

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Alabama vs UConn

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

State Farm Stadium

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Dan Hurley**

**Donovan Clingan**

**Stephon Castle**

**Alex Karaban**

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

UConn 86, Alabama 72

THE MODERATOR: At this time we welcome UConn. We'll ask Coach to open things up with a statement.

Coach.

DAN HURLEY: I mean, much respect obviously to Nate and Alabama and their season, just where they have been since he's gotten there. They're top of sport in terms of quality of their program. We were able finally just to defend well enough in the second half, get to the three-point line, defense under control there. Obviously executed late. Were able to kind of get that separation.

They were really, really hard to guard. I was thrilled with the way we defended, the way we closed the game out.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Donovan, how does it feel to be one win away from history? The wrap on your hand, can you explain that?**

DONOVAN CLINGAN: The first part, I mean, yeah, everyone came to UConn to try to be a part of history. We're one step closer to our goal. But none of us in this locker room are satisfied. We know we have a lot of work to do, a big matchup on Monday.

My hand, I just bruised it the other day. I'm good.



**Q. Stephon, tied your career high. Were you a little frustrated sitting out the last five minutes with foul trouble? Were you kind of aware you were feeling it from the get-go or if it came naturally?**

STEPHON CASTLE: I mean, yes and no. Clearly I didn't want to sit out. I mean, I believe in the depth of our team. I wasn't worried at all for me sitting out.

I mean, yeah, I had it going. My teammates, they put me in great positions to be successful. I saw a couple shots fall in early. I mean, I just had it going.

**Q. Donovan, what do you think about facing Edey? Are you excited, looking forward to playing against a guy like that?**

DONOVAN CLINGAN: Yeah, I'm real excited. You play at this level to play big-time matchups, big-time games. I have a lot of respect for Zach Edey. He's a great player.

Me and my team are going to get ready to battle and give everything we got on Monday.

**Q. Alex, when the team is hitting threes like they were in the first half, what type of feel sets in on your side? Do you get frustrated that you can't pull away? How are you approaching that?**

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, we weren't surprised by it at all. We just had to stay together, tighten up on the defensive end. We thought they were making threes because we were gifting them open threes.

We thought in the second half we had to do a better job of disrupting, making sure they don't get open threes off. I think we did a great job in the second half.

**Q. Stephon, those who know you know that you very rarely get emotional on the court. After that alley-oop dunk, you were pretty animated. What was it that brought that out of you?**

STEPHON CASTLE: I just sensed that we had started to spark a run. I was just trying to get my teammates just to

have a little energy on the court.

I mean, it was a good dunk. It was a great pass by T-New, so I kind of got fired up for it.

**Q. Alex, it's now 11 straight tournament games you won by double figures. You're making this look easy. Why do you think you guys have had such consistent domination in this tournament the last two years, pick up where you left off last year?**

ALEX KARABAN: I think we just stayed true to our identity. The coach preach every day. If we focus on the defense and the rebounding, everything else can go our way.

It really starts on the defensive end with us, get out in transition. Offensively we're so unselfish. We'll pass up good shots for great shots. We have so much trust in one another.

Coach Hurley, never let the returners be complacent with what happened last year. The new guys are hungry for what we did last year, to have that feeling. There's no let off.

**Q. You guys have seen what Steph can do in practice. To see him be this assertive and dominant in a game like this, were you surprised?**

ALEX KARABAN: No, I'm not surprised at all. We see it in practice every day. We always want to be aggressive, the opportunity. He had the opportunity at the beginning of the game to be aggressive, and he took advantage of it.

We know how talented of a player he is on the both ends of the floor. I mean, it's not a surprise at all.

DONOVAN CLINGAN: Yeah, like Alex said, not surprising at all. He's not like any other freshman. He's out there to do whatever his team needs for him to do to win. He's one of the best on-ball defenders that you'll see. He puts a lot of work in. He's the most unselfish player on this team.

**Q. Steph, did you notice them kind of playing off you a little?**

STEPHON CASTLE: Yeah, I noticed it like the first play of the game when we were trying to run a set and the guy was guarding me in the paint. I tried to take advantage of it early.

**Q. Did that motivate you at all, them not respecting your jump shot, daring you to score?**

STEPHON CASTLE: I wouldn't say it was motivation. I would just say it was kind of a disrespect on their end just to guard that far back. I took advantage of it early. I saw the ball go in early. I thought it started a great night for me.

THE MODERATOR: We'll thank the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Hurley.

**Q. There's coaches who come up after they lose, and they're like, They were just better, nothing we could do about it. Have you had a moment tonight, during the tournament, the last two years, where you ever looked at another team that was out there, I don't have an answer?**

DAN HURLEY: Well, I mean, at different points, different points of the game, they were 8-11 for three in the first half, which we wanted to keep their three-point attempts to under 22 for the game. The problem was we were on target for the attempts, but they made eight.

I think the feeling just with the group is it's body blows, it's body blows, it's continue to guard, continue to rebound, execute our offense. Eventually there will be a breaking point opportunity that will present itself, especially in this tournament. For us, we have just played so well.

**Q. What did you tell your team at the end of the half? What was the message? Were you feeling good and confident after the end of the first half?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean, they're a great offensive team. I mean, they're like the hardest team to guard. Illinois had a great offense. These guys were harder for us to guard just 'cause of their one-on-one abilities. They just had so many players that could beat you off the dribble, make a three. Nelson, you see his talent level. He's an NBA player. Modern, mismatch, position-less guy. Pringle. That's a very talented team.

We felt like if we just kind of stayed into 'em, just kept doing what we do, it sounds like coach talk. Our identity is to be pretty relentless. We might not break you for 18 minutes, 25 minutes, but at some point if what we're doing at both ends and on the backboard is at a high level, it just becomes hard for the other team to sustain it.

**Q. All week 'Bama fans said we have to shoot so many threes. Were you surprised by the game plan with Nate?**

DAN HURLEY: To shoot a lot of threes?

**Q. (No microphone.)**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, they wanted to shoot 'em. I thought we went over everything and chased them off the line, tried to funnel them into the midrange, even though it's hard to do because they're such great coaches, Nate is such a great coach, their system of offense, it's the hardest to guard that we faced this year 'cause it's got elements of Xavier's transition game, which is incredible, Marquette's ball screen game, which is something else, and then Creighton's three-point shooting all converged into one game here for us.

We knew it was going to be tough.

**Q. I think when Tristen hit the three to make it a 13-point game, you turned and looked into the crowd and did...**

DAN HURLEY: I used to do this, but Carmelo retired (smiling).

**Q. Is that when you finally exhaled and felt safe?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, 'cause you don't feel safe with that offense out there. Plus you've seen enough games as a coach to see people find a way to lose a double-figure lead with a minute or so to go.

When you turn the ball over as infrequently as way do. I know sometimes we get some crap for the batting gloves, the dribbling warm-up that we do, that's kind of high school-ish in a way, very fundamental.

If you look at the way we take care of the ball, it's rare. It's rare.

**Q. Donovan earlier said Stephon Castle is not like any other freshman, he's the most unselfish player on the team. Can you speak to that and also when you knew you were getting that?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, so you knew right away in the recruiting process because of how quickly and decisively he made a decision based on, like, the things that really matter: the culture, the connection with the staff, all the things that we do at UConn. Obviously he's seen some guards have great success with us over the years, so...

You just knew when you recruited him. When you got to the first practice, whether you ripped him or encouraged him, everything was, Yes, Coach. He's such a pleaser. His value at the next level, obviously you see it on game night. A lot of NBA teams, they come through and watch us practice, where he even has the ball in his hands more, where he gets to show all the things he can do that you don't always see on game night.

**Q. You averaged almost one 10-0 scoring run per game this season, and tonight you have four separate 7-0 runs. What is it about your team that allows you to take control of games so quickly like that?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we flirted the whole year with 50% from the field. I think from an efficiency standpoint, we've been the number one offense in the country. We've kind of passed that back and forth with Purdue and Illinois and Alabama throughout the year.

The offense is super efficient. We're top four in defense. We rebound the heck out of the ball. We can bunch up stops and then we score a lot. You get stops, you score...

I think we got a lot of confidence. There's a factor with teams now that they've seen us play, where we get on a run, I think it's disheartening for the other team because they've seen it, they've seen us do it a lot.

**Q. As your second straight national championship, I'm wondering what similarities and differences you see between this year's team and last year's team?**

DAN HURLEY: Just the same relentless, relentless effort. Just a meticulous approach to performance and winning, game planning with Luke and Kimani, two of the best in the country at what they do in every facet.

Like Jordan is a different player than Cam, Steph is a different player than Andre Jackson. The bench is a little bit different. The culture, the preparation, the commitment to every aspect of the game so that we keep ourselves as bulletproof as possible in this tournament, which we make a hard tournament look easy. It's crazy.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Coach.

DAN HURLEY: Thank you.

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