

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

Sunday, April 5, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

UConn Huskies

Coach Dan Hurley

Solo Ball

Alex Karaban

Silas Demary, Jr.

Braylon Mullins

Tarris Reed, Jr.

Finals Pregame Media Conference

DAN HURLEY: Just obviously the quick turnaround, once I got out of mass this morning, now it's preparing for Michigan. Obviously impressive, imposing team. Obviously a dominant team. Just excited to be able to have a chance to play for a championship on Monday.

Health-wise we'll see how Silas come out of that with last night, and then Solo, you'll see him. He's in a boot, took some type of a foot sprain, so won't participate in anything today and see how he's feeling tomorrow.

You'll see the boot. Anyway, so I might as well tell you.

Q. Last night you said that somebody has to figure out why you're always losing in the Big East. How has the Big East play prepared you and the team for this run that you're on?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean, when you get beyond what the metrics say, because so much of that is determined by how well you play in the non-conference schedule, and I don't think across the board we probably as a league haven't performed that great in the non-conference schedule which has really hurt the NET and some of the different metrics.

But it's a grueling league; it's round-robin; everyone knows you real well. The games are officiated in a way where



physicality -- we get mauled pretty good in Big East play.

It prepares you for the NCAA Tournament. The games are so brutal. The environment you play in, again, the physicality, the level of coaches, you've got some of the best coaches in the country in that league.

You go through a lot, and when you go through a lot, that prepares you.

Q. You had a serious one and a lesser one. The serious one is just kind of we see how your roster is constructed, but I was wondering about your philosophy about using the transfer portal. Then the other one, just kind of the status of your sports coat/suit and how many straight you've worn that or whatever.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we would love to be a program that the majority is home-grown boys, high school players you recruit out of high school or multiyear transfers. Obviously you've got situations where there's a Cam Spencer where you've got this huge need in the program that Jordan Hawkins leaves as a sophomore, goes lottery, wins a National Championship, now boom, you've got to really fill a role that you don't have a player that you've recruited and developed, ready to step into.

I think for us, it's always we want to have a lot of continuity. Our culture is unique. It's specific. Takes a certain type of player to play for me. It takes a certain type of player to play at UConn. I think when those relationships are forged through a recruiting period as a high school player, they really buy in and believe in your program.

We want to supplement hopefully our roster with some strategic portal moves like we were able to do. We needed help at point guard. Silas Dembry, Malachi Smith.

The suit is in bad shape. I'm not going to lie to you, guys. The pants are fine. It's the jacket that is really -- the lining is a problem. There's like three holes. When I stick my arm in the right, there's like three different places, and if you can see it, it's like the lining is coming through.

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

It's actually going past the dress shirt. I'd say my biggest problem is the lining in the jacket is a complete mess. I'm going to have to get a tailor in the off-season.

Q. Kind of related to how you answered my question yesterday, you guys are not favored and are quite a serious underdog in this game. How will you use that to fuel your team?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, in this game not at all because when you get down to winner take all at this point, it's just something that doesn't even probably register. It's just like, preparation, game plan, make sure the guy you're getting is healthy and all the recovery and just really you don't have to be the best team. You don't have to have the best season to win this tournament.

These are all one game, Game 7, single game elimination. There's been plenty of times in the history of this tournament where the best team hasn't won it. You've just got to be better for one night, and obviously for us, we need to play the game a certain type of way where we obviously can't get into a certain type of game with Michigan. They're an incredibly dominant team, incredibly well-coached, talent up and down the roster, physically imposing, all those things.

The good thing for us, it's not a seven-game series. Just got to play one game on Monday night.

Q. You've said all year that you needed Tarris for you guys to be at your absolute best. What's your relationship like with him and what's enabling him to play his absolute best?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, my relationship with him, it's improving. It's really improved since he's been on a tear. Now we're best friends. (Laughing).

But I've been saying that, go back six weeks, go back two months, go back three months, our season is going to be determined by what Tarris Reed does, which Tarris Reed we get, does the light switch go on for Tarris Reed. I've been saying it for months and months and months.

Q. For Luke and then obviously for Justin Joyner on Michigan's staff, they want to get to this point, but how challenging is that for them to juggle those two responsibilities?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I saw Justin, too, and I congratulated him, and he's a sharp guy with incredible pedigree.

When you get a little bit -- when you want a healthy distraction from preparing for machines like Michigan or the Illinois game, I get a chance to go over to Luke and start asking him how it's going putting his staff together, and some of the conversations he's having with our players. They are balancing that work. Obviously it helps Luke now that he had the Arizona, and if they won.

But it's a lot. But when you get sick, obsessed people like Luke Murray on your staff, he's able to balance it because all he ever thinks about is basketball.

Q. A lot of adjectives have been used to describe how Michigan has looked. You've said dominant, scary seems to be a popular one the last five games. In scouting them, what aspects specifically do you find most worrisome?

DAN HURLEY: The size, obviously, jumps out at you. In my mind, I think when they go and get Johnson and Mara, you're wondering how it's all going to work.

Then just playing that bigger -- just how big they are at the 3, 4 and 5, like, is there going to be enough spacing on the court offensively for such a huge, athletic group. They've just been dominant, just scary with the size, scary with the rebounding that they've got just a great scheme.

Obviously they've got one of the best coaches in the game in Dusty and they've got the orchestrator with Cadeau who's shown his worth, obviously, at that position, orchestrating everything.

Then just the wing shooting. Like the wing shooting, the two-way players on the wings that make plays. It was a beautifully constructed roster that dominates the glass, dominates it defensively. They just put so much pressure on your paint at both ends of the court.

Q. You kind of alluded to it already, but people felt like yesterday whoever won Michigan-Arizona was going to be the national champion. Why do you feel like this team cannot get rattled from the fact that you watched Michigan play yesterday just completely lights out and knowing you go into the game tomorrow with a shot at beating this team that's looked so dominant this entire tournament?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, you go through your process of preparation at this point. Every team has some vulnerabilities. No teams are perfect. Again, it's not a -- we're not playing a best of eleven or best of seven. Both teams have a short turnaround. We're basically going to get probably two times on the court to walk through some things, a bunch of video sessions to try to prepare to take

away the strengths of each team, and it's going to come down to who plays better on Monday night.

Underdog, I don't know that we necessarily feel like a huge, huge underdog. Obviously we acknowledge Michigan's greatness and the team that they are, but we're a 34-win team coming into the game tomorrow night.

Q. Maybe this is an extra chapter in the next book to come --

DAN HURLEY: Never stop. Life, leadership and the -- I forgot the last part.

Q. You're 40 minutes away now from winning three National Championships in four years. If a young coach came to you and said, how do you explain sustaining success in today's day and age of basketball, what's your answer?

DAN HURLEY: Oh, man. Develop an identity, trust your identity, be as relentless as you possibly can. Then recruit, coach hard. Most great players, they want to be coached hard. I think it's a cop-out in today's day and age to say that players don't want to be coached hard. Great players want to be coached hard. Great teams want to be coached hard.

But I appreciate the book plug. Thank you.

Q. How do you balance the concept of playing your game the way you want to play it but also taking away what maybe the other opponent does well? How do you try to balance those two objectives when you game plan, especially in the NCAA Tournament?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, you know, listen, you've got to have a plan A, a plan B and a plan C, whether it's ball screen coverage or you're trapping the post or how are you going to treat Cadeau in the ball screen game or what are you going to do when they start posting up those Monstars, like are you playing 1s down there. You've got to make those types of decisions.

I just think a lot of this tournament does come down to just how teams match up. Are they a good matchup for you? Obviously they're got a huge size advantage on us defensively and on the backboard that's going to be a huge challenge for us.

Then we've got to make them work defensively. Whether they switch screens or don't switch screens or top block screens or play in the drop or hedge ball screens, no matter what your opponent does, for us, we're going to do things to make our opponents move defensively maybe

more than they are accustomed to, and then hopefully that has a compounding effect for us during the course of the game where it could just wear an opponent down a little bit, just having to run around and chase people and off-ball movement more than they're accustomed to.

Q. We've already heard the terms "dominant" and "scary," but you know something about dominant and scary teams. What's the mindset difference for a team like that preparing for Monday versus you guys? Is there a difference right now?

DAN HURLEY: Well, I don't know. '24, you know you have the best team. There is a certain level of pressure that comes with -- it's like when you get to the Final Four and you know you have the best team, that was a different level of pressure than in '23 where we weren't really sure. It was our first time. We weren't sure we were the best team in '23, we were just trying to win the next game.

But in '24, yeah, it was different. It was different. Now, facing that Purdue team, Purdue's team that year was a pretty excellent team, too, with Zach Edey and Braden Smith, one of the best point guards of all time, Kaufman-Renn.

That was a loaded, loaded Purdue team that we built. We certainly that was a pressure that I felt, when you get to the Final Four and you know you've got the best team. Yeah, there's some pressure to that.

But there's also some pressure even if you're, whatever the underdog we are because we're one game away from having a National Championship with this team. Both coaches, both teams definitely feel the pressure going into Monday.

Q. Solo Ball's injury, what more can you tell us about how it happened, and how do you feel like with him and Silas both having lower leg injuries, how does that affect the way you have to manage the game?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, Solo just sprained a foot early in the game, so he was able to finish the game. He won't participate today. I think we'll see whether this turns into -- it's going to be tough to get an MRI on Easter, on a Sunday. I don't know what the hospitals are like in Indiana. Hospitals stay open. Even on Easter, huh? Okay.

Q. You guys have been really successful with your charge circle post seal plays. Arizona had some trouble scoring down there against Michigan's size and length. Is that something you guys still go to, or do you try to find advantages somewhere else?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just think for us, depending on how Silas comes out of yesterday's game, I just think for us, how we try to go at the opponent is as diverse as possible. Throwing it to our center, whether it's off the block or top down or in the roll game or off of off-ball screening when they can put two on ball, the center is a focal point of what we're trying to do offensively, and we try to get them the ball in a variety of places.

It's easier to avoid the post traps when you go top down because you can duck in deep. Obviously against somebody like Mara, or Johnson offensively, your pre-catch post position is critical. You've got to fight for every inch if you're Tarris or Eric because you're not going to be able to catch it off the block and score off those guys. You've got to catch it deep.

Offensively for us, again, the center, we probably throw it in the post to our center more than anyone in the country, or at least as much, and it's just a huge part of our offensive philosophy because everyone is trying to get threes, rim twos and free throws, and posting your big deep in the post is a great way to get rim twos.

Q. Coach, you and Dusty May were back in the Final Four in 2023. He was at FAU then, coached your guy Jalen Gaffney. What's impressed you about what Dusty has done since then and how much he's grown to have this juggernaut team in Michigan?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, just take what Dusty did then, Florida Atlantic to the Final Four? If you look at that roster, his talent evaluation, his roster construction, his culture, both ends of the court, plus the rebounding, just there's no real holes in any of it.

You look, too, I think the staff he puts around him, he's got an excellent staff. This is a coach who's very confident, very secure in what he does in every way.

You're looking at -- I didn't realize how old he was. He's 49 years old? He looks really young. I thought he was younger than that. 49, I was surprised at that. I thought he would be more in his early 40s. I thought he might have been like 40 or 41. His hair, and he looks great.

But he's one of the best coaches. He'll be one of the best coaches for -- hopefully this is the first of many meetings in these big spots between me and Dusty. He's excellent.

Q. Alex started off the tournament really hot from three but since has cooled down --

DAN HURLEY: So he's due.

Q. Sure. What's it going to take for him to get back on track on another National Championship stage?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean, listen, we're going to have to make shots. These guys, the way they -- the size and the paint and obviously we're going to -- we can't abandon what we do. We've got to do what we do.

It's been kind of the story of the season. It's been bricks away at times. We've been laying bricks at different times, but we've made enough shots to get here. When we went back and watched our shot attempts last night, we had great, great shots.

I mean, the fact that we shot 30 whatever percent from the field yesterday speaks to the struggle at times that it's been just to be able to make good shots and then the transition finishes and different things.

We're not going to get away with that on Monday night. We've got to have a really good night shooting the ball on Monday.

Q. I saw your moment with the Fab Five after the game last night. I'm curious what your relationship is with those guys, and have you talked with Juwan specifically about Tarris or anything?

DAN HURLEY: I mean, we camp together. The old Nike camp, the old Nike camp when it was just the top 100, top 120 players in the country. Nike camp with those guys, the old Dapper Dan Classic in Pittsburgh with those guys. Go way back to high school with them.

Got a chance to -- the thing when you're a player, it was still a thrill. I hadn't seen a number of them in person in a number of years, except Juwan. But seeing Jimmy King and Jalen and C Webb and then -- yeah, that was a pretty cool moment.

At first it's like, Fab Five, as they were walking by me. That was pretty cool. Then Juwan, we made eye contact, and about Harris, he's like, I'm happy for him.

Q. Dan, to the earlier questions about being successful in this era, I'm curious, when you bring recruits on campus in this day and age, are you even showing them academic buildings, facilities? Do parents care? Or is it about what's the number going to be that you're going to pay me and how soon can you get me to the NBA?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, so we definitely have the academic component. That's still definitely something that the families are still interested in, or at least the players that we

want to recruit, the value of your college education. Just the overall structure and discipline of our plan and our culture and organization is, like, you're going to have a very full day when you get to UConn.

You're going to go to every single class. If you don't, if you miss a class, you're not playing in the next game. You're going to be in study hall. You're going to value your education, whether you like it or not.

Obviously the process has changed. You do get to a weird point of a visit where now the agent gets involved, and there's -- let me enjoy this until a couple days from now because I know that that is coming and it's going to be brutal.

And it's going to start right away.

Q. Do you kind of marvel at the year Michigan has had when arguably their four best players are new players, and it's basically a new team? You guys are obviously built very differently.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just don't think that there's any more year one, year -- you want to do more? I'm going to forget the beginning of it.

Q. Do you marvel at how good of a year they've had when you consider how new their team is?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just think college is so volatile now. You're competing -- most programs have this type of a turnover. I don't know that you could compare anyone's first year or two or first four years or whatever to what people experienced five, six, eight, ten years ago when you had to build a program. I think now things are year to year for everyone.

I think the years of coaches getting six- or seven-year contracts, I think that there's an expectation that in year one or two, you're going to start winning big because of your ability to do so with the portal and NIL.

Now, what makes Dusty May special as a coach is obviously his eye for talent, his ability to construct a roster, the fact that he insulates himself with an excellent coaching staff, and his ability to build team and culture. Like he's got a special eye for how to put together a great team.

Things are volatile. It's year to year. You've got to have the skill set to do it on a year to year basis because things are volatile.

Q. Coach, in the past you've cited Roosevelt's Man in the Arena passage, and this year you challenged the

team with more of a Viktor Frankl philosophy to find a deeper human meaning within the struggle. Can you reflect on the sacrifices and the struggle this team has made to get back to this point and how tomorrow's title game serves as the ultimate arena for you and your team?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, when you play or coach at UConn, you don't get the benefit of coming in under the radar. You don't get to sneak up on anybody. You've got to be able to handle all the external noise, the expectations, the standards, the history, the tradition, like, what it takes to have a great season at UConn is -- to go down as having a great season here, you have to do great, great things. It takes a special player, special coaches to be able to execute and perform and handle that type of pressure.

We're not the underdog. We're not the underdog story. You get a Sweet 16 berth and everybody is kissing your butt telling you you've had an amazing season.

We don't have the benefit of going in under the radar. I do think when you get to those pressure moments in the tournament or in big spots, that becomes then beneficial because you're playing under pressure the whole year. When we lose a game, our fans are so brutal on social that -- and obviously I'm disliked by a number of different programs. Like when we lose, the celebration that goes on and the mocking, like, that's kind of like a loud external.

We get the benefit of kind of -- I don't know why I just brought up our fans' brutality. (Laughter). Just thinking about that. Nothing to your answer to your question.

Q. Do you expect Solo to play tomorrow, and could you speak to the significance of him being the best version of himself?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I don't really know. They alerted -- they, the medical staff and general manager, Tom Moore. I saw him actually in the boot first and then they told me. But I couldn't tell. We'll know more as we get later in the day.

Q. When it comes to decompressing from a game, I don't know if that is something that you do constantly. How do you step back, even something like last night, looking forward to a National Championship game, and just find time for yourself and also maybe just your family?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah. That's probably -- the decompression thing is something once the season is over. I think you get home, you take the bus ride home, get to the hotel room, you get in the shower, you're thinking about

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

plays during the game that could have gone the other way, things that went in your favor. You're thinking, obviously, about your next opponent.

I think just the decompressing part is not going to come until Monday night is over. But yeah, for me, I can't shut my brain off.

Q. Braylon, do you have a relationship with Dusty May? I know your dad is pretty close with him. What is the relationship like, and what's it like to face him now in the National Championship?

BRAYLON MULLINS: Yeah, Coach May recruited me at Michigan, so just having that relationship throughout the recruiting process, I know my dad got to know him very well, and then him being a guy from Indiana. I think that was a connection.

You know, we know each other, but I think now we're playing on the national stage, so we're ready for tomorrow.

Q. Alex, obviously after a win like last night, the team is going to want to celebrate, but your veteran mindset, how quickly if at all did you have to remind the guys, job not finished?

ALEX KARABAN: The guys knew right away when we got back to the locker room, but we're here for a reason. We're not here to win one game, we want to win two, and we know the National Championship game is the reason why we came here. Just reminding guys what our goal is the entire year and to be 40 minutes away from it you've got to invest everything you have right now to prepare the right way and to execute out there tomorrow night.

Q. Tarris, what can you say about the length Michigan has and the matchup you're going to have in the paint with Mara tomorrow?

TARRIS REED JR: It's going to be a great challenge. They play with a lot of tremendous size, especially in the front court. That's been helping them a lot this year. I think it's going to be a great challenge for our front court, to go out there, have fun and compete.

So it's going to be a challenge for us guarding them and them guarding us. That's the beauty of basketball, and it's going to be a great game.

Q. Solo, how did the foot injury happen, and how are you feeling right now?

SOLO BALL: It actually -- I got through it with adrenaline, but it happened in the first half. I think my foot got caught

with T Reed with the screen and it kind of just happened. But I'm feeling all right right now. Just leaving it up to the medical staff. I'm doing everything I can to prepare for tomorrow.

Q. Silas, Coach said you're also banged up. How are you feeling today? Do you and Solo plan to play tomorrow?

SILAS DEMARY JR: I'm feeling fine. Fine as I've been the whole time, just doing what I can do with the medical staff every day to try to prepare myself to be ready for the game.

I know I'm playing. Like Solo said, he's leaving it up to the medical staff to see what he's going to do, but I think he's going to do everything he can do to get back out there.

Q. Alex, Coach talked about not being able to fly under the radar anymore. Just curious how you've seen the expectations, having won two back to back, and since then into tomorrow's game?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, ever since we went back to back we've always had a target on our back, and what Coach has done bringing this brand back to the national level and really a target for everybody, everyone is excited when they play UConn, and that happened ever since we went back to back.

So making sure that we're the hunted and just realizing that every time someone steps into this program knowing what they're stepping into and what it means to wear the UConn jersey.

Q. Alex, last night with the victory you moved into a tie for the second most NCAA Tournament wins of all time with Coach's brother incidentally. How important is it to you to have reached this final game of the season and have that be the final game of your college career? In an era where players bounce around all the time, where great players leave for the NBA early, what does it take for a player at the college level to reach that many victories and get to the tournament and get to this stage that many times?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, it means a lot. You dream of being on this stage one time, and to be heading into it for a third time, it's a blessing.

It's the reason why I came back. It's the reason why I've had extremely hard decisions to make throughout my career. I've always wanted to come back to win, to win championships, and to leave a legacy that's unmatched in college basketball.

It's been a huge motivating factor for myself to continue to help lead guys and be around teammates that want to compete for championships and compete at the highest level.

I've been blessed. To have these four guys along with other amazing guys in the locker room as teammates throughout this year or years past has allowed me to have the second most wins in NCAA history and in the tournament.

It's all a blessing. It's something that hasn't really felt real during this entire journey. Just enjoying every moment, not taking it for granted, but knowing how special it is to win it all.

Q. Silas, a question about Elliot Cadeau. He's the catalyst for their offense. You're going to be on him probably a lot tomorrow night. What's your take on him so far, and how are you going to limit him, if you can?

SILAS DEMARY JR: I think he's a very aggressive play maker. I think, like you say, he's the head of the snake for them, does a lot for them. Creates plays for them, an aggressive scorer as well. For me I just got to try to make it as tough as I can on him to force him into some bad decisions, force him into some tough shots, and kind of just make the game tough for him.

He's a great player, shooting it well right now, making a lot of plays. He had a really good game last night, so just trying to make it as tough as I can on him throughout the whole game.

Q. Alex, to follow up on the earlier question, I think if you win this game, you'll be the first player not from UCLA to win three championships. What does that mean to be in position to make that history now, and what would it mean if you actually did?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, it would mean everything. Leaving a legacy like that in college basketball, it's unheard of. It's a motivating factor to add a National Championship to this program for the guys that haven't experienced one, and for my legacy, as well. It would mean everything to me. It would be a blessing.

We know we've got a huge challenge ahead of us against Michigan to do that, but it's the reason why I came back so many times is to put myself and to have great teammates around me to compete for championships.

Q. Solo, do you expect to play tomorrow, and what's

the emotion like to have an injury like that at this moment with the stakes the highest?

SOLO BALL: Yeah, I'm just leaving it up to the medical staff, kind of like I said before. Just doing everything I can to prepare for tomorrow. I don't think it's too much added to it.

Just being in the National Championship game, just got to prepare the exact same way we've prepared all season, so bump in the road, but, I mean, still going to play.

Q. Alex, in what ways have the previous two National Championship runs changed Dan as a coach, or do you think he's changed at all?

ALEX KARABAN: No, he's been the same. I think he's been the same. He's always been the type of coach that connects well with his players and if anything it's probably made him hungrier. It's experienced what it's like to be at the top winning championships, and he always wants to go back there and he's always going to continuously pursue that.

He's done the same practices. He's done the same coaching schemes. He's done everything the same, and he's continued to get better as a coach throughout the years. But that hunger and that passion that he has always been the same, and I think it's gotten greater every time he's won a National Championship.

Q. Tarris, you transferred out of Michigan two years ago but you're basically facing a whole new team. What's the feeling of facing a familiar jersey without any familiar faces on it?

TARRIS REED JR: Yeah, so I started my career at Michigan and now I'm about to play them my final game of college basketball. I never would have thought that would happen in a million years. How cool a blessing is that?

I know a couple guys on the team, but I feel like at the end of the day it's the game for the National Championship game, so I feel like they're going to be coming at my neck, we're going to be coming at their neck, so it's going to be a great, fun bloodbath and just a competitive game.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

