

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Missouri vs Miami

Thursday, March 19, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

**Miami Hurricanes**

**Jai Lucas**

**Tre Donaldson**

**Ernest Udeh**

**Malik Reneau**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: The final school on our dais is University of Miami Hurricanes. They represent the Atlantic Coast Conference. They will play the tenth seed Missouri. Tomorrow night after the conclusion of Game 3. Head coach is Jai Lucas. On the dais we have Tre Donaldson, Ernest Udeh Malik Reneau.

**Q. You have been through these big tournaments before with your previous teams. Can you describe a little bit about what it has been like for the last I guess 24 hours since you got here. If you can describe what it has been like for you guys.**

TRE DONALDSON: We are in March Madness but we want to treat it as a road game. Like we usually do. We've won a lot of them. That's what we want to do treat it as normal as possible. Just be Miami.

ERNEST UDEH: Tre said it. Everything outside is heightened, whether it be in media, sports in general, college basketball in general, the main thing for us is again going into these next few games. Obviously one game at a time stick to our stuff. The things we work on in practice, things we talked about working on.

We want to win. We are not here for an experience or here to lollygag. We here to win. It's a business trip. Being prepared. Being excited, making sure we have the same energy going into the game.

MALIK RENEAU: The last time I have been to a tournament is my freshman year. It's surreal. Like they



said, keeping it normal. Stick to what we usually do on the road. Stick to what we do best. We are pretty good at away games and how we play here.

**Q. How important is it to have tournament experience? You have all played in the Tournament before. How important is it to have tournament experience, and for the players who haven't been in a tournament before?**

MALIK RENEAU: It has been a while. But I played in a couple games when I was there. Just being in the moment, playing with your team and not going away from the -- what the game plan is and staying together. Sticking as a team constantly through ups and downs on the court through their runs and through our runs staying together and staying poised to be the best.

ERNEST UDEH: Definitely helps. Us being the senior leaders of the team. There's a certain amount of credibility that comes with that. The rest of the guys trust that we know what we are talking about.

Again, we are an extension of the coaches. Obviously having that experience on top with just our capability of letting the guys know what is expected of us as a group night in and night out, no matter if it is the NCAA Tournament or the first game of the season. Making sure we stay true to what we work on in practice, stay true to our brand of basketball night in and night out no matter what the stage is.

TRE DONALDSON: For us as a team I think it is huge, to have the experience for us three guys because we have a couple young guys we lean on to play big roles. Having that experience being able to relate to them being able to talk to them through it and trying to get them used to it and what to expect exactly is huge because we lean on them so much.

So that experience that plays a big role. When it comes to March and March Madness, you don't know what the games are going to throw at you, you don't know what it is going to take to win. Going into the game you have to be able to adjust. Whatever it takes to win, you have to be able to do that. It has to be all five guys to bought in, so that experience plays a big role.



**Q. What has it been about Coach Lucas' approach that has pulled this team together? We talk about the young guys a lot of you guys in the first year together. What is it about Coach and his staff that built that chemistry between all of you so quickly?**

TRE DONALDSON: I feel like our togetherness, and then when it comes to Coach, just his want to prove he belongs here. We have seen all of the other stuff that has been said. We can all relate to it, our whole team. We have been counted out on certain stuff.

That chip on his shoulder would be the biggest thing. Him keeping that chip on his shoulder and pushing us to whatever that chip may be to us each individually to keep that chip on our shoulder as well, and have that push us and drive us to play hard, do the things that other teams don't want to do, so we can come out here and win.

ERNEST UDEH: He is very poised. Whenever we are going over a scout or game plan he is poised and precise. He is always letting us know basketball is a game of runs. So again during games and situations where we feel like things may be getting out of hand or whatever, he is always reminding us to just stick to what we know, stick to what we do. It is the game of basketball. There are ups and downs. You are not expecting things to go perfect all of the time. That's something he has shown us throughout the season. How poised he is in moments how poised and precise he is in situations. It is incredible. Being a part of this team and this program is something I am blessed to be a part of.

MALIK RENEAU: I will say Jai is a player's coach. He understands everybody and what they are going through. We lean towards him and feel more comfortable around him and trust him a lot more. It also brings us together.

An aspect of the coaching staff and all of them, I think they take the job super serious. They are always ready to go with a game plan. They can adjust on the fly when they see something wrong in the game or an adjustment they like, they do a good job of adjusting on the fly and getting us ready to go for second half adjustments and stuff like that.

They take their job super serious and get us in the right positions to help us succeed on the court.

**Q. You all are going to be the last game to tip tomorrow. 9 local back in Miami. What's the prep knowing you have to wait all day to play and how have you prepared to play, logistics of playing that late in the day?**

ERNEST UDEH: Breakfast, lunch, dinner, 9 a.m., midnight, three p.m., rush hour 9 to 5. Coach obviously something he talked about this morning, doesn't matter what time it is. We understand the task at hand. The timing, location, situation is really the last thing we are going to look at and kind of think as a determining factor on our success how well we do. No matter the environment of what we are playing, and we understand why we are here. We understand what we are here too do.

So the preparation, understanding it is a late game. Might push things back maybe an hour or so. Nothing we do schematically is going to change in any regard. Above all else stick to what we know, stick to the principles we have worked on our practice, the entire season has gotten us to this point, we will be okay.

**Q. Also on the late-game angle is there any benefit to being -- I think your game is actually the last game, 10:10 Eastern time, last game I think of the first round. Any benefit in the fact that you have gotten to watch, you just saw what happened with Duke, you are seeing Wisconsin, you are seeing all of these games. By the time you guys play do you feel there is a benefit of having settled into March Madness watching all of the games and not being one of the first games? Is it good to be one of the last games? For any of you.**

TRE DONALDSON: As a group playing the late game and having the young guys that don't have the experience we have, I feel like that's big for us. We can show them what it looks like to win, what a team looks like, how bad they want to win, what winning plays looks like in March Madness. You can learn a lot from other teams. That's something we as a program really embody, trying to learn as much as possible and take everything we can from everybody. They are not in this tournament for no reason.

Attacking it that way and being open-minded about it I feel like is the biggest thing. There's a lot of good teams in this tournament. The hardest playing teams are going to win.

**Q. Making the move to Miami and what has maximized the opportunity with this program this year?**

MALIK RENEAU: Coach put me in a lot of positions to succeed, whether it is been in the pocket, posting up, isolation. Being able to be versatile for him and be a facilitator on the team whether it is getting to the rim myself or kick out threes to teammates, being able to be the guy that he goes to other than Tre as a facilitator, as a team as you say and help the team out that way.

I think Coach has put me in excellent positions to put me in



the best possible spots on the court to get myself going throughout the game.

**Q. Do you guys have any, like the Queens College team they have a dog that goes around with them they take around, like a good luck charm kind of thing, do you guys have anything you brought to the tournament or any kind of trinket, shirt, anything you guys have as a group? I know you have the mask thing. Is there anything specific for the Tournament that you have done different?**

MALIK RENEAU: No. I mean pack the same stuff.

We didn't switch nothing up. We brought the mask. That's probably the only thing we brought. Everything else has been the same.

TRE DONALDSON: Oh, the wristband.

MALIK RENEAU: I forgot about these.

ERNEST UDEH: No way both ya'll got it. Oh my God. My fault, Grace.

TRE DONALDSON: She made us these and they have our nicknames on them.

Grace did.

ERNEST UDEH: I was thinking about hooping, I wasn't thinking about messing up. I forgot.

THE MODERATOR: Head coach is with us.

JAI LUCAS: For us this is what you practice for, this is what you play for in this moment to be here in the first round in St. Louis. We wouldn't want to be anywhere else and give us a chance to come compete, and what should be a great environment. Whenever you play against a team that is close, hopefully they bring a lot of fans, and it adds to the environment and makes it feel like March.

We are excited about that opportunity, excited to play and just excited to get ready.

**Q. Jai, is there any benefit to playing the last game so you guys get to -- your guys and your players get to see all of these games with what's happening to Duke, just so they can sort of see by the time it gets to your game, do you think the players especially who haven't been in this before can really see what March Madness is, the intensity of these games, any benefits to being there as opposed to being one of the first games?**

JAI LUCAS: I would say yes and no. The longer it goes the more anxious you get watching all of the games and seeing all of the games. But also you can realize how quick it can be over. Just the realization of this is it, if you don't come out and play to the standard, don't come out to compete your season can be done in 40 minutes. That's a big part of it.

I wouldn't say it is a benefit. I am on the fence with that one. Wait until 9:10, it is going to be miserable tomorrow.

**Q. I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit about what it was like working with Mark Mitchell when he was at Duke and how you have seen him grow since then too?**

JAI LUCAS: Mark, one he is a great kid. Comes from a great family. We kind of came in together, if I am not wrong my freshman year -- his freshman year was my first year at Duke. You know, he was one of the guys I got to work with. He is just a great kid. I am so proud, also so happy for him and the player that he has become and the role he has been able to play, being at Duke, coming to Duke, being All American, all of the accolades that he had, playing with other good players, you never really know how it is going to go. He showed up every day to work.

When he felt it was his opportunity to make a change he did that. His family did it in the best way that could be done. Now watching him be a go-to player and kind of be -- I mean, I think he leads them in every category, if I am not wrong, kind of be the man is exciting. I am happy for him.

**Q. Marcus Allen's story since it has unfolded since December, can you kind of walk through what that has meant to your program, and wrapping your arms around that, and then having him here how important that is?**

JAI LUCAS: Man, it was a tough, tough situation. It is information and something that you never want to hear. When everything happened with Marcus, the biggest thing with Marcus is he wanted to still be treated like Marcus. So we had to make sure we did that around the program.

And for us as a team, it is just giving us the appreciation value that nothing is promised, and you can't take anything for granted, and you have to go out and attack every day.

Whenever Marcus is around, even before he was diagnosed with cancer, he is kind of the heartbeat of the team, he is the guy who was hear and the guy everybody kind of gravitated towards. Same thing when he is around and him being on this trip with us and being able to be

back and forth in between treatments and practicing. He did scouting for us yesterday. He was Mark Mitchell.

Having him around keeps the guys and keeps the perspective of the program in the right place.

**Q. You said before in a way you are trying to take a positive out of the fact that Missouri will be playing in their home state, I think it is 120 miles, compared to coming from Miami to here. Can you talk a little bit more about that? You would think it would be a disadvantage this is going to be kind of home game for them. How are you managing that?**

JAI LUCAS: For us it kind of goes with our motto and theme for the year. We haven't really been respected to the level that we think we should be. Where we were projected to be in the ACC, the projections beginning of the year, now being a Tournament team. Now you get all of this stuff and get all of this credit and praise, and then you get a seventh seed and have to go on the road.

So for us it is business as usual. We won eight road games. We are expecting it to be like a road game. We are treat it go like being a real road game. We have to go and earn and take our respect like we have done the whole year.

**Q. Obviously, both teams kind of have superstar forwards going into this one with Mark Mitchell and Malik Reneau. I curious what your thoughts are on the matchup and kind of what are the differences between those two players?**

JAI LUCAS: To be honest with you, there is not a lot of differences. The way they kind of use Mark is very similar to how we use Malik. Like you were saying, they are both the kind of primary person on each team.

The thing will come down to what team takes care of the ball the best way. Go throughout the game and what team can kind of capitalize on that, and the second biggest part be the glass, who can control the glass and win the rebounding battle. It starts with those two because they are the leading scorers, and I would say the best player on each team. I would say it is going to come down to -- I won't call them complementary, but everybody else around them, how their impact on the game is won.

**Q. I am wondering, you have been in the Tournament before with Duke, now you are here as a head coach. How is the experience different coming in as like a Duke assistant coach or assistant coach for another program and coming in as head coach? How is the March Madness experience different for you?**

JAI LUCAS: For me it is making sure you are setting the right tone and the right temperature for what it should be. A lot of times, even at Duke, Kentucky or Texas when we were here, you can kind of be just satisfied with getting here. This is what it should be. You should want to get here. That's the whole thing. It is not just getting here, it is winning and advancing when you get here.

Making sure as a program we have as much confidence as possible and our mind frame and approach is in the right way, but also not making it like too much or heightened, adding to the anxiety. Like everybody understands it is March Madness. Everybody knows when you are going home. Keeping it in our daily approach and how we have done it all year is also the big part of the job being the head coach.

As assistant coach you can kind of watch games on your phone, kind of just mess around and do your scout. But as the head coach, there's a lot more that you are responsible for. So just making sure I am doing my part in that way.

**Q. To fill in one more detail on Marcus Allen. Has he been constantly a practice presence? Is this new, recent? Kind of fill us in there.**

JAI LUCAS: I would say within the last month he has been. His treatments have been kind of once every six weeks. After the treatments is when he kind of feels his worst, so now that he is almost a week from his last one, he was able to kind of come and do that.

I would say it has been pretty consistent about those two weeks in between the treatments where he comes and practices and participates in practice, whether it is -- he is not out there full blast. He will get a few reps and then rest and kind of do that. But it is a big part of his treatment is just making sure we keep it as normal as possible for him. Part of this battle of not only the chemo, it is the mental part.

Making sure that he is still feeling like Marcus. I had the unfortunate circumstance of dealing with this with Andrew Jones when he was at Texas when he was there, when he had leukemia. I have kind of been through it and seen it and understand kind of what it is. Being able to help Marcus through that also, I kind of knew some of the little things that could help him.

**Q. Jai, the margins are so tight in this game. I kind of think back to your guys game against Cal this season. How did that ultimately tighten the screws for your team and eventually the platform it gave you guys to execute down the stretch of the season and now into**

## **this part of the postseason?**

JAI LUCAS: That game our team was kind of changing. I believe that was the first game without Drew when he had stepped away a little bit. We missed every layup down the stretch. You are giving me PTSD right now. We have been in so many tight games. We have been in so many close games. 8 or 10 or something that have been ten or less. Then all of our losses a lot of them have been one possession. You think about Louisville, Cal, Florida State at Virginia. Those tight ones we lost in conference. All of that experience is giving us confidence in those moments not to panic. We won our fair share too.

You pull from all of that data in these moments that's why your schedule and conference all of that stuff is so important. When you getting in these moments in March, all of the games are close. All of them are tight. You look at the games today and what happens they are close. You have to be able to pull from your experiences. That's what helps you down the stretch in these games.

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