

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Alabama State vs Auburn

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Auburn Tigers

Johni Broome

Chad Baker-Mazara

Denver Jones

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Auburn student-athletes Johni Broome, Chad Baker-Mazara and Denver Jones.

Q. How different is it from a year ago, you're getting ready to play on a Thursday, you didn't play on Sunday. Is that extra day -- the focus now simply go and take care of the business at hand, past is over with?

JOHNI BROOME: For sure, we can't control the SEC tournament, everybody is 0-0. So we're looking basically to take it one game at a time and get a 6.

DENVER JONES: I feel like we are more motivated now as far as taking it one game at a time, and obviously we are trying to win that game and get to Sunday -- Saturday, sorry about that.

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: I feel like us not playing Sunday is a little extra motivation for the guys because we know we wanted to be there, but we didn't take care of our business. Now that we're here, we will be able to take care of our business, and I feel like the guys are excited to play.

Q. Johni, you have pretty much picked up every All-American first teams. Talk about your newest accolades today and what that means to your season so far.

JOHNI BROOME: First off, all glory to God for allowing me to play the game I love. And I want to thank my teammates and coaches and the organization for developing me and believing in me and putting me in those



situations to succeed and help my team win. Ultimately, it's an honor, you know, to be recognized as one of the best players in the country. Yeah.

Q. Johni, you're back in Kentucky where things began for you at Moorehead State. What do you remember about those two years of your career, and where do you think you have evolved the most as a college basketball player from then to now?

JOHNI BROOME: Shout out to Moorehead State. I think those two years of my college career have helped me become who I am. It allowed me to find myself, and it allowed me to, you know, experience kinda -- I don't know how to say it, experience being one of the best players on the court and handling the double teams and stuff like that.

So now I'm at that point in my career now where I kinda know how to handle it better.

Q. Denver, is there any extra pressure being a 1 seed? First time y'all have been a 1 seed under Bruce. What's that like having that expectation, knowing you're the top on this side of the draw, and how do you approach that going into the tournament?

DENVER JONES: I don't really look at it as extra pressure. I just know that when we ended up losing the SEC tournament, we ended up losing three of our last four games, I feel like we're just a little extra motivated going into March Madness.

And it might be a little pressure just because we're the 1 seed and this is the first time it happened in Auburn history. But as far as I'm concerned, we just focus one game at a time, and we're just trying to be determined to win this tournament.

Q. This time last year, you all were in Spokane. Now being in Lexington, already being in Rupp, a place you all have had success so far this season, what does that mean coming into this? What are you all looking forward to coming into this?

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: I feel like coming from our last performance, I feel like we're comfortable here. We had a great game as a team. And being able to be back here



playing March Madness, it feels like something really good for us, knowing that we was able to shoot the ball well out here. So probably keep that rhythm from the last game here.

Q. For all of you, Bruce Pearl talked last weekend about, okay, we've got to flush the last three out of four losses heading into the NCAA Tournament. Over the last couple days, what has practice been like? What has Coach Pearl been like for you guys just trying to, okay, let's forget what happened in the past, let's move forward into the new season now?

JOHNI BROOME: Practice has been a little bit ramped up. We had an extra day of rest because we didn't play on Sunday. So we got to work on ourselves and just trying to find our identity again.

We was named the No. 1 overall seed in March Madness. So with those three, four losses we had to the end the season, our body of work still allowed us to be in the position we are now. Like I said, we're going to work on ourselves and try to win. Take it one game at a time.

DENVER JONES: I just feel like we can't dwell on what happened in the past, basically. And we come into this tournament 0-0. And I feel like practice obviously has been a little bit more with a sense of urgency just because it's a lot of us, a lot of our guys' last year. So it's a different level of locking in, working on things in practice that got us to this point. And I feel like that was the most important thing.

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: Basically what Denver says, most of our guys' last year. So we don't want to go out sad. We want to make the best of this opportunity. So lately we have been extra locked in and just taking care of our business.

Q. With Alabama State playing last night, did you all watch that live? Watch it today? See highlights? What's the familiarity with Alabama State? Their coach used to be with the Tigers, but it's been a bit. How different is Alabama State, an HBCU in the SWAC, versus Auburn, which is an SEC program, and, oh yeah, the No. 1 seed in this tournament?

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: We played them last year, and they had a pretty good team. So we can't take nobody for granted. This tournament is March, so anybody can really beat anybody if you don't come focused and locked in and take people for granted. So we gotta make sure we come in tomorrow and take care of our business.

DENVER JONES: Kind of what Chad said. We played them last year, so we know how good of a team they are.

And like we said, we can't take any team for granted. We know they're going to come out here, and we're going to get their best basketball. So we've got to be prepared for that and just be ready to play basketball.

JOHNI BROOME: We did watch them live last night. It was in the team room watching the game. Crazy ending. And after that we kinda started scouting them, watching film on them and getting prepared on how we want to guard them and their tendencies.

Q. Johni, what's been the biggest message as y'all transition from the SEC Tournament to this weekend? What's the main point of emphasis from Bruce in order to get your momentum rolling in the way you want it to to have a good run?

JOHNI BROOME: Urgency, and it's win or go home. I don't think there needs to be a big message. We have eight to ten seniors. I don't want to go out not to my expectations, and nobody else on the team would either.

So it's win or go home. If you're not willing to step up and play your best basketball now, then why you playin' it?

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time.

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