

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Utah State vs UCLA

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

## UCLA Bruins

## Coach Mick Cronin

## Eric Dailey Jr.

## Sky Clark

### Media Conference

UCLA - 72, Utah State - 47

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA Coach Mick Cronin and student-athletes Sky Clark and Eric Dailey. Coach?

MICK CRONIN: You know how good of an SID you were at Cincinnati for me? He put up with me, man.

Obviously proud of our team. Before I get to that, congratulations to Coach Calhoun, to Jerrod, my friend, and to Utah State on a tremendous season. To go in there in his first year and lose the player of the year in the league in Osobor and be able to have the 26 wins and the season that they had is an amazing job by him.

Tough draw for him being as though their defense is something that Coach Willard taught me a long time ago. And I lived in it at Cincinnati my last 5 years. So very, very hard to play that defense against somebody that lived it and breathed it and ate it every day. So tough match-up.

Really proud of the guys. Defensive effort was awesome. These two guys to my right give us a toughness that you need to have, that we're going to need to have Saturday. And hopefully, Sebastian, he tweaked his groin a little bit, so hopefully he'll be all right.

Not much to pick at -- 22 assists on 26 baskets. And the guys just did a great job. It helped us to have three days because against a match-up zone defense you have to score on passing and cutting. You can't dribble your way into it; they will steal the ball.



The guys did a great job with the preparation and Coach Savino did a great job.

Their spirit and their mind to be a great defensive team tonight just took Utah State out of their comfort zone. And uncomfortable teams shoot a low percentage. Our last time out we let Wisconsin get comfortable. We paid the price.

**Q. Key sequence for me was second half, I don't know, three minutes in, Dy goes down, you're up 10 or so. And with him out, you increase the lead -- you hit a 3, Sky; Kobe hits a couple, you get defensive stops; and that's basically the ball game. How big was it to step up in that stretch and get separation?**

SKYY CLARK: It was huge. We know they're a team that if you just let come back in the game they will. They're 17th in offense, so just doing everything we could to try to get them out of rhythm and not let them run their offense was the key.

**Q. Seemed like a lot of step-up performances tonight, both of you, Dylan's defense on Ian was really good, and he had eight assists and only one turnover. He played a two-way game tonight. Talk about his performance and the guards in general and how important that is right now.**

SKYY CLARK: It's huge for us. Dylan is a great person. Always had nothing but great things to say about him. His performance helped tonight. Those eight assists were huge. That's one of the reasons we got the ball moving against their match-up zone. Super proud of him.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: D.A. did really good on the defensive end. That's what we're going to need to continue on in this tournament, defensive effort from the guards and taking care of the ball.

**Q. Can you both talk about how you were able to disrupt them defensively all night long?**

SKYY CLARK: Just pressure the ball, don't let 'em make easy passes, just do everything we could. We knew on the ball screens they like to throw over the top on the pick-and-roll or they like to throw it to the lift man so have



high hands and a hard blitz was definitely one of the keys.

And having Mud as well -- just locking in on the scouting report, I think that's what won us this game and got us the outcome that we did.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: And also the intangibles, our effort and our attitude helped as well. Just having a lot of energy playing is contagious to the team and everybody, and that got us really going.

**Q. Eric, obviously you went out early in the first half with foul trouble. Came back in the second half, found your spots and were able to contribute. Talk about that.**

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Yeah, I had two fouls in the first half and sat down for a little bit. That didn't change my mindset on the game at all. I knew we had to win this game and stay locked in in the second half. Just got myself going and some things were falling for me. So that's all I can say about that, keep playing hard.

**Q. Skyy, obviously you have some memories of Rupp from your first high school recruitment. What was it like to play in here? Seems like you got a good feel for things offensively and shot the ball well from deep.**

SKYY CLARK: I mean, I've been here before when it's been sold out, I've been here for big blue madness. Been here when Tyrese Maxey was playing. I know there is a different energy in this building.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys. Appreciate it. Questions for Coach.

**Q. Coach, did you have a sense the guys were as locked in as they were going to be tonight based on how they were performing in practice and just the way their vibe was?**

MICK CRONIN: Man, I wish I could -- I mean it would be easy to say yeah, but then I would start turning into some other coaches.

Who the hell knows, man? I mean, I wish I knew. You know, there's times you think they're really ready to play in this sport, and you lay an egg. You know, tough to say, man.

I will say -- look, it scared me when Eric went out with the second foul. He's a guy -- him and Sebastian, they're not afraid to say something to their teammates. They're not quiet. And you saw -- Eric, in his 22 minutes he was all over the damn place. You've got to have a guy --

confidence matters.

We had a talk this week about the guys that went to the Final Four and the multiple guys that are in the NBA off of that team. And then the next team that was going to go to the Final Four, those guys, unbelievable season. They actually won more games.

But anyway, you have to have a confidence about you. You've got to believe.

So we had some guys, it was a little bit different, like Cody Riley; Tyger, high rated; Johnny, high rank guy; David, Mr. Basketball.

I don't know why Eric wasn't rated higher, because I saw him. I didn't see Tyler. Obviously he was not high rated. Trent is probably our highest rated recruit on this team. So I'm trying to infuse confidence in these guys.

They're the ones -- they're the only one in this tournament that practices under 11 banners, championship banners, only one. And when we walk out there with them uniforms on, everybody knows them uniforms.

So you have to have an air about you. But Eric has it. I told him, you've got to be even more so outward with it and permeate it down to your teammates, because, like, Eric believes that he is really good. And he is really good.

Some of our guys at times, I don't know. You know, you've got to believe that you're supposed to win in this damn tournament. The number next to your name was given to you by a bunch of people that never played basketball, in a room, so what the hell do they know?

You've got to believe you're supposed to advance and win. To me that's a big, big part of it. And it's helped us where we're 10-3 in my time at UCLA in the NCAA Tournament. And I think his spirit -- to your question, Ben, this week, Eric, he knows it's tournament time. He knows.

**Q. You talk about guys having that air and that attitude. Is Aday developing that?**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, and, look, he's fighting a sinus infection right now of some sort. So he's been heavily medicated since we got on the plane to come here. So I was really proud of him, you know. He's come such a long way in two years. And that's a credit to him.

A lot of guys quit -- I tell guys, my speech is, guys get to college and it's really hard unless your name is Michael Jordan or Cooper Flagg, Lonzo Ball or Kevin Love. 99.9% of them, it's harder than they think it's going to be. And you



either quit, transfer, blame other's, or you get to work. And that's what life is about.

I'm pretty in their face with them. I tell them that's what time it is. Because nobody else is coming to save you, because they don't care. Other than your parents, nobody else cares. They've got their own problems.

So, Aday, he put his head down and he has really, really worked hard, for a young kid that never really worked hard until he got to UCLA. He was just a prodigy of size and skill. I'm really proud of him. Look at his numbers -- five blocks, 10 points, six rebounds in 20 minutes. And I'm telling you he is sick. He was our high deflection guy because of the blocked shots.

**Q. Three-point defense was incredible and the guard play across the board with Skyy, Dylan, Kobe, you could go down the list --**

MICK CRONIN: Guard play, I'm not playing out there so, again, I'm trying to infuse confidence. I've been telling you, Skyy can really shoot the ball. He got off to a bad start. But a lot of it is what he went through in the offseason. And he continues to fight through with his dad's health situation and just trying to clear his mind.

Dylan played one of his better games tonight without question. Without question. But, again, I can sit here and say, oh, you know, our defense was awesome. They missed -- Ian went 0-7. He probably had a few clean looks. It's not always you. Sometimes the other team -- they can shoot the lights out and sometimes they struggle.

They didn't make shots. They were going to need to make shots to beat us because they don't have an interior offense. They don't have a post-up guy.

Some of that was our defense, because I say this to you all the time, uncomfortable teams shoot a low percentage. And we were able to make them uncomfortable to an extent. And then what happens is when you do get open, you're rushing everything. You're not comfortable, because it's so hard to get open, because our effort was so good.

But even with that said, sometimes they just missed some clean looks. That's just -- that's the truth, the fair of it. It wasn't all of us.

**Q. Obviously, Mick, just the way you played offensively and defensively tonight, how much confidence do you think this will give you against Tennessee on Saturday?**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, we don't get to take any of these points with us. Whole new ball game. You know, it's not the same as it was when Canelo was getting old. I grew up a big boxing fan. It's different when you change weight classes, a little bit different when you change weight classes.

We'll see. They used to say everybody thought they were tough until they walked in the ring with Mike Tyson. Everybody had a lot to say until the guy with no socks walked in and crushed him.

It's a different animal. I'm really happy with our effort tonight. But we've been preparing all year to play Saturday. Hopefully a lot of the Big Ten battles we've had will prepare us, because my respect for Coach Barnes is off the charts. Because he does it the right way. He cares about kids. He's not a phony. He is who he is. And Tennessee got really lucky when somebody else let him go.

It's been great for Tennessee basketball, obviously. They've been in a golden era of being at the top or near the top of the SEC.

So they're always a great defensive team, they take care of the ball. They don't beat themselves. They got a great point guard down the road. They got Jamaih Mayshak, who we would have tried to sign but we didn't have a scholarship. We didn't have a need for him at the time. But I knew he was a winner. He's a great kid.

**Q. Offensive rebounds for them, I think they had 10 in the first half, you did a better job the second half. Was that a lot of 3s?**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, long rebounds got us. We got caught reaching for the ball with one hand. A lot of their rebounds we had and they tipped them away from us. So it's obviously an area that we were not great at tonight, obviously. Most of them were long rebounds. We didn't go grab the ball, we were reaching for the ball.

**Q. Mick, great Canelo reference by the way. Secondly, why did you decide to challenge up 21 that late? What went into that?**

MICK CRONIN: Because I knew I was right. And sometimes you gotta show those guys, because it's always the cat-and-mouse game with officials.

Doug Simons is a veteran. I just had to let him know it was clearly a missed call. I don't care what the score is. Make the right call. It is what it is.



And even if the shoe is on the other foot, don't "ref" the scoreboard, pretty simple.

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