

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

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

State Farm Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Nate Oats Mark Sears Grant Nelson

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

UConn 86, Alabama 72

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Alabama. Coach Oats, we'll ask you to begin with an opening statement.

NATE OATS: First, just want to thank our guys for getting this school to a Final Four for the first time in school history. We had an unbelievable run. Guys kind of got us over the hump to get there. So can't say enough about the leadership of these guys, particularly in the last few weeks.

Unfortunate that it ended tonight, but we played arguably the best team in the country. I mean, UConn is top five in offense and defense. It showed tonight. I thought our guys did a good job staying in there, not giving up big runs. After we tied it there in the second half, I think they went on an 8-0 run after that, I if remember that, it was pretty quick.

They're good. Like Danny says, they're close to being bulletproof. When you're that great on both sides of the ball, you out-rebound teams, the official box score had us down for zero fast break points. The first time all year that that's happened to us. We're used to getting out in transition. This game ended up being 64 possessions, which is a lot slower than we like. We kind of know they play a lot slower.

They got out in transition on us a little bit. They hit a three in transition. They got that dunk early in the second half. We let it get away from us a little bit.

UConn is great. It's going to be a great matchup Monday



night. Our guys were really good from this stretch in the NCAA tournament. We just came up a little short tonight, but we came up short against a great team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Mark, at halftime I think you were eight of 11 for three. You were out-shooting them. Hanging tough on the glass, still losing. Is that disheartening?

MARK SEARS: Yeah, they're a really great team. We had turned the ball over, and they made us pay for it. We turned the ball over, they really capitalized off of it.

Q. What kind of specific things on the court did you guys see from UConn's defense that slowed down your high-powered offense?

GRANT NELSON: Yeah, I mean, they're solid all around. They have a really good rim protector. I feel like we didn't really attack the rim with the physicality and the patience we should have. I mean, yeah, they're just a great team all around on the defensive end.

It's tough to get things going. Just give them a lot of credit.

MARK SEARS: Yeah, to go with what he say, they're a great team overall. They did a great job of being physical with us on our drives. They have a great rim protector in the paint.

Q. You are the leaders on the team. What was the message after the loss? You got to the Final Four for the first time in program history.

GRANT NELSON: Yeah, I mean, great group. I mean, I feel like we all loved each other. It was tough seeing guys like Aaron Estrada play their last basketball game. We just told each other we made history. Didn't end the way we wanted it to. We can't hang our heads on this season. We have to use this game as motivation going into the next year.

Q. Grant, you had a chance to play against Zach Edey early in the season. Donovan Clingan tonight. Can

you give us your insight on the differences between the two and how they'll match up?

GRANT NELSON: Yeah, I think they match up pretty well. They both draw a lot of fouls. They're tough to play against as a team really. I mean, I think it will be a good matchup. Tough guarding both of them. If you put them up against each other, it's really just who is more physical, who can foul less.

Q. (No microphone.)

GRANT NELSON: I don't know. Probably equal.

Q. Mark, what was the difference behind the arc in the second half?

MARK SEARS: I say they did a better job of running us off the three-point line. Even when we would try to create separation, they were right there to run us off the line. I'd say they did a great job of doing that.

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Oats.

Q. I'm talking to your athletic director, the fans, it seems like this is the beginning of something special, not a one-time thing for Alabama. What is the message to the fans after this run?

NATE OATS: I want to thank 'em. They've really supported us since we've gotten here. They've gotten behind this when I took the job. A lot of people said it was a football school. There's a large contingent of basketball fans. No reason you can't be both.

Florida -- we'll see if UConn wins it on Monday, if they go ahead and win it on the Monday, first team since Florida to win it back to backs. Florida is a pretty good football school. They became a pretty good basketball school. I think we proved you can be good at both.

They're good at a lot of sports at Alabama. I mean, they've been great to us since we've been here. I'm glad that I was a small part of bringing the Alabama fan base some joy through the basketball team and making the Final Four.

But while it was great and I want to thank them and thank our players for getting us here, we're not finished. We'd like to get back here and win this whole thing. I think that's what our goal's going to be. We're going to aim to get back here, aim to get back here and win the final game.

We just got to keep knocking at the door, ask for them to

continue to support us like the way they've been, and we'll continue to put a winning product on the floor for them.

Q. I know you're close with the Hurleys. What does it say about this family that Bob Sr. could have two sons each with back-to-back national championships, one as a player, one as a coach? Talk about the family legacy.

NATE OATS: Yeah, it's pretty crazy when you say it like that. I didn't even think about that. But, yeah, obviously Bobby is arguably the best point guard to ever play college basketball. Unbelievable leader. He led his team to back-to-back national championships. I learned a lot from him. Two years being an assistant... Competitive, fiery. His IQ as a point guard, the way he sees things.

If Danny can go do it as a coach -- they obviously run a lot of basketball in that family. I was able to learn just a little bit of it from Bobby when I was with him for two years. I still talk to Danny and watch his teams frequently, watch Bobby's teams frequently.

Yeah, I mean, we've played both UConn and Purdue. Both really good. They both pose problems, but would be incredible if the same family had back-to-back championships a few years apart.

Q. Dan mentioned this UConn team typically plays slower. You did as well. With the five starters they have, all potential NBA players, how difficult of a matchup is it to have five guys who could be drafted this year in the NBA? How did that change how you had to scheme being high-paced?

NATE OATS: We wanted the pace higher. Shoot, they kind of won out. 64 possessions is not ideal for us. They turn to speed them up, though. They don't turn the ball over. They're tough. They're physical. Their sets take a long time to run. When you give up 12-0 boards, all of a sudden they take 20, 25 seconds off the clock, shoot, get a rebound, take another 15 seconds off the clock.

We had to do a lot better job on a lot of things. But they imposed their will on a lot of teams. In some regards, they imposed their will on us tonight, especially with the pace of play. Kept getting our guys to push a little bit faster. Seemed like there was always bodies in front of us. They did a great job in transition.

The only breakaway transition bucket was the one dunk they had. I don't know that this official box score is exactly right, we'll have to look at ours, because we did have some fast break points, the three in transition that Mark had, Grant Nelson got the dunk. To me that's a transition

bucket.

So we got a few transition opportunities, but not nearly like we've been used to, and not what we needed to beat a team like this. Obviously they do a great job keeping teams out of transition.

Q. Coach, was there a tactic that you wanted more threes during this game, or were you happy with the way you played with that?

NATE OATS: We knew they were going to try to run us off, be physical. Pringle does a great job getting shooters freed up. We don't really put him down in the paint, where Clingan can hang out in the paint. Clingan ended up with four blocks. We were trying to have Nick set more screens. Grant hit the one three. Would have been nicer if we could have got him a few more pick and pop threes, pulling clean out of the lane.

Yeah, 23 is not ideal. We'd rather be pushing more like mid 30s on threes. But they were obviously going to try to take us off the line. When they took us off the line, we drove it in. They did a better job forcing us to take more non-rim twos than we probably have all year. We took 58 field goal attempts, two-point range, that weren't at the rim. We were 5 of 17 on those. That's not ideal. Almost a third of our shots ended up being non-rim twos. That's not how we typically play.

They're a great defensive team. He's a smart coach. They know the numbers like we do. That's what they want teams to take. They forced us to take way too many of 'em.

Q. Have you talked to Grant at all? Do you have any sense of what his future holds, whether his NBA Draft stock has risen during the tournament is impacting that?

NATE OATS: I'm sure his draft stock has risen in the tournament, particularly how he played against was it Carolina where he had 24-12-5. He's one of the four players in the history of the tournament to do that against a single-digit seed. I think it was him, Shaq, Tim Duncan and Channing Frye.

This one, 19 and 15, his stock has risen. We're going to have to sit down and evaluate how much it's risen, will he get drafted, where will he get drafted.

I'd love to have him back, I know that. I always said you do what's right by the player, by the person. If he's got a great situation, makes most sense for him not to come back, I'm all for it.

Noah Clowney, nobody thought he'd be gone after one year, and ends up going 21st from the draft last year. If Grant's stock rose enough to where it makes sense he leaves, I'll be the happiest guy in the world for him. If he needs another year of college, I'll welcome him back with open arms. I'd love to welcome him back for another year. We'll have to figure that out in the next month or two, however long it takes to figure that out.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Oats.

NATE OATS: Thank you. Appreciate you guys. Thank you guys from Alabama.

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