

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - UConn vs Duke

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Washington D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

UConn Huskies

Dan Hurley

Alex Karaban

Solo Ball

Silas Demary Jr.

Braylon Mullins

Tarris Reed Jr.

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference



Q. What did your experiences as a teenager being able to spend time around your brothers' Duke teams mean to you? Specifically, were you at the 1990 game in East Rutherford when Laettner beat UConn at the buzzer?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I was there. (Laughing). I was there. Listen, I was in Denver for that UNLV. I was at the Laettner game. I was in Indy for that rematch with UNLV. Then the Kansas game, obviously, when Duke won their first.

I was in Philly when Duke kicked our butt when I was at Seton Hall. In 2004 I was in San Antonio, sat next to my brother for that Duke-UConn game, that classic semifinal game.

Yeah, I've seen a lot of them.

Q. Dan, you were talking yesterday when they called you out on the Blue Blood question, when you look at your own program, what you guys have achieved, not just you, but Coach Calhoun and everyone, if they aren't Blue Bloods, what are you guys then?

DAN HURLEY: Did somebody just mumble something?

THE MODERATOR: Go ahead, Coach.

DAN HURLEY: We're one of the biggest places you could play college basketball. Listen, I think all things being equal, all things being equal -- NIL or -- players would prefer, all things being equal, meaning NIL is in the ballpark, players would still want to go and play in the biggest places for the coaches that are going to help them become better players, give them the best chance to play deep into this tournament, develop their career, have an incredible experience.

So, yeah, I think right now, if you've got the resources and the support, relying on history, brand, tradition to carry you in recruiting, I think that's over.

But all things being equal, if a player has a chance to go play at a Duke or an UConn or a big place where the coaching and the development and the chance to play

THE MODERATOR: Joining us now as we prepare for Elite Eight, Dan Hurley, Alex Karaban, Solo Ball, Silas Demary Jr., Braylon Mullins and Tarris Reed Jr.

DAN HURLEY: Thank you. Obviously excited about the game. Just drilled with these guys last night, grinding it out. Gutting it out. Giving us the opportunity to play in another big UConn-Duke NCAA tournament game for big stakes. Thrilled to get the opportunity here in D.C. to get out here on Sunday.

Q. Alex, do you feel like right now you're playing maybe, individually you're playing the best basketball of your career? A lot of big games, a lot of great games, but I think you're averaging 22 in this tournament, which is higher than almost any three-game average you've had, I think. Just with the clutch shots and everything, do you think you're picking the right time to play the very best of your career?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, I think so. I definitely feel like I'm playing my best. I feel the most confident I've felt my entire career, just riding the hot hand I have right now.

I feel great. I feel coaches are putting me in great positions, teammates are having a lot of trust in me to take the shot. So I'm feeling confident right now.



deep into this tournament, I think they're still going to take that.

Q. Tarris and Alex, Cameron Boozar uses as many pump fakes as anyone I've seen in college basketball. What makes the pump fake so good, especially his? How do you try to toe that line of being aggressive and being physical, but not biting for the pump fakes?

ALEX KARABAN: I think just staying disciplined. He obviously has a great pump fake, just like the rest of their guys. Just staying disciplined, not falling for it, and really just having trust in your technique.

We know that he likes to do it. We've just got to remain true to the scouting report.

TARRIS REED JR.: To piggy-back off Alex, be disciplined, stay long, and make him stay over the length. Make it as difficult as possible for him to score in the post.

Like I said, wall up and make him finish over you.

Q. Dan, following up on the Blue Blood question, Blue Blood, Cinderellas, is it maybe time to retire these monikers?

What do they even really mean at this point in the NIL era?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, Blue Blood, I don't even know. I look at -- yeah, I think you're right. I'm sorry, I only slept for 3 1/2 hours. I'm struggling a little bit.

I just think the playing field has been leveled so much in our sport that, again, if you've got the resources, if you're willing to commit in basketball to have the best coaching staff, to obviously have the healthy NIL, to travel in facilities and to run at a first-class level, whether you're a mid-major like High Point or you're Duke or UConn, you have as good a chance to consistently be in this tournament and be in contention.

So I'm with you.

Q. Sort of along those lines without belaboring that point, one of the most interesting things anybody said yesterday on this topic was Izzo said, I kind of still like the term because it's something you earn over time with consistency. In this era of upheaval, roster, all the change, is this game tomorrow, you and Duke, an example of consistency still winning in this sport? I mean, roster consistency, program consistency, how much does consistency matter?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think it speaks to just the

university, the commitment that Duke makes to basketball, the commitment that UConn makes to the sport, how important it is to both universities, how much of a part of the identity of the universities -- obviously they're both world class institutions, but basketball is critically important.

I think you look at where programs in the last 30 years have had a high level of dominance in this sport, since the '90s UConn and Duke have been the two best college basketball programs on the men's side in the last 30 years. So it's a pretty cool matchup.

Q. Silas, to the extent that you can share it, can you give us an idea of what you go through on game day to be able to get out there with the injury you have? I know it's something that usually doesn't get better unless you rest it, but you don't have the luxury of doing that now. What's your game day prep to get ready to get out there?

SILAS DEMARY JR.: My game day routine kind of just to prepare is wake up, eat some breakfast, and automatically go right to treatment, like Compex, doing a bunch of stuff on the BOSU ball, game ready, massage boots, a mix of all that. Then get here a little early, jumps on the BOSU ball, stretching, taping, and trying to stay warm as long as possible.

Just doing those things throughout the course of the day and using orange bands and doing like little gas pumps just to keep my ankle warm.

Q. Dan, in terms of Caleb Foster with Duke, even Coach Scheyer was kind of surprised with the impact he made last night. Are you guys game planning for him to be 100 percent? And from your standpoint, what kind of impact does he make on Duke when he's fully healthy?

DAN HURLEY: That was -- we're marveling at what Silas is doing, and I know Jon feels the same way. Silas hasn't taken a live rep in practice since the Big East Championship game. I mean, that's how big of a gamer and a warrior that this guy is, and I know Jon feels the same way.

Just to have a guard with his experience, two-way player, excellent defender, great decision-maker, shooting I think over 40 percent from 3, calming influence.

To go with Boozar, to have two guys at that position that you could even play together, just such a lift. Just emotionally, confidence-wise for their team. It's really the same thing for us just having Silas out there for us since that UCLA game, those guys getting him back, huge

confidence builder for the people around him.

Q. For Alex and Solo, with all this talk about Duke, you guys have won two championships in the last three years, but there has been no Duke-UConn games during that time. It's kind of weird that the teams haven't played in 11 or 12 years. What is the significance of UConn playing Duke, and does it mean anything special to you that it is these two big programs that Coach is saying?

ALEX KARABAN: I think it's extremely special. You have two of the biggest brands in college basketball going at it to make it to the Final Four. I think it's super special. I think it's super exciting. I know we're excited as a team. You've seen Duke. You've seen UConn throughout your entire life when you watch college basketball growing up. To be another piece of that story of those two programs going at it, I think it's awesome.

SOLO BALL: I think AK put it best, Duke-UConn is just two storied dynasties competing for the same goal to win the National Championship. Especially being in D.C. at this venue, and all the great coaches that are here too, it's just definitely very significant.

Q. Braylon and Silas, how did the experience of playing in Boston against BYU, at the Garden against Florida, in Illinois, and those big games at the Garden against St. John's help you guys at this point playing in these arenas in these significant games?

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I would probably say just playing in those games early, playing in those venues, just being able to, when teams go on runs, being able to take that punch and just be calm and be poised.

I think in those games we were up and teams made a run, and we were able to take that punch and respond the right way. So I think being able to be in those venues knowing that they played there against Illinois in one of the prior runs, so just knowing that those are venues we're going to be playing at. Especially being here, just being able to respond the right way and being able to do the right thing.

BRAYLON MULLINS: Yeah, I think it just kind of built the adversity that we were able to play with in having those non-con game. Just being able to play those games early in the season kind of helped us throughout the course of the year, and it's kind of built us for these moments playing in front of these crowds.

I think we're all ready for it. We all prepared for it. So I think it's just another game.

TARRIS REED JR.: That's what you come to UConn for, to play in these big games, and I feel like these big arenas help with the nerves. You're playing in front of thousands of people every week, and it can be a lot of pressure for some.

I feel like we've done a good job just taking it on the chin and being able to really fight and go out there and give it our all.

Q. Solo, you played a lot of high school ball in Maryland and Virginia. How meaningful is it to be back in the DMV for the Elite Eight in front of family and friends?

SOLO BALL: It's pretty cool. I peeped the Bullets sweatshirt he had on. It's pretty cool to be back. Shout out, man.

It's definitely an honor being back here and playing in D.C. Really just grateful, but I'm not taking it for more than what it is. I'm just happy to be here and continue to move on.

DAN HURLEY: Seth Davis too.

Q. I'd love to ask a question of the athletes and then Coach, if I can.

THE MODERATOR: Any of the athletes?

Q. Actually for all of them. I want to know, you talked a little bit about Cam Boozer, but I'm wondering from every one of your perspectives, going into a game against a guy who's likely going to be a top 3 pick in the NBA Draft, what is your mindset facing a guy like that?

ALEX KARABAN: Your mindset is he's a really good player. The impact that he has on Duke this season and the impact that he's done nationally, he's a really good player, and you've just got to prepare for him as if we would prepare for any other great player.

Really knowing the challenge that we have ahead as a team and really making sure it's not on one sole player. It's a five-man issue on defense and trying to make everything difficult for him.

SOLO BALL: AK said it to a tee. Playing a talented guy like Boozer, you know he's ultra-talented, but they have so many other talented guys. You've got to be able to focus on the whole team as a whole.

Also, to be able to handle those matchups when that time comes, but I think it's really just focused on that. Really

focused on the whole team. It's not just focused on one individual player.

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I feel like they kind of said it all. He's a really great player. He's done a lot for the team. I feel like he's the key piece to what they have going on. He gets everybody going.

So just being able to not make him, obviously being a top three pick, bigger than what it is. It's just another game we have to play, another guy we have to defend, and follow the game plan and do what we need to do to get the win.

Q. Coach, you've talked in the past about your Catholic faith. I'd like you to expound on that a little bit and talk about how that shapes you as a coach and how it helps you, especially in these big moments.

DAN HURLEY: For me, my faith -- first of all, I'm Catholic school educated all the way up through college, from grammar school at Our Lady of Mercy, to St. Anthony, to Seton Hall. So Catholic school educated.

For me, my faith in tough times gives me the strength to endure the difficulties, the challenges that life presents you, whether they're health or family or professional. Then my faith also when things are going great, it gives me a humility to not celebrate these great successes and to live with humility.

There's a Being, and there's a spirituality that is a lot greater than me, and that's my Lord and Savior.

Q. One of the biggest crowd pops I saw from your side of the sideline or biggest pops from your bench was when Stew hit that 3. Can you talk about what he means to the team? I talked to him in the locker room yesterday. He says he's feeling 100 percent. Do you think he'll have an added role on Sunday?

DAN HURLEY: Listen, I don't think there's anybody in the locker room -- is there anybody you guys don't like in there? Get rid of them. We're running out of time.

No, listen, we've got a great locker room. We don't recruit -- I don't bring anyone into the circle or into the locker room that the player's going to look at me and say, hey, who's this guy? The locker room is filled with great guys, just like J Stew and throughout the roster. He's an easy guy to root for. He's a guy who would have stayed at UConn when it would have been easier for him to leave. He's a real UConn man, and he's a sweetheart of a guy.

He's funny. He's just a great guy. He's an easy guy to root for. Yeah, I think he hadn't taken many live reps. I think he

took maybe one day of live practice reps before he got into yesterday's game. He's definitely more viable for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll let Alex, Solo, Silas, Braylon, and Tarris head out. Coach is with us here.

DAN HURLEY: Sorry about the tablet too, guys. I'm like the child of a bad parent. I just throw the tablet in front of your kid and let him just -- sorry. I'm closing it.

THE MODERATOR: You're making efficient use of your time.

DAN HURLEY: You see these kids. Bad parent, just throw a tablet in front of your kid.

Q. What are you watching?

DAN HURLEY: I'm watching Duke.

THE MODERATOR: Game of Thrones.

DAN HURLEY: I'm watching Duke possessions. Game of Thrones. (Laughing).

Q. Coach, Jon Scheyer has become one of the top coaches in such a short time. Even with the pressure of succeeding Coach K, you know how that pressure is with past predecessors. What do you like about the way he coaches his team and gets these guys going?

DAN HURLEY: Man, that's impressive. I can't imagine at his age as a first-time head coach, just how he's been able to handle not only the responsibility of having the program where it is, but yeah, I mean that.

First-time head coach, Duke is your first job, to be able to roster construct, get your team to play both ends of the court efficiently, I think when you start to study them too, you have this impression of Duke that they're just going to be really talented. Obviously organized, but they play incredibly hard. They're as hard a playing team. What they did with St. John's, being that plus on the backboard yesterday.

The roster construction, his ability to handle everything at that age. If I was at his age, I wouldn't have been able to handle the Duke job. Very impressive. How old is he? Where was I then? I might have been at St. Benedict's. Let's go, Gray Bees.

Q. I was going to ask you about the tablet, but we got there. You joked saying, I got three hours of sleep last night, and I feel like that might be on the high end.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

What is that turnaround like? Not even, take it where you want with the late game, but even if you were playing at 7:00, what the turnaround is like this weekend?

DAN HURLEY: It's fast. Luke, Kimani, and Mike Nardi, they break down Duke. A lot of that prep has been done, so you're adding whatever we saw in last night's game to that. It's like cramming for an exam. It's like really, truly -- like game ended last night, you're not going to be able to go to sleep right away anyway. You can't turn the adrenaline -- plus with how caffeinated I am. You see what I'm drinking at the scorers table.

I'm just so caffeinated. I watched two games because I knew I wouldn't fall asleep until around 4:00, and I was up by 7:30, and then you catch 2 1/2 more games before we get here, and I want to try to catch another half before we get out on the court. So at least I've got five games in on Duke.

There's really not a lot you're going to be able to do on the court. You're going to walk through some things, do some light shooting. I imagine both of us will skip shootaround here tomorrow and do a walk-through at the hotel.

Yeah, I'll try to get to sleep tonight. I'm going to -- I'm banking that I'm going to be able to get to bed around 10:00 tonight, 10:30, and hopefully get a good 8 1/2, 9 hours. Hopefully my Oura Ring gives me something in the high 80s.

No, I supplement, I do. A lot of magnesium L-threonate. I haven't always responded well to melatonin. I get groggy and grumpy. I coach worse when I'm grumpy.

Q. A lot is made about the impact of veteran guards here in March, but how have you kind of seen Braylon grow throughout this tournament run so far, and how have you seen him lean on some of the other veterans for that growth?

DAN HURLEY: I think with Braylon and however we evaluate these talented players, these future NBA high draft picks is strictly what you see from shooting, scoring, and I think what a lot of people miss with Braylon is just how well he's able to hold up for us defensively and how well he's able to hold up for us on the backboard from a physicality standpoint, for an ability to function defensively and offensively in a system and be in the right places.

You don't get far in this tournament unless your freshmen can do that. Like the guy, he's a three-way player. He's out on the glass. He's a critical threat on offense, but he's also like an underrated defensive player with a maturity

about him where, if he goes through stretches of the game where he's not getting shots, not making shots, he keeps playing winning basketball.

Q. You've been in a lot of these short turnaround preps over the last four years. Where does Booser kind of stack up among kind of the challenging 36-hour turnarounds, and what specific challenges does he pose for you?

DAN HURLEY: Booser is a unique challenge, just because of he's a threat pretty much from everywhere. He scores at the 3-point line at a pretty efficient clip. Obviously he's devastating in and around the paint, on the offensive glass. But what makes him unique is how much he plays on-ball and the way they kind of ball screen him.

Probably the only thing we've seen similar to that was Ighodaro at Marquette a little bit. They used use him as a handler, and they would ball screen him as opposed to him being the roller or popper as a big.

But he's such a warrior and such a relentless player. Obviously with him and with Evans and the depth of all of their talent, you've just got to figure out the things you want to take away from him, the things that you're not going to allow him to do in the game. You can't take everything away, so we've got to pick and choose.

Are we going to let him play one-on-one in the post versus Tarris? Will we allow him to play one-on-one in the post versus Karaban, or are we trapping that? Are we going to make him beat us from the 3-point line? Are we going to blitz him or go under those ball screens? We've got to make decisions on a quick turnaround on what we're going to do.

Q. You were asked earlier about Brendan Byrne Arena in 1990.

DAN HURLEY: That's horrors for me, Buddy.

Q. Can you kind of put in perspective, I don't know if "irony" is the right word, but that was really the birth of UConn as a national program, that weekend. You were there for that. You think about what was set in motion that weekend that UConn became what it became, and now you're the man in charge of it.

DAN HURLEY: I was literally in the end zone on the Tate George. I was right behind that pass.

My family has obviously got this special connection with Duke, with Bob and how much that has meant to our family, those moments, my brother's success and the

amazing run he had there.

Now being on the UConn side of it, kind of an arch rival this time of year, some heart-breaking moments on both sides, to find myself, I would not have imagined I'd be on either side of this. Pretty cool to be in an Elite Eight game versus Duke here after having witnessed so much of it.

Q. I read a nice article about you in The Athletic.

DAN HURLEY: Was it nice?

Q. Did you hear about it, the kinder, gentler Dan Hurley? Just some of the lessons you learned from last year when you gripped the reins. What's the thing from last year you've learned about yourself of these guys that has stuck the most this year as you've navigated this one?

DAN HURLEY: Listen, the way you prepare your team, the standard of practice, what's acceptable in terms of the efforts that we make and the level of preparation, the willingness to give everything you have for what the team needs this time of year during the "we" season, not the "me" season. The "me" season is coming. Portal is going to open, and the NIL negotiations will begin.

But the standards of preparation, practice, how demanding I am from that standpoint, that will never change. I think for me the focus with this team that I've never gotten away from, which caused me to coach really poorly last year was -- and I think this is what Geno helped me a lot with was, just get the most out of your team. Like you're not always going to have the best team in the country. You're not always going to have the '24 team, and you can't coach your team mad the whole year.

When you go back-to-back and your ego is so wrapped up in three-peat, dynasty, anything less than a National Championship is unacceptable, just a warped way of thinking. You're not going to win this tournament every year. It's a really hard tournament to advance in, and it's gotten even harder with the way things are set up now with NIL and portal. It's gotten even more difficult to advance in now.

I give myself the grace. I give the team the grace of let's just be the best that we could be with what we put together, have the best season we could possibly have, and enjoy the journey with each team. It's taken a lot of pressure off. I think I've taken pressure off myself, but I think my team is looser and has played looser this year. I'm not as uptight, and I'm not as big a monster, which is better for everyone, except social media.

And the TV camera people who just keep their camera on me nonstop and pull the camera off other coaches and they're in mid-meltdown. I always wonder why they pull the camera off.

Q. Dan, you brought up Duke a couple of times over the last few years, whether it's in recruiting battles or last year in Raleigh with the talk of the home and home. I'm wondering if this one means a little bit more to you because of who the opponent is, or are you too tired to even think about that right now?

DAN HURLEY: I'm definitely tired, but -- well, I think, relative to the scheduling piece, I think the direction of things is we're all, as we're in rev share mindset, trying to play the best nonconference games that we could all play. The benefit to that is obviously the ratings have been great this year for college, and we're all looking to play these games to generate more money now that we're in rev share.

It doesn't have any more meaning who we're playing, whether it was Illinois in '24 or Gonzaga in '23, in these games. It's really I've got a lot of respect and admiration for Duke, for Jon, for the job that he's done now that I've had a chance to kind of see what he's done across his time as the head coach there. It's very, very impressive. The start to his career is pretty remarkable.

Yeah, I'm just -- it's just a pretty cool game, man. Obviously there's a lot at stake, playing in the Final Four. First weekend is awesome. Second weekend is everything gets bigger and better. Then the Final Four is the sh.. you know what.

That's basically what we're both looking at here. Pretty nameless, faceless opponent, but obviously the electricity meter on a Duke-UConn Elite Eight game, that's a big deal.

Q. Dan, I think people would look at Alex and you and think you two are not terribly similar, but yet I know he's got a fire to him. How are you guys alike, and how has he grown into that over the years when he's been under your care, if you will?

DAN HURLEY: I think we're both pretty -- Alex is pretty introverted, except when basketball starts, and then he becomes an extrovert. There's a metamorphosis with this guy. He starts out nerdy. You look at the first media pictures, like Ichabod Crane headless horseman look about him, and now he's all swaggered out.

How he's similar, when we're driving our car, we're thinking about basketball. When we're in the shower, we're thinking about basketball. When we're sleeping and we wake up,

we're thinking about basketball -- and my wife Andrea and my boys Andrew and Danny -- and then I quickly start thinking about basketball. We just obsess over the game, we obsess over our love of the game, of the team. We just obsess, and we share that obsession.

Q. About Alex, to follow up, do you ever worry about putting too much of the leadership on him? He's good at it, but as he said, it's not something that comes natural to him.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just think it's the responsibility of his greatness, it's the responsibility of being a senior and a two-time champion and one of the biggest winners in the history of this tournament.

And it's part of his development just as a man. As somebody that's going to enter the NBA, a huge business, trying to earn a roster spot, trying to earn a rotation spot on a team with grown men that are fighting tooth and nail to keep their roster spot or keep their rotation spot, like he's entering that world.

Then eventually he's heading into husband, fatherhood, head of a family, where he's going to have to carry himself like a leader for the rest of his life.

Q. Recruiting-wise, can you kind of give a big picture look? Is there a difference between how Duke and UConn recruit? This team lost Cooper Flagg. Then they bring in Cam Boozer. A lot of people think they don't even really recruit, they just pick the best players that they want. After the Cooper Flagg thing, you said UConn should be able to compete, will compete with any team in the country for players. Are they sort of on their own level in recruiting, or do you feel that UConn is right there? How would you explain that difference?

DAN HURLEY: Listen, there's no denying the power of the Duke brand, and they've earned it. They've been with what Coach K did building the program, and my brother was obviously a part of that. These guys were -- I mean, they were the Beatles, man, in the early '90s. What that meant to the growth of basketball and what Coach K has meant to the growth of college basketball, and the stars that have played there, the championships, they've earned their position in college basketball.

Jon has shown that he's going to keep it at that level, but UConn has also earned its position in the sport with our championship level success, our success with putting players in the NBA, having one of the great fan bases, just like the Duke fan base.

Yeah, we feel like we could recruit up against any program in the country. It's always challenging to recruit against Duke because they've got -- there's a lot behind that brand, but they go for the players that fit them, and we've been very successful looking for our type of player as well.

Q. Tarris has had some monster games in the last month. I think in the last seven games he's averaging a double-double. What do you attribute this explosion recently too?

DAN HURLEY: I think with Tarris or any player, I think just at some point you hope that the light switch comes on in time. Maybe it's the life or death urgency to this time of year, which has created that urgency, that focus, that concentration, that locking into the identity, the motor, where like it's now or never.

Maybe it was the pain of the Big East Championship game. A lot of times in life, it takes pain and suffering to make changes. Maybe some of those brutal film sessions, not winning the Big East tournament, has galvanized him to no longer play below what he's capable of.

When he plays at the level that he's capable of playing at, we can beat any team in the country, and he's as good as any center in the country.

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