

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Florida vs Auburn

Saturday, April 5, 2025

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

Auburn Tigers

Coach Bruce Pearl

Johni Broome

Dylan Cardwell

Denver Jones

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

Florida 79, Auburn 73

THE MODERATOR: We're joined at this time by Auburn, head coach Bruce Pearl and student-athletes.

We'll ask coach to open things up with a statement.

Coach.

BRUCE PEARL: I want to start off by congratulating Florida on their victory. Wish them luck in the championship game.

I'm really proud of my team, how these guys made history, the best basketball team in the history of Auburn basketball. They gave us a ride that won't ever be forgotten. They did so many great things both on and off the court that I'm extremely proud of.

Played beautiful basketball in the first half. We were prepared. We had a great game plan. They executed it really well. We only turned the ball over twice.

Second half, Florida's effort and energy, the fact that we're not as deep as what we normally are, was a factor. I thought fatigue was a factor. As a result, we weren't able to maintain control of the game, which I think if we had taken care of the basketball a little bit, not turned it over, not given them easy ones, we could have been in position to win the basketball game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions now for



Dylan, Denver and Johni.

Q. Johni, it looked like you and Charles Barkley were able to share a moment. What did he share with you and what has he meant to you?

JOHNI BROOME: He just thanked me for what I've done for Auburn. Told me to keep my head high. Coming from a guy who cemented himself in Auburn history means a lot.

Q. Denver, what made guarding Walter such a challenge? What was he doing out there that was tough for you guys tonight?

DENVER JONES: Honestly, just, you know what I'm saying, doing a lot of dribble handoffs, a lot of actions just run through him. Just constantly moving. I feel like that is just what gave me some of the looks he had tonight. Just a lot of hand-offs, a lot of drives. That's what it was.

Q. Dylan, you've been here five years, through the COVID years. As you look back on your career at Auburn, are you like the glue, the spiritual leader of this team, walking away from this right now? What are some of the memories that you have learned from being in this program?

DYLAN CARDWELL: First and foremost, all glory to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Without him, I wouldn't be here.

It's bittersweet to end it this way knowing we left the national championship on the table. But being at Auburn has been the best five years of my life. I couldn't have chosen a greater university to have loved me back, just watch me grow from 18 to 23. I am the man I am because God let me come to Auburn.

Man, the thing I'll take away most, just being an Auburn man, but just being a teammate, being a player for Bruce Pearl, but also being in the locker room with the best locker room in the country.

I love these guys. I cherish every single moment, every single memory we made. That's my prayer all year: Lord,

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prolong our season. We just have so many great memories on and off the court. This is the funniest team I've ever been on, but most loving, caring and thoughtful team I've ever been on. I'll forever remember this team and hope we can stay in touch for the rest of our lives.

Q. Denver, second half, did they do anything differently defensively to give y'all some issues?

DENVER JONES: Honestly, I just feel like we probably just felt fatigue a little bit. Turned the ball over. Had a lot of careless turnovers that in the first half we didn't really have. I feel like that's what just what gave them the part to take the lead.

Q. Johni, I know coming into this game you said your ankle felt totally fine. In the second half it looked like it was getting to you a bit. Can you walk us through what you were playing through, the heart that took to push through that.

JOHNI BROOME: My ankle was fine.

Q. Johni, I'd ask you the same question about the elbow. Looked at times line maybe it was bothering you. You still seemed to be able to do everything. Second part is, what did they do defensively to deny you shots in the second half?

JOHNI BROOME: My elbow felt fine going into the game.

Obviously here and there it bothered me a little bit. But, I mean, nothing that I couldn't play with.

I feel like we got the looks that we wanted to get. I wasn't able to capitalize and finish 'em.

THE MODERATOR: We want to thank Dylan, Denver and Johni for joining us. Congratulations on a great season, fellas. First question for Coach Pearl...

Q. You guys had a hell of a run here to the Final Four. You said fatigue was a factor for your team coming in. Just the grind of the NCAA tournament or was anything in the routine that stood out?

BRUCE PEARL: We got down to seven guys. That's not enough. We just did not have enough help off the bench. I think to take a little heat off of Johni, we scored great in the first half with our two-point baskets. We went through him, and he did great. I don't know whether we got away from it a little bit, but we only had a handful of two-point baskets in the second half. I'm going to give Florida credit defensively for stepping up.

I just think that passing and catching and fighting for your real estate, getting your spots, not letting 'em push you out of position, I think that's why we didn't execute.

Q. Clayton Jr. is a phenomenal player. You got on him defensively. There were some times he got to the rim real easy. Talk about the defensive breakdowns on that.

BRUCE PEARL: Well, he's a great player. He can go both ways. He can make tough shots.

About the only thing, again, I probably should have done more is trap the ball out of his hands a little bit. Believe it or not, that was part of our game plan, but we just didn't execute it.

Like just sort of you say all things are kind of equal. Clayton was the difference. He was just flat out the difference. We couldn't contain him down that end.

Again, I take responsibility for 12 turnovers in the second half. It's just impossible to either explain or to think that you can win turning the ball over a little bit.

We got a little out of sorts offensively. Guys just did not execute offensively what our game plan was like they did in the first half.

Q. You mentioned the depth when you did your opening statement that Florida has. Obviously Johni got what he wanted in the first half. Did you anticipate their depth and their size and their defensive acumen coming into play in the second half?

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, we knew they'd come out aggressively. I was hoping that our starters would be able to withstand. I did not call timeout in the first four minutes. I was trying to get to the TV timeout. We got to it.

Obviously those starters, my top-five players, all seniors, I just think, again, we came out offensively and we didn't run some of the things that we had talked about running the way we talked about running 'em. So just 12 turnovers, bad execution, bad decision-making, bad passing, catching. Took a lot of shots that we did not want to take.

Q. I was going to ask you about the shot selection. Felt like you had some good looks that didn't go down. Do you feel that faded in the second half and you took tougher looks?

BRUCE PEARL: We just did not execute offensively in the second half. We just didn't.

I give Florida credit for the defense. But there were certain things, certain reads, certain looks that we made in the first half, chose to not make them in the second half.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Miles Kelly. Had kind of a tough run through the last few games, especially from three. Seemed like he was unable to find a rhythm in the last few games for you.

BRUCE PEARL: Well, they did a great job of extending his catches. They recognized what a dangerous shooter Miles is. So not banging down some of those shots...

He got a couple in the first half. Again, we scored 48 points in the first half, right?

Q. 46.

BRUCE PEARL: 46. We just had a great rhythm. We got everything we wanted. But we had to work for it. I just thought we stopped working offensively the way they're coached.

Q. What do you say to Tahaad after tonight's game?

BRUCE PEARL: I haven't talked to him yet. He's been sensational all season long. I know that he's going to be disappointed because he wasn't elite tonight like he's always been.

Give, again, Florida credit. There's real size in their backcourt, real size in their front court. Again, if he had a better coach, he'd have gotten cleaner looks, and he would have been had a few more open shots. That probably would have helped him play a little better.

If there are five of the top freshmen in college basketball this year, Tahaad Pettiford is absolutely one of them. I'm so incredibly proud of him. I know his teammates are. I trust him.

THE MODERATOR: We want to thank Coach Pearl for joining us and congratulate him and Auburn on a terrific season run to the Final Four.

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