively than they are defensively. So Denver Jones had a really good offensive game, but we needed that other guard out there offensively. Denver was a little bit under the weather. He had to play through that. So he wound up playing more minutes under the weather. Chris Moore had to play more minutes. KD had to play more minutes. We just weren't as deep or as fresh. I don't think they -- I think they took a shot at Chad. They hit him and he retaliated. Can't retaliate. But they hit him first.

**Q. Did you get any explanation from the refs why it was elevated from a 1 to a 2?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think perhaps a couple of words, the fact that it was serious, maybe, or intentional. Chad lined him up and retaliated. So by book or if that's the wording they will use as a Flagrant 2, but it had a huge impact on the game and I don't think any -- I think if he called it a Flagrant 1, I don't think any -- it was a Flagrant 1. He intentionally, it was excessive, it was -- how many Flagrant 2s are there in games versus Flagrant 1s? That would be a good discussion. Let's just say, of all the flagrants in my experience, 90 percent, maybe 1s, maybe. 10 percent. Tough to get here after all year long. I don't even know if we had a Flagrant 2 all year.

**Q. Was Broome okay there at the end?**

BRUCE PEARL: I don't know. I don't know. He got tangled up pretty good there, didn't he? But Johni had a great year, carried this team, particularly the offensive end, improved tremendously defensively. We rely on him a great deal. He's one of the best centers in all of college basketball as an All-American.

**Q. You're up by 10 with seven and a half to go and the offense, a lot of turnovers, missed shots. What do you think the biggest difference was? Was it something that Yale started doing differently or what you guys were doing differently just for the offense to cool off like that down the stretch?**

BRUCE PEARL: We turned it over. I think that was probably the biggest takeaway. We did not get a ton of easy ones. We didn't -- kind of running without the ball, and we put the ball in Chad's hands a lot late to make plays. So really, offensively we lost a huge breakdown guy for us. But I would say it's our turnovers. Yale played solid defensively. Mahoney was 9-11 from the foul line. So he was on the ground a lot. I'm going to be anxious to see what all the -- we just fouled him too much.

**Q. You guys were 24-0 against non-quadrant 1 opponents this year, you were blowing teams out all**

**season. At what point did it become clear that this Yale team was not going to go away even when you had 10-point leads?**

BRUCE PEARL: We didn't expect them to go away ever. Ever. Listen, this was not -- it's funny, I heard Jay Bilas say some things today. Give Yale credit for making those plays. This has nothing to do with us not taking them seriously. Nothing. They outplayed us in many categories, they made shots, they guard us. They know how to fall. They know how to get the whistle to blow. I mean, the whistle blew a lot. They went to the line 31 times. That's a lot.

**Q. I know we talked a lot about Chad, but I was curious to know in a game this close and with a player that has that much impact, what did you say to him to better himself? And number two, how do you use that as a teachable moment for the other guys going into next season as far as discipline?**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, we all have to be accountable for things. We recognize that. I visited with him a little bit at halftime and he felt badly about it. He wished he had a do-over. But you don't. A lot of aspects of the game, give Yale credit. They played great, they played defense, we turned the ball over too much. And that's not to disguise the fact that we missed one of our best players, he's one of our top two or three players.

**Q. Awkward question here, but you guys won a lot of games by a lot of points this year, didn't get into very many close games this season. Do you feel like down the stretch the lack of close games played a part or what?**

BRUCE PEARL: I don't know. We missed a couple free throws, but we got a couple of offensive rebounds on the free throw set. So that played into our hands. Guys us to where we had a chance to win the game based on our, let's say, offensive free throw set execution. So it will be interesting to see in those last two shots with Johni on the ground, all the contact that was there.

**Q. You spoke about where you were picked to start off the season and the success that your team had. I know that this is a rough patch moment, but when you reflect on this season, what are the positives that you take away from you as you build forward at Auburn?**

BRUCE PEARL: Well, I think that this was a team that our fans liked as much as any I've had in the 10 years I've been at Auburn. Like I would say the 2019 Final Four team, that was a special team, had a special run, certainly one of the great teams we've ever had, maybe the best

team we've ever had at Auburn. I think that Walker Kessler and Jabari Smith's year where we were No. 1 in the country for about four weeks and won the regular season didn't finish great that year. But that was a team, I think, that I think people, our fans, really enjoyed.

Our fans love this team. They love their energy, they love their passion, they love their emotion, they love the fact that they beat every team they were supposed to beat, except tonight.

**Q. You haven't lost many games shooting better than 50 percent from the field. You guys shot 51 percent from the field. Can you characterize for us where you felt the difference in the game was and kind of what made this different for you?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think our second half defense wasn't as good. We didn't turn 'em over as much. We succumbed to fatigue a little bit. They made a bunch of shots off of us, and we turned the ball over too much in the second half to win.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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