

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Miami vs Purdue

Sunday, March 22, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

**Miami Hurricanes**

**Jai Lucas**

**Shelton Henderson**

**Tre Donaldson**

**Malik Reneau**

Media Conference

Purdue 79, Miami 69

MODERATOR: Miami Hurricanes here. Head coach Jai Lucas, Tre Donaldson, Malik Reneau and Shelton Henderson represent the student body. We're going to ask Jai to make a comment on the game they just finished.

Jai, please.

JAI LUCAS: It's a tough one. It's a tough one. I felt we were right there, and then it's just moments in the game. When you get in these high-level tournament games, there are one or two moments, one or two plays, one or two situations that kind of separate the game.

It was a 10-point win, but the game was a lot closer than that, just the way it felt. And we hit a moment between, I would say, probably somewhere between the 16 and 12-minute mark of the second half till about that time, to about, yeah, to about the 10 minutes where we just had to recover.

But we competed. We competed. I was happy with how we competed. And for me, this first year just being able to reflect on it now and just think about it, and I told them in the locker room and I'll say it publicly, but it was an absolute pleasure and a joy to coach this team. And I thank them for believing in me, believing in a person who had never coached before, and everything they gave me this year, I'm forever in debt to them.

So I'm proud of them. Although it sucks right now, I'm



proud of them and I'll remember this forever.

**Q. Congratulations on your season. The Purdue interview before, just so you know, they were very complimentary of your team.**

For Jai and then I have a question for the players. Jai, does it hurt more, do you think, to win knowing that it was so close rather than a blowout? To lose a close game rather than a blowout, does it hurt more?

For Shelton, I wanted to ask you about the game that you had today, which was real stand-out game. Can you just talk about what you were feeling, what you were seeing and how you were able to just dominate the way you did.

JAI LUCAS: For me, I felt good about the match-up. You know, from the beginning I just liked our speed and our pace that we play with. I felt like it would give them some struggle. In saying that, they're one of the best teams in the country. He's one of the best coaches in the country. He's been one of the best coaches for the last 10, 12 years. The program has been a blue blood for the last 10 or 12 years. So it's with the utmost respect that I say that. But I felt like we were a good matchup.

They were a good matchup for us with some of the stuff we could do and some of the stuff we could exploit. It was there in the first half. At the end of the half they made a little run. We gave up those three threes to Cox, that separation going into halftime, it's a different feel, different pressure if you're up 6, 8 than being up 1 or 2, whatever it was. But I liked it.

To be honest with you, Michelle, they all suck. If they're blowouts or if they're a one-point loss. But it's hard to get here. It's hard to get here. It's hard to be a part of March Madness. It's hard to win a game. So I am just appreciative of that.

SHELTON HENDERSON: I just think I went out there and played. I took what they gave me. Didn't do anything special. Just played my role and played hard and what I was supposed to do.

Came up short. It sucks. I wanted to play for the seniors but just came up short.



**Q. First for Tre and Malik, can you kind of just describe the journey to the point of when you got the first phone call from Coach Lucas to now and kind of what this whole season has kind of encapsulated for you guys?**

TRE DONALDSON: The first phone call with Coach Jai was kind of I'll never forget it because I was at low moment and it meant the world to me because I felt like everybody had gave up on me. And just having a coach that believes in you, that trusts in you no matter what you've been through, it means a lot. So it's something I'll never forget.

MALIK RENEAU: That first phone call with Coach, like Tre said, always remember it. He put his utmost faith in me and believed in me. I just want to thank Coach for putting that trust in me and letting me fight throughout the season.

**Q. Coach Lucas, from your perspective, from the day you got the call that you got the job at Miami to as you sit here now, how do you put into words everything that's happened through it all?**

JAI LUCAS: I mean, one, you can always have a plan and have stuff in place that you think is going to work, but the ability to adapt. But for me, it started with Malik and Tre. They were my first two commits. They were the people I wanted to build the team around, build the team through. So it started there.

And it kind of dominoed with Shelton, Ernest and Tru. And then we kind of built it from there.

For me, I just wanted to make sure, because I was a former player, I've been in those points. I've transferred. I know what that feels like. I wanted to make sure I gave them everything I had of me, so they could enjoy their last year of basketball and they could get utmost out of basketball. And I felt like they did.

With both of them being all-conference players, Malik first team, Tre second team. Shelton should have been all freshmen team, but that's a different conversation.

But as much as they can say about me, I can say about them. I'm forever in debt for them. They put Miami basketball in a place where we can go nowhere but up.

**Q. For all of you guys, what has this season kind of really meant to you, Shelton and Jai in your first years coaching and playing and Malik and Tre in your last years. What has this meant to you and what are the experiences and lessons that you've learned over the course of the season.**

SHELTON HENDERSON: It's been great. I learned a lot about myself and just I had to grow up a little bit faster playing with these guys. And I think it helped me in the end. But just going out there and having this run with them is something I won't ever forget, and I can't thank them enough.

MALIK RENEAU: Yeah, this season meant the world to me. Just coming through all the obstacles I've been through in my career, and Coach giving me the opportunity to not only be a pivotal player on the team and play 30-plus minutes, but also become a leader and be someone these guys look up to for years to come.

So I'm just blessed that Coach gave me this opportunity to come back home and come to The U and finish my last year at The U.

TRE DONALDSON: Coming to Miami, I had to build myself back up coming off a tough year last year and how it ended and how everything went, transferring and stuff like that. So just coming into a coaching staff that was going to help me build myself back up and not only build myself back up to where I was, but then continue to help me get better. I felt like that was the biggest thing coming here to Miami. I enjoyed every moment of it. So as someone has said, I'll never forget it.

JAI LUCAS: For me, I felt like this could be a special place. And that's why when the job opened I kind of did everything I could to get involved. I'll say that that way. And then once I got to meet the people, once I got to meet Dan and Brian and Joe and the administration and the support system that we have at Miami, it was a no-brainer.

And it's the people that make places. We have good people at the university, and then we had great people in the building this year with the players in the locker room and these three to the right of me. That made my job easy.

Half the battle is making sure you get the right people in there, and then once you get the right people, you just gotta figure it out. So I was blessed to have the right people, have great young men, great support from administration and then the fans this year. The fans! Instagram, Twitter, and then at the end of the year, just packing the Watsco. We really have built a great foundation.

Now it's my job to keep it going and keep it rolling, where this time next year we're talking about going to the Sweet 16, not just the season ending. So that's the goal, that's the plan, until you win National Championships.

**Q. First for Jai and then for Shelton, could you talk about what went into limiting Braden Smith's efficacy tonight, forcing him into eight turnovers, which is a career high for him?**

JAI LUCAS: Yeah, the first thing was I wanted to start and I wanted to put some size on him. Really, watching all the games I haven't seen anybody with size guard him. And so that's where Shelton came to mind just initially, and then the thing with him is you gotta try to limit him as much as possible, because he's kind of -- he's the engine to the machine. Everybody knows that.

So we tried to deny him, we tried to trap him. I don't know if he's ever had eight turnovers, so I guess that's something we kind of hang our hat on. But we just had to give him different looks. We tried to make him as uncomfortable as possible. And then, of course, he's going to make some plays. He made a few down the stretch. But I thought the size and just mixing up defenses, mixing up coverages, pressing, not pressing, kind of just hopefully kept him guessing.

SHELTON HENDERSON: I just think being physical with him, what Coach said, having more size on him. We know he wants to get in the pocket. Just playing with our hands up and just limiting what he does, because we know what he wanted to do. And just being physical was the main message that was preached to us.

**Q. Jai, I want to ask you about Shelton's performance tonight. I know that you know him as well as anyone, since he was a kid. What did you see in him today and that he was kind of the X factor for your team? Just talk about his performance and how much would you like him to be a foundation for next year's team.**

JAI LUCAS: Well, he didn't shoot any free throws. So I'm going to say that. No, I'm just playing.

You know, this was always what I envisioned for him, and this was my whole plan for him when I recruited him the first time when I was at another school. And then he had -- him and his family just felt like coming to Miami was the best option, and I'm happy he did.

But with Malik, Ernest and Tre they have set the foundation of what this culture is, what this work should look like. And then for those younger guys like Dante and Shelton, my goal and my plan is for them to carry it on and to hold it up. And that's how you become a really good team and you become a really good program. And it's what Purdue has, to be honest with you. You have Loyer, Smith, Kaufman-Renn. Those guys have been there for three and four years. It's hard to build a program where you're

bringing in so much new.

So just having some turnover, having some continuity within the program, within the team is important for me.

With them being freshmen, Shelton and Dante are two of those guys hopefully next year that can carry that on.

MODERATOR: Jai, thank you very much. Gentlemen, thank you very much. Congratulations on your season.

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