

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

Monday, April 7, 2025
San Antonio, Texas, USA
Alamodome

Houston Cougars
Coach Kelvin Sampson
J'Wan Roberts
L.J. Cryer

Finals Postgame Media Conference

Florida 65, Houston 63

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Houston head coach Kelvin Sampson and student-athletes. We'll ask coach to start with a statement.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, I told our guys after the game to be disappointed you lost, but do not be disappointed in your effort. Defending Florida is difficult. They got a really, really good team. Coach Golden runs great schemes over there.

We guarded 'em. We held that team to 65 points. Thought if we held Duke to under 70, we'd have a good chance to win. I felt like if we held Florida under 70, we'd have a good chance to win.

Saturday we found a way to win. Tonight maybe not so much.

Two great teams. Two tough teams. We lost by two points. They made one more play than we did tonight.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for L.J. and J'Wan.

Q. J'Wan, six years with Coach Sampson. What has he meant to your life, what has Houston meant to your life? Are you looking at all toward the future with leaving this program as a player?

J'WAN ROBERTS: Coach Sampson has been everything to me. From Coach Sampson down to grandkids. Everybody played a part in me being here for six years.



I wanted it so bad for him. So, so, so bad. And it hurts. I can't do it next year. I can't put myself in position to do it next year. This will be my last time wearing my jersey, and I feel terrible.

But I told the younger guys, the returners, to remember this feeling. So when you in this moment again, in this situation again, you'll be on top. I feel like everything you go through in life is a lesson. I'm glad I could play with L.J. I'm glad I played with all those guys.

But Coach Sampson, the role that he played in my life, I can't even put into words.

Q. Leading this team this season, can you talk about what it's been like with this group of guys and what it means to be able to still go out with them.

J'WAN ROBERTS: The dream has been great. A lot of ups and downs. Fought through a lot of adversity. We all stayed together. We all believed in each other. We just came up short. Probably a lot of stuff we wish we could do, but...

I mean, I'm proud of these guys. But I'm mostly sad that I can't do it with them again. That's the worst part. Not going to be teammates with Emanuel again, L.J., Mylik, J. This is by far, out of my six years, the best team I've been on.

L.J. CRYER: Yeah, I'm just proud of the way we fought all season. We went through some adversity early, and people tried to kind of write us off a little bit, not expecting us to get to this point.

But we kept our head down and kept grinding all season. We flipped it around. Went 19-1 in Big 12. Big 12 tournament champs. Made it all the way to the last game.

I mean, it didn't end the way we wanted it to, but we just got to hold our heads high because we did accomplish a lot, so yeah.



Q. L.J., you made two decisions, one to transfer to Houston, one last summer to run it back. What was the experience like for you playing in your hometown, taking this program to another level in this new conference?

L.J. CRYER: Man, this experience, it's hard to describe it. I mean, I remember before I got to Houston I had three foot surgeries before I got here. After those surgeries, I was kind of questioning myself if I was going to ever be the player I once was before. My confidence was kind of shook. I wasn't confident in my movement.

But coming to Houston, the coaches, they believed in me. Coach Q, I used to have talks with him every single day in his office, telling him these things. He'll be like, Man, go out there and be free. I used to tell him I was scared because of my surgeries and stuff like that.

They believed in me, told me to trust God. I've accomplished a lot because I listened to him, put my faith in God. It's been a blessing being here. Just been the best year of my life so far.

So yeah, I'm just proud to be a Cougar, man.

Q. J'Wan, you just mentioned the last six years, but obviously the pain is tremendous right now. We've followed you the last eight or nine years. Talk about the trip it's been, reflect. Did you ever think you would end it at the pinnacle playing for a national championship?

J'WAN ROBERTS: I want to thank the coaches for coming to one of my AAU games, looking at me and giving me opportunity to play at the University of Houston. That's step one. Giving me the opportunity.

They invested so much in me, development-wise, redshirting my first year. Six years later, who knows I would have been playing for a national championship. I first got here, I wasn't on nobody's scouting report. I worked my butt off. They continued to help me along the way. Six years later I had a different role.

I feel like the coaches had a lot of trust in me to lead this team. These past six years have been the best years of my life. Like I said, the worst part about it is I can't do it again.

But I'll always be a Cougar. No matter how you try to shape it, I'm always going to be a Cougar, this is always going to be my home. 10, 15, 20 years from now, I'm always going to look back on this game and remember the team and remember the coaches that put me in position to

be the best I can be.

I give all the credit to my teammates and my coaches for giving me the opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: We want to thank J'Wan and L.J.

Our first question for Coach Sampson...

Q. What's going through your mind right now? Big picture...

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, I'm just going through those last two possessions more than anything else. Incomprehensible in that situation we couldn't get a shot, couldn't get a shot. We're down two, and obviously we didn't need a three. But with Emanuel, we were struggling to score the entire second half. We got good looks. But Florida was doing a good job running us off the line and forcing us to score it. We just didn't do a very good job of finishing some shots.

Guys that have been in the paint scoring all year... L.J. developed a really good runner, floater. I didn't go very much tonight. Milos. Give Florida credit, too. I'm not going to sit up here and poor mouth, pity mouth us. We held that team to 65 points. Clayton and Martin combined to go 5 for 20. If you would have told me we would hold those two guys 5 for 20...

We had a good plan. We just didn't score it well enough to win. Scored it well enough to be in a position to win. At the end you've got to get a shot. Got to do better than that.

Q. What were you hoping to get out of that last play?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, we have a set where it's a staggered gait. We thought if we could get Emanuel to shot fake and get downhill -- I have to look back at the film. I don't know if the ball slipped out of his hands.

Q. Clayton.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Probably should have shot faked that. Both those guys, Richard and Martin, both really good defensively. Clayton made a great play on that.

That's why you got to shot fake and get in the paint. Two is fine. J'Wan has been awesome all year. Tonight was not his night. Florida was really physical with the way they were chucking and bumping when he was going in. He had a lot of balls that just fell right off the rim, seems like.

So at the end of the day they scored 65, we scored 63. They struggled scoring on us and we struggled scoring on

them. When it gets down to the two best teams left, it's not going to be easy for either team.

Q. Tonight you only had five assists. The fewest you've had in a game since 2020.

KELVIN SAMPSON: What's your first name?

Q. Evan Miyakawa.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Let me explain how an assist works, Evan. I'm not sure...

When you throw the ball to somebody, and they score, that's an assist, right? We threw the ball a lot to J'Wan in the post, and he missed some shots that he normally makes. So those were possible potential assists that we had a lot. We just didn't make a lot of shots.

I don't know. Certainly Florida, let's give them credit for being a good defensive team. But we threw the ball and passed the ball enough to get more assists. We just didn't make enough shots. That's what I would say right off the bat.

You're the stat guy, right?

Q. As good as your guards are, as many turnovers as you have forced all year long, how rare is it that the turnover bug bit you the last four minutes?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, the last four minutes. Our defense was so good the first half. Of course, a big part of our defense was Clayton, because he's elite. He really is. We missed an assignment when he came off. Our goal was to not give him a full-court layup. He gets that a lot. Watching the SEC games. So we took that away.

We didn't want him to get a shot going to his left. If he was going to shoot a three, we wanted it going right. We did an awesome job on that except for one. He made a big one late. I don't remember how much time it was, but...

I'm proud of our guys for how they guarded tonight. That was a tough ballgame. Two tough teams. Florida's tough. Martin is a tough defender. He gave L.J. some problems. The big kid, Condon at 6'11", and Chinyelu, those guys are all big, strong, physical guys, just like our guys are.

We got an offensive rebound, chance to get a kick-out three, and JoJo did the one thing that we really emphasized, don't bring the ball down. Turned into a turnover. Probably put him on the line a little too much, and they made their free throws.

But the way we looked tonight, we've won a lot of games like that. Some nights we struggle offensively. But we usually find ways to win. Tonight we didn't.

Q. To what degree with the way that they were breaking out on you early in the game to get some long passes to the big men, did that surprise you?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Surprised me we didn't do a better job guarding it. Didn't surprise me that they did it. They're good at that.

But we settled in. They scored two or three early, I think. I'm not sure they got another one after that.

Yeah, our guys figured that out. I think by the time we got to the first TV timeout. Sometimes guys try to guard their man in transition. You have to try to guard the guy that has the deepest position.

Again, we're disappointed we lost. We thought this was a game that if we played well, we could win. And we did play well. We just didn't play very good the last three minutes. That's been a strength of ours all year long, was winning close games. But tonight we didn't.

Give credit to Coach Golden and Florida. They're a very worthy champion.

THE MODERATOR: I want to thank Coach Sampson for joining us. Congratulations on the run to the title game.

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