

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Santa Clara vs Kentucky

Friday, March 20, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

## Santa Clara Broncos

## Herb Sendek

## Allen Graves

## Elijah Mahi

### Media Conference

Kentucky 89, Santa Clara 84

MODERATOR: Santa Clara Broncos are with us. We have Coach Herb Sendek, Allen Graves and Elijah Mahi.

HERB SENDEK: Just incredibly thankful for the opportunity to coach each and every one of the men on our team. It was a phenomenal experience. Really proud of their effort, not only today but all season. They brought it every day, whether practice or games. Always, always gave their best, with great attitudes. So I celebrate that, and I celebrate each of them.

**Q. Coach, this is a great month. It can also be a cruel month sometimes. If you're around the game, you probably see both sides of it. Can you just talk about for you the emotions of going through a moment like that where it's up and down?**

HERB SENDEK: It was a really euphoric high, followed by a tough one to swallow.

**Q. Elijah, being a recruit for West Valley, now getting over to Santa Clara, seems like expectations have risen. What was kind of the most fulfilling part of your journey and fulfilling the expectations and bring Santa Clara back to the NCAA Tournament?**

ELIJAH MAHI: Everything. I'm just proud to be a Bronco, proud of what I did here and we did here and we were able to accomplish this year. It means a lot, honestly. This is a great school. I'm thankful. I'm really thankful to have had a career here and to be here for two years. I'm just thankful.



**Q. On behalf of the student body, thank you guys. This was pretty unbelievable. First tournament in 30 years, just for any of you, looking back on the accomplishments this season, 15 conference wins, the first WCC Finals since 2007. What comes to mind when you think about this season as a team.**

ALLEN GRAVES: Definitely just the hard work that we put in. We worked day in and day out in practice. We competed each and every day, and I'm glad that we got what we deserved, you know, coming here, being able to play in March Madness, the biggest stage. Obviously we didn't get the outcome we wanted but I wouldn't change it for the world with these guys.

I'm proud to be a Bronco and always will be a Bronco, and just happy to be here and be able to do it with these guys and the genuine people that are here. The culture we've built is amazing, and I feel like we can do it again next year.

ELIJAH MAHI: Yeah. Like he said, took a lot of hard work to get here. Very thankful for my guys, I love my guys and all the work we put in together, day in and day out. It showed what we were able to do this year and the history we were able to make. And like he said, it hurts how it all ended, but I'm just thankful, man. God bless. I'm just thankful.

**Q. Allen, can you kind of just walk us through that last few seconds in regulation? You hit that big shot, then Otega hits. What was going through your mind then?**

ALLEN GRAVES: Really running back, first of all, getting back to transition defense. Otega I think hit the lay-up and I saw it was nine seconds on the clock and I knew Sash had the ball. So I just tried to get myself in the action, give myself a chance to make a play. And he hit me on the pick-and-pop, and as soon as the ball hit my hands I knew God willing that it was going to go in.

Even though I missed the first two I took earlier in the game, I just had confidence in my abilities and I feel like this program has done a great job of instilling that confidence in me, and making sure I'm ready for those big-time moments.



And obviously him coming down and hitting the half-court buzzer beating but we knew we had overtime to play and be prepared. So I just tried to get the team back in the right mindset to go back out there and play.

**Q. Herb, in your 10 years leading this program, how do you reflect on I guess the turning points and what it took to build this into what it was and have it culminate in a game like today?**

HERB SENDEK: Once again, I think my immediate reaction is one of gratitude, because I have a very clear mind and understanding knowing that it has taken the collective efforts of countless people to provide this opportunity, to make this possible, people that may be on the outside don't get recognition. People may not know their names, but it's been a collective effort, from many within our university community that's allowed us to be in this place at this time.

**Q. Herb, it looked like you might have been trying to get a timeout in the final seconds there. Walk us through the end of the game sequence on your end and what kind of communication you had with the officiating crew those last few seconds.**

HERB SENDEK: Yeah. Well, I unequivocally called timeout. But they didn't grant it. I mean, I think the video evidence is clear. And anybody is able to pull it up. So, you know, which, you know, is a likely response after Allen hits the three that the coach would be calling timeout to set the defense, which I tried to do, and I was successful in doing, other than it wasn't acknowledged or recognized. And so that's what happened.

**Q. Following up on that for the players, you all were both on the court. I assumed that's why you guys probably didn't foul?**

ELIJAH MAHI: Yeah. I guess, but honestly like there was just so much going on in that moment. There was just so much going on in the last seconds. Like right after Allen hit the shot, obviously the second, I think in that second I was kind of like, damn, looking at the time, seeing how much time was up.

Like I said, there was so much going on that I didn't realize it.

ALLEN GRAVES: I would say there was a lot of emotions involved in that play. Obviously hitting a shot like that was exciting, and then kind of lose your man maybe. I know Coach was calling timeout. So we thought we were going to be granted that, but we didn't and then came down,

threw up a prayer, and it went in.

**Q. Herb, all season you've sung the praise of the fanbase and the investment into the community and the program. What's your message to them in terms of what should be the lasting memory of this team and what they did?**

HERB SENDEK: I think there will be times subsequently to reflect on all that. You know, what you find is sports is a tremendous vessel to enjoy relationships, whether it's a son coming to the games with his dad. Tonight my father was able to be in the stands together with other family members, the relationships you have with your staff, your teammates. The sport, the game is a vessel to accomplish that. And that's what you take away, not only from this season, because you know, by many standards it was successful, but any season, even seasons that you don't win as many games. They have the same outcome, ultimately.

**Q. Coach, in such an emotional game like this, your personality kind of shows through. You mentioned yesterday about your calm demeanor and such, but at the end of regulation the game is still tied. So how do you kind of reset so that you're able to approach overtime with the right mindset?**

HERB SENDEK: Great question. Not easy to do, right? In the moment. But our players have a tremendous armor of resiliency and they've done a great job of staying in the moment, and we're a next-play team. So you take a brief second to breathe and then it's next play, because that's what it's been all season.

**Q. Elijah, can you talk about the players that are staying and what you see from them looking to next year?**

ELIJAH MAHI: I see a lot and I'm just excited to see where their progression is going to go. Santa Clara does a great job of helping these guys get player development. So we're going to see throughout this year how they're going to progress within the season. So I'm excited to see how they're going to take it to the spring and the summer and into next year.

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