

Jimmy V Classic: Florida vs UConn

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

UConn Huskies

Coach Dan Hurley

Alex Karaban

Solo Ball

Postgame Press Conference



PRESENTED BY **Modelo**

UConn - 77, Florida - 73

Q. Alex, you get the block, and you hit the three on the other end. What was that moment like for you in this building? Just to hold off a team like that in a game like this?

ALEX KARABAN: It was electric. Mally made a great pass. He had me in transition onto him. That's the moments you play for. That's the moments you come to UConn for is to play in a game where it's the last three national champions going out in the most famous arena, and to have that special moment was awesome.

That's why we all came to UConn, to have those moments.

Q. Alex, what was the feel of having everyone in the lineup tonight healthy? Obviously Mullins is back, Tarris is back. You had all the pieces together tonight. Is this a feeling of what it could be like, or is it going to grow from here?

ALEX KARABAN: I think it's going to grow. We're always a confident team. We always believe we're the best team in the country. But to get two key pieces that we were missing back makes us even more confident, a lot stronger obviously.

We're going to continue to grow. Tarris really boosted offensively us to start the game. He just presents such a different look offensively and defensively. This was his first game back in a while. It was big time for us.

And then Braylon, what he gave us in the second half changed the game for us, and he's only a freshman

playing. Basically got thrown into the fire with these type of games.

Q. They close it to three, and Braylon picks up his fourth foul on the 3-point play there. You countered with that 3-point shot with five minutes left. Take us through the play and how big a shot it was for you?

SOLO BALL: Yeah, I was just saying this in the hallway, we have so many great screeners on this team that are able to get people open. I feel that's the strength of our team is just the depth and how you can just go to the bench and there's no dropoff. Having a team like that gives you so much confidence, just like AK said, just to go in the game and hit those big shots.

Those shots that you work on, shots that you kind of dream of taking, it's like you're just sitting in your backyard and putting those up, and you work on those counting down. So I'm kind of used to that.

Q. Alex, obviously this is the team that eliminated you guys from the tournament last year. Was there any extra motivation going into this game to make a statement that you guys are ready to compete at the highest level?

ALEX KARABAN: Definitely. I wouldn't say that was -- it was definitely a topic, I would say. Definitely revenge was just like added motivation, I would say. A lot of guys in that locker room last year were hurt, and we just remember that feeling being hurt.

At the end of the day, we knew how good Florida was, and we can't let the emotions of last year carry into this year's type of game.

DAN HURLEY: He wants to get home.

ALEX KARABAN: We play Friday.

DAN HURLEY: I just thought a gutty performance by us. Just to be able to share the court with Florida, I just have so much respect for Coach Golden. He's a champion.



They're a championship level program and one of the premier college basketball programs in modern basketball, like the last 25, 30 years. It's one of the top five programs.

So it's an honor to share the court with them and obviously feel great about getting a win. This was a big win for us, just to try to do a great job with our nonconference. We put together a monster of a schedule. We've dealt with some injuries and different things along the way, but to be at 9-1 with everything that the team's been through versus the quality that we've had to play against with this schedule, just impressed with what we've been able to do.

Q. Obviously a lot of different guys contributed, but what Braylon gave you the second half, despite the two fouls in seven seconds in the first half and a quick third, still making the most out of 11 minutes.

DAN HURLEY: Obviously the free-throw thing, there was some undisciplined fouling. And I just think it's just a little bit unfortunate where it felt -- obviously the 16 free throws, we probably took 8 of them on getting fouled late in the game. It just felt like -- obviously the free-throw differential was kind of keeping them in the game, plus their second half surge offensively and just their character and what they're made of.

I just thought for us it was Braylon Mullins, that spurt and what he gave us offensively. It was Malachi and what he was able to do in that second half. I thought Jayden Ross just helped stabilize our defense. When he got in there, I thought our defense changed when he was in there. Then obviously AK made just some huge timely shots.

Q. Is this the most balanced rendition of UConn you've had?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah. Number one, I think the defense is where we needed to be to compete for the things at UConn that you want to. I thought we were pretty good offensively, 18 assists on 50 percent shooting.

And yeah, the strength of the team, it's the nine guys. When you have nine quality players, you can survive an off night from multiple people and still get enough scoring production to win the game.

Obviously the rebounding situation, I think when Tarris gets back to full strength -- that's twice that Tarris has stepped up as a gamer. I think he's healthy enough now to be able to actually get in practice consistently and sharpen up his game. He got off to a fast start, but then you saw some of the rust. But we don't win this game without his presence on the court.

Yeah, this is a deep team.

Q. First time really you've got all your pieces together even if Tarris wasn't all the way back, but what did you think of this first look of everybody out there together playing?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, you've certainly got a lot of options. Again, I think that Silas, the foul trouble caused some issues with his rhythm in the game. Again, the strength of the way this roster was constructed. Now you've got a guy like Malachi Smith, who you have the luxury of a guy who was a great player at Dayton that is able to give you what he gave us.

I just think that just getting Tarris back, he probably played tonight at 75 percent capacity, getting this guy healthier, just getting Braylon in rhythm. Obviously his first half was foul plagued.

But yeah, we just, we've got wings, we've got point guards, we've got two excellent centers. It was good to see Solo and AK make big threes.

When all is said and done and we're fully healthy, I think it's a pretty formidable group.

Q. You said yesterday that the defense is where it is now to where you can win a game with your defense and have it save you. Do you think that's the last missing piece to this group, being a title contender again and going for 3 out of 4?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I would say my biggest concern right now is the rebounding. We were minus 20 versus Arizona with obviously no Tarris, and we gave up 16 offensive rebounds in a game where the goal is to try to hold them to 8. We were minus 12 on the glass. That's probably my biggest concern.

I think, when it's all said and done, we're going to have a top 5, top 10 defense, top 5, top 10 offense. I think right now my biggest concern is probably rebounding.

Q. Florida's 5-4 after this game, but clearly gave you one of your closest games with your full roster. Is this one of the best opponents you've seen this season?

DAN HURLEY: I mean, they're as good as anybody. I think that, a lot like us and a lot of teams, they've -- they've got Chinyelu and Condon and Haugh and Urban who are all champions. You've got a new backcourt.

I thought Lee took a big step for them tonight in a big game at MSG, showing what he's capable of. I think, once they



get that backcourt comfortable and play together more, they're as good as anyway we've played or watched on film.

Watch that Duke game on the road -- Haugh is one of my favorite players. Haugh is one of my favorite players in recent memory. That guy is an incredible player. How he's developed and how Todd has developed that guy, that guy is like first team All-American. That guy should be a lottery pick. That guy is tremendous now.

Q. Dan, another win in a close game. How good is that for this team to experience this, everything they've experienced this season so far, and how big was this defense on that inbound violation when you pumped your fist after that?

DAN HURLEY: Obviously we gave them a chance by turning it over there on the sideline. We were preparing to foul them to prevent the three to tie it. I mean, the guys just made an awesome effort of taking things away.

When you play the people that we played, we're literally playing the best teams. Probably we played five of the top 15 teams in the country. So these are the type of games you're going to find yourself in. These are teams you're going to be playing in an Elite Eight game.

Q. You obviously mentioned that there's still some things that you need to work on, but you won 4 of 5 of your biggest games in your non-con, one loss coming without two of your starters. Not to look ahead of Texas, but you must feel pretty good about where everything is right now to go into that conference play.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah. When Bray went down and when Tarris with the hamstring to the ankle, it was a pretty daunting task to play the schedule, especially the frontcourts with Tarris out too, just the Illinois frontcourt. This frontcourt here with Tarris not anywhere close to his best. The Kansas frontcourt on the road. To be able to win those games, just a testament to Karaban and his leadership and the group in general.

For us, the Texas game is a huge game. That game on Friday is -- and this group deserves just the best home crowd we've had in a while for that game because this team is really, really worked for its fan base.

We've got to have a PeoplesBank Arena on fire for the Texas game. And as great as the '23 nonconference slate was for us when we went undefeated, this would be our most impressive nonconference performance if we're able to get the game on Tuesday, just based on the teams we played and the health of the group.

Q. So it's Madison Square Garden, it's Florida, it's Braylon's first game and he doesn't last long in the first half. At halftime, what's your message to him, and how did you assess his performance coming into the second half?

DAN HURLEY: He's a confident guy. For a young player to be able to put the first half behind him that was a mess, and for him to do what he did in the second half, it shows his quality. He's a beast.

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