

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

Saturday, April 4, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

UConn Huskies

Coach Dan Hurley

Tarris Reed, Jr.

Silas Demary, Jr.

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

UConn 71, Illinois 62

DAN HURLEY: Just obviously thrilled. There's no better feeling than being on that bus on Monday night, just being one of the last two teams standing, that bus ride to the stadium. It's just a cool experience.

I look forward to obviously the ability to max out the season to get to the last game, and then just Illinois, couldn't have more respect for them and their coach and their awesome players.

We're very selective with who we try to play in non-conference situations, whether they're home and homes or the series that we're now doing with Illinois. We only try to do series with the best programs in the country. They'll obviously have another crack at us in Chicago next year, but yeah, just couldn't be more proud of my guys and how hard they fought when most people probably didn't think we were going to win the game, or at least a little bit of what I saw on TV today, you know, TNT and some of the different prognostications.

So it was great to win the game. I had to throw some shade.

Q. My question is for Braylon. You guys came out of the gates, both you and Tarris seemed to have the sense of feeling early. Was that any continuation of your shot in D.C. or was it just coming out of the gate strong?

BRAYLON MULLINS: I think it was the flow of the game, but coming into the game I knew I needed to shoot it with



confidence coming off last Sunday just to have that flow, that momentum.

Seeing the first two go in, it just boosts all the confidence for you to keep shooting. I think it just happened within the game.

Q. Tarris, there were obviously points in the season when your free-throw shooting, I'm sure you were disappointed in. You hit two big ones with 2:46 left, and with 30 seconds left you ran for the ball to get it to shoot. What has changed with you at the line and what's your confidence like at the line?

TARRIS REED JR: Yeah just putting the work, trusting all the work I put in. Yeah, it was 30 seconds left I looked at Coach, gave him a not like, yo, Coach, let me catch the ball, let them foul me. I am going to knock these two down.

So I felt like just trusting in the work I put in and the guys around me, and like I said buying into the system.

Q. Silas, you had a huge offensive rebound, kicked it back out to Braylon for that three. What has been your mentality in this tournament to make that kind of an effort play?

SILAS DEMARY JR: Yeah, it's definitely nothing but sheer effort, just to get that rebound was a big time play in the game. I think it was probably minute and some change to go first one to the ball got to make those big time effort plays those 50/50 plays just knowing that being on a bum ankle but still being able to give it my all and leave everything out there for my teammates, just making sure I'm not shorting them, it's a great feeling, and I'm just glad to be able to be playing another game on Monday.

Q. Silas, as the games have gone on and you've gotten deeper into the tournament, it seems like you guys have made fewer and fewer mistakes each time, hardly any turnovers today, free throws not an issue. In your first year here, what have you learned about UConn? How are you guys playing more and more solid fundamentally as the pressure gets higher and



hire he?

SILAS DEMARY JR: I think that's just a testament to the coaches just giving us confidence and setting a game plan for us to follow and I think us just going out there and being confident and the decisions we're making, the shots we're taking, I then think when it's winning time we try to connect as much as possible and have each other's back throughout the whole time.

I think even when they had that run like late in the second half we told ourselves we were fine, let's just respond, and I think we were able to do that.

Q. Tarris, you knew how good of a rebounding team Illinois was coming into this one. Only minus 8 on the total glass, minus 2 on the O glass. Is that a win for you guys?

TARRIS REED JR: I wouldn't say so. I mean, knowing that first half we were down, losing the rebounding battle by four, so I feel like they're such a good offensive rebounding team. Like I said lock in on that side, being able to put pressure on the offensive glass, put pressure on the defensive glass.

Feel like we could be better, but like I said, we escaped with the win today so we're blessed and thankful for that.

Q. You didn't have any turnovers in the first half and I think it was the first four plus minutes of the second half before you had your first one, finished with four, I think it was. How do you do that on a game this big and against a team that's as physical as Illinois?

SILAS DEMARY JR: I think just our decision making, being confident in what moves we're going to do, if we're going to take a shot, take a shot, not getting caught in between, and I think more so erring on the side if we screen for one another and we set a good -- when we screen for one another we know we can get to our spots and hit our shots. And then just being smart with the ball.

I think if the pass is not there rather get a shot on the rim and try to offensive rebound rather than just getting a live ball turnover.

Q. With Alex Karaban I think you would probably agree that wasn't his best game ever, but to be the only player not from UCLA to do that, what can you say about what Alex has meant to the team and what do you expect from him on Monday?

BRAYLON MULLINS: I think AK just holds the standard with this program. That's the guy you look up to on the

court. He's been through it twice and just knowing that he has been through it twice, you can use him as an outlet.

I mean, to make history with Monday for him, I think that's what we're all trying to accomplish, and it would be so special for him.

Q. Braylon, you started off in the first half shooting 50 percent; second half you shot 1 for 6. What is it to keep you determined in the middle of a shooting slump to hit such a clutch shot in that moment that essentially iced the game?

BRAYLON MULLINS: Yeah, I think just coming into the second half just had to get the momentum from the first half and just -- you've always got to shoot with confidence. The set was going to be run for anybody on the team, you've just got to shoot with confidence.

Just trying to find the best look on the floor and I know our point guards are going to get us the ball, so I think that was the biggest shot I hit tonight.

Q. This is your 18th win this season when holding your opponent under 40 percent shooting. Talk about the defense throughout the course of the season, especially compared to the defensive woes last year.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, listen, I think we spent a majority of the year as a top 5 defense.

Just the life-and-death nature of this tournament, I think, has created the urgency, and I thought kind of the best thing that we did was get into them in the full court and get into them a little bit more in the half court and move some of those two-man actions a little bit further away and put them under a little bit more duress.

Obviously to hold them to 33 percent from the field, three assists, eight turnovers in the game, we won a lot of one-on-one battles. Not all, but yeah, our defense sustained us.

We ended up -- we had so many opportunities. We could have made 18 threes. We had twos at the rim. We could have played better offensively and finished plays more. But great ball security, and the defense was elite.

Q. Dan, kind of what I asked Silas, when you have -- you're in a rock fight like this when every little play counts, how much does help not only having guys that are capable of getting a rebound on a bad ankle, but understanding how critically important that kind of a play is?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we knew what it was. You're coming into the game as an underdog versus a team that you beat by 13 points earlier in the season, which was kind of surprising, that that's how we kind of came into the game.

Obviously I've been waiting to say that and now I forgot your question. (Laughter).

Q. Glad you got it out of your system. My question was with Silas' rebound, having players recognize the importance of such small plays, not just being able to do them?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I thought players like Silas, what he's done for our basketball team, the mentality, it was everything we were lacking last year. Just a guard like him, ball hawk, incredible toughness, on the backboard. Made Wagler work for it, made Boswell -- just his on-ball defense.

He's a shell of himself offensively. He is really gutting it out, and the courage he has showed, I think, has been inspiring for the group, and guys like Jayden Ross, too, just the defense that he's able to play on the perimeter, I thought obviously those were game changers.

Q. Dan, with Tarris, he's had games obviously where he's been incredible during the season. Saw it when you guys beat St. John's. The consistency that you've seen in these five and then he's making free throws, where do you point to why all of a sudden now it's every game he's bringing it?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just think these players, they have careers, and it's why you kind of never give up on a player. You stick with a player. You stick with a player because of the characteristics that he has. Obviously he's got enormous talent, but he's a man of great character. He's a man of great faith. He's got great work habits. He's a very humble person. He's just a great, great young man.

We've all just been waiting for this from him, this version of him, which this version of him is one of the best players in this tournament, one of the best players left in this tournament. He's played as well as anyone has played in this tournament, and it's all we've ever wanted for him. It hasn't been an easy process to get him there, but he's there now, and hopefully this is the player he is for the rest of his basketball life.

Q. You have a team that averages 15 assists a game. You have four play makers on that Illinois team. You hold them to three assists. Is that some sort of coaching strategy that you were deploying about

preventing extra passes or was that the nature of them missing a lot of threes?

DAN HURLEY: I think a lot of that has to do with how we guard. Again, we both could have made more shots. We'll both go back and look at the game and see the missed opportunities.

But for us, it's very important for our players in one-on-one situations to be able to hold up on an island like a corner back in football that plays a lot of man coverage because we do want to try to take the three-point line away from players like Davis in this game, try to limit Wagler to the tough contested off-the-dribble ones. Ben is an excellent three-point shooter.

We were willing to live with Mirkovic and Ivisic, like kind of stunt them because we were 30 percent free-throw shooters so we picked our poison with some of the guys that we were willing to let shoot the three.

Q. Late in the game it was kind of the opposite of the Duke game where they're closing the gap. What was your message to the huddle to keep your guys' composure?

DAN HURLEY: I thought we were just getting great shots. We were getting great shots the whole way through, and that's not easy. I thought we were able to execute to get good looks all over the course.

Like we had a great process, the way we were going about our offensive execution, the efforts we were making defensively. I just thought we had a great process, and we were going about things the right way. When you're doing that as a team and you're just not making the shots, you're just, hey, listen, if we get stops and rebound the ball and don't turn it over we're going to get great shots and we're due to make a couple.

The year hasn't been a joyride. We haven't been a machine of destruction. We've been a team that's had to grind out games like this. We're comfortable in a possession game like that.

Q. On a similar note, Dan, you talked yesterday about how this team is like the 2023 team, resilience-wise, and obviously down the stretch you get into foul trouble and the gap is closing. What was it about that time period and the resilience of this team that allowed you guys to hold on in the end?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we're a tough program. We're a tough program. We're a group of fighters. It's not appealing to everyone. I'm sure there's some people in



here that it's offputting for. But we are a group of fighters. We are incredibly tough. We've got incredible will. We go into these games, we're ready for battle.

Again, for us it's not a game that we're just kind of running around in uniforms throwing the ball around, hoping it goes in. That's not what we're doing out there. We're fighting. It's a life-and-death struggle for us to get to Monday night for the opportunity to win a championship, and then just to be able to prolong this season with each other and to make the people of Connecticut proud, to make the university proud and all the former great players.

And I mentioned Coach Calhoun and Kevin Ollie and Rip Hamilton is here, Khalid El-Amin, Kevin Freeman. Got a bunch of former players here. It means everything for us to show up as warriors for our battles and wars that we do in sports.

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