

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - San Diego State vs UConn

Thursday, March 28, 2024

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

**UConn Huskies**

**Dan Hurley**

**Cam Spencer**

**Stephon Castle**

**Tristen Newton**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

UConn 82, San Diego State 52

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you want to give an opening statement.

DAN HURLEY: Obviously thrilled with the performance. Just playing against Brian's teams, it's always an honor to play San Diego State. They've been one of the best college basketball programs in the country for the last several years, the job he's done there. It's incredible. Couldn't have more respect for their players, how they show up.

Obviously we had our best night, and they didn't have one of their best nights. Obviously didn't expect a game like this versus those guys, but ultimate respect to San Diego State. True champions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Dan, you've won nine straight tournament games by an average of 22.8 points. That's nine straight tournament wins by an average of 22.8 points. When you hear that number, is it hard to believe? It's not supposed to be this easy.**

DAN HURLEY: We suck at winning close games, so you have to go with the alternative.

No, I think the group, we have killer instincts. We play



every possession with great desperation. We have NBA-level players that are incredibly well-prepared by Luke Murray and Kimani Young, two of the best coaches in the country, assistant head coaches, two of the best that do it.

Obviously we're very comfortable in tournament play. We're hard to prepare for.

**Q. Cam, I guess I wanted to ask this of you having joined this team this year. How would you describe the hunger level for this team, and how much does it mean to you to see teammates who have already won kind of play with as much hunger as it seems you guys do this year?**

CAM SPENCER: I think everybody is very hungry. Obviously the team had great success last year, but it's a different group. A lot of those returners came back wanting to go do it again and help the new guys experience a national championship.

I think that is just a part of the UConn culture, and I'm happy to be at UConn, and happy to be a part of it.

**Q. Alex drops eight right off the rip in the first four minutes. How much do you think that settled the team in? How much did that settle you in as a coach knowing this was a real wild card game?**

DAN HURLEY: We expected to have a very difficult time offensively versus these guys. They're a top-10 defense. The physicality, just that start by Alex really settled us. Obviously Cam's first half. T-New's second half. Donovan got it going. The balance basically to have the four guys in double figures, two more guys with eight, we have a lot of answers.

**Q. Steph, can you discuss what you saw, what you thought going into the second half, and if you feel like this game maybe represented even a breakthrough to a different level for you?**

STEPHON CASTLE: I just saw that I kind of missed out on a couple of opportunities to kind of grab some offensive rebounds, kind of make some more plays for my



teammates. The second half I just tried to make up for those and just try to do whatever I can to win my matchup and help my teammates.

**Q. Dan, I was wondering if you could speak upon how the defensive -- how the defense really stepped up in the second half, specifically when you look at how LeDee performed in the first versus the second? There's a real stark difference there, and it really seemed to shut down the SDSU offensive attack.**

DAN HURLEY: In the first half we made some -- he made three perimeter shots against Donovan out in space and then two broken-play buckets. Obviously he had 15 at the half. Obviously to hold an All-American caliber player like Jaedon to three points in the second half, I think we just -- Donovan made it hard on him. Samson made it hard on him. Guys who were helping off the right people on the perimeter, just showed them a lot more bodies and played much better one-on-one defense.

We're a top-10 defensive team as well. So again, that's the best way to keep yourself from being vulnerable in this tournament is by guarding at a high level.

**Q. You went to Donovan a little bit in the first half. He was putting up a bunch of shots, not really hitting, but those three guys combined for 51. How were you able to -- what was your focus in this game in terms of back court versus front court and scoring?**

DAN HURLEY: Donovan had some good opportunities with LeDee. The opportunity to get three fouls on him there, it was too tempting not to give him a couple of opportunities there. But that guy, sometimes it's hard for a 7'3" guy to score against a freak athlete who is super strong, who can kind of leverage them a little bit. He had that low leverage.

You look at the three guards and the performances by these guys. 17 and 4, 18 and 3, 16 and 11. Then Hass, I thought Hass was really, really good too.

**Q. This is for any of you guys. It's supposed to be a neutral site game, but a lot of UConn white in that crowd tonight. What does it mean to have that fan support in a game like this?**

STEPHON CASTLE: It means a lot just to be able to travel with our fans. We travel very well. I feel like it gives us kind of a boost, a little bit of an advantage. Our coach said before, we tried to make it like Storrs North. They showed out for us, and it was definitely electric in there tonight.

DAN HURLEY: We had to win a s--- ton of games to get

that.

**Q. When put your walk-ones in, it looked like you looked up into that crowd for a second. Do you allow yourself to take a moment? At that point you've got the game in hand and realize that this is kind of special to have this around you, what is you just accomplished on the court in front of you, and to have the people and the support behind you? Is that a moment that you can kind of pause and keep for later?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, listen, the way the defending champs have fared in recent history, it's kind of been against the odds in terms of the season we're having following up the national championship with an even better season, winning the Big East regular season by multiple games and setting a program record now for wins on the season and winning the Big East Tournament and now getting to an Elite Eight. This team has defied what past champions have done and taken this program to a completely different level.

With about 13 seconds left I allowed myself to enjoy it, as I screamed to get the ball to Andrew's hands so he could dribble out the clock. That's been another superstition. "Get him the ball, please."

Then just to be able to go and hug my wife, Andrea, who she has to put up with me, and she's got to deal with my socks and underwear and everything after this.

**Q. To lose Jordan and Andre but have players like Cam and Stephon step in to help fill those roles, what is the most impressive part of two newcomers, even though they're in different stages of their careers, in filling that gap? Speak to the chemistry as well to those. There were a couple of technical tic-tac-toe passes between them.**

DAN HURLEY: Jordan, Andre, Adama, Joey, Nahiem, all those guys are a big reason why we are where we are right now with this season too, what they built in terms of the championship culture. This is just where our program is at right now. This is where our program is going to be.

I don't think we feel tremendous pressure going into these round of 32 or Sweet 16 games. Obviously we feel pressure because we want Cam and Steph and some of these guys that are maybe on their last run at UConn to experience a Final Four and national championship, but as a program we don't feel a lot of pressure.

I know as a staff we don't because we feel like the position that we're in right now is going to be our level and that we're going to be able to maintain it because we've got the



formula.

**Q. On Steph you have talked about how unselfish he is as a freshman. As a big five-star recruit, what do you see of the progress he's making? Obviously first career double-double tonight, and his defense, and now his rebounding. As he has gotten more experience, what do you think of just the strides?**

DAN HURLEY: He is a pleaser, and he is a humble kid, and he's got the great parents. Then I think what makes it easier for Steph is, again, he's insulated with a great group of older players and a great mix on the roster. His relationship with Tristen has helped him a great deal. Donovan, Alex Karaban, Cam Spencer. He's got veteran players that aren't threatened by him in these mock drafts and all of his abilities and talent. We don't have that petty s--- in our program. We just have a great group of people that support each other. The players have a really special bond.

I'll credit Steph's parents and these guys he gets to play with.

**Q. Dan, maybe a little bit more about that, but what I was asking Cam, that hunger, what do you see in some of the guys who have won? How do you see it manifest that they really are pulling for guys who haven't experienced it to feel it too? How do you know that? How do you see that?**

DAN HURLEY: We just have people that just are desperate to win more. We have winners. We have "we" guys. We have also too talked about legacy. You're talking Tristen Newton right now, you can make a case for the greatest career that any guard has ever had while wearing a uniform at UConn while he's at UConn. What he's accomplished in two years.

Donovan Clingan. These guys right now are leaving a legacy in a place that's hard to leave a legacy. It's been a historical season in a tough place to make history. They're galvanized by that. It's special.

**Q. What level of confidence does that give you going into Saturday to be sitting right next to your coach and hear him saying that about you right now, Tristen?**

TRISTEN NEWTON: It gives me a lot of confidence. This isn't anything I haven't heard from him before. He praises me behind closed doors. My teammates, they give me great confidence. I have the utmost confidence and can't wait for Saturday.

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