

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Creighton vs Auburn

Friday, March 21, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Auburn Tigers

Coach Bruce Pearl

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Auburn Head Coach Bruce Pearl. Coach?

BRUCE PEARL: I've known Greg McDermott for a long time dating back to my days as an assistant for Dr. Tom Davis at the University of Iowa. Been a big fan of his and the way he runs his program and how competitive they are, particularly in postseason.

The fact that Creighton has been to the Sweet 16 four of the last five years speaks volumes about what kind of program they have, what kind of coach they have, and their culture.

I would love to have a week to get ready for them, because they do so much good stuff that I think I would enjoy learning. We will be excited about trying to guard it and seeing if we can put our defensive system in place against a very unique offense with a 7'2" center and a dynamic point guard and the different pieces around them.

Q. Bruce, Creighton fouls fewer times than anybody else in college basketball. What's the challenge going up against a defense like this, that isn't going to send you to the line very often and the way they play on that end of the floor?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, since our guys complain about getting fouled all the time, it's going to be a tough one for us, because they're not going to foul us. You've just got to make shots. They do a good job with verticality and they do a good job working to not foul shooters.

They don't send a ton of people to the offensive glass because they take such good first shots, so there are not a lot of rebounding fouls. And the big fella does a good job of being vertical so they're able to challenge shots at the rim with him sort of being down there. And their other



players really don't have to challenge shot because he challenges so many of them. It just means our first shot offense has got to be really, really good.

I guess for us, we're a pretty efficient offense and we don't rely on the foul line like many teams do to score points. I think we get about 17% or 18% of our scoring from the free throw line. So it's not something we rely on so that's a good thing for us.

Q. Coach, with Louisville getting out yesterday, what does that mean for you? What's the message to the fans? More seats. What are you thinking going into tomorrow?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, I don't want our fans to wait thinking that Atlanta is an automatic, because it's not. Anybody that follows college basketball understands that this match-up against a number 2 team in the Big East -- you know, St. John's won the league and they were a 2 seed and Creighton finished second in the league and played them in the championship game and they were a 9 seed. So that's a pretty big gap between those two teams.

So obviously Creighton is an outstanding team and there are tickets available. Plus Auburn baseball is up here in Lexington, so you can get a two for one. Come up and watch our baseball team and come up and watch our basketball team, and hopefully there's plenty of seats at Rupp Arena.

Q. There has been talk about effort and energy and those things. Knowing when players are on the court that they want to play hard and they want to win, just can you talk about what that entails? How is happens?

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, you know, we've all talked about it. I talked about it in my postgame. Steven talked about it in the radio postgame, Dylan Cardwell talked about it. What we do does not work without tremendous effort and energy. It's be not that our guys didn't have effort and energy. It's just that you would say -- and I don't mind saying this -- on most nights Auburn is going to play harder than our opponent. Many people have said it. I insist upon it. But it doesn't always happen.



So one of the things we tried to send a message to our guys yesterday is, look, what we do is not going to work unless we put forth a different level. For example, in covering Creighton, they're going to play five or six guys who are in the best shape of their lives, and they're going to go forever. They play really, really hard. If we don't match that, we're not going to be successful.

So it was a calling out. And we call each other out all the time, we hold each other accountable. It wasn't that we didn't have effort and energy. We just didn't have the kind of effort and energy that we are used to playing with and that we need to play with.

Q. Going off that, after those callouts, how was the mood from the locker room today as you get ready to attack the next challenge here in Creighton?

BRUCE PEARL: I thought it was great. Especially when it comes from within. I think it's great when the players can hold each other accountable. You know, everybody has to make sacrifices for the team. One of those sacrifices is going to your strengths and staying away from your weaknesses, playing unselfishly on the offensive end, which we have all season long. If you look at our offensive numbers and turnover ratio, we do a great job of sharing it. That's got to continue to be the case, but just not taking plays off on the defensive end. So I thought the guys -- we're in a good space.

Q. Coach, when you have a hard-nose defense and a complex offense, what's the key to establishing your pace and your game in a match-up like that?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, Creighton is sneaky good in transition. Like they really are good in transition, and they will run. They will take advantage of our transition defense. We're a pretty good offensive rebounding team, we will send guys to the glass. So they will attack us by making us pay at the other end. So we will have to be on fire in transition and not let them have that.

I think the key to playing at our rhythm is when our break is not there, we will be able to run our stuff. Creighton is not going to turn us over, they're not going to turn us over too much. We will be able to run our stuff. The question is are we going to execute it.

One of the keys to playing Creighton is you've got to make open shots. If you take that thing too far close to the rim, you're going to be met with something you're not going to be very happy with.

Q. Bruce, it seemed like the best minutes y'all had it was Denver and Tahaad together, and I know they

have played together throughout the season. What's the advantage of having your two point guards out there together, especially maybe tomorrow in a match-up against Creighton where they have so much experience and their length and the way they like to run their defense.

BRUCE PEARL: Yesterday Tahaad's speed and quickness was really required because Alabama State was so fast and quick and small. We had a little jitterbug out there that could kinda off-set their speed and quickness.

I think the fact that whether you have -- let's say you have Miles Kelly and Denver and Tahaad out there together, you've got three play makers. Tahaad can play make, Denver can play make and so can Chad. That makes whatever offense you are running that much better. So I think right now -- you look at our top seven guys, our top seven guys have played really, really well.

I would like for our guys to be able to come off the bench and continue to help us more, and Hudson and those guys have been good coming off the bench. They will need to play well. We don't know about Chris Moore's status tomorrow. We hope he will be able to play tomorrow. We won't know until game time whether he's going to be able to play.

Q. You talked about a 2 for 1 weekend for Auburn fans. Do you have a message for Tennessee fans that will also be in the building?

BRUCE PEARL: I appreciate that. I had thought about that a little bit. I think because Tennessee and Auburn are in different regions and because Tennessee and Auburn have played so competitively against one another -- because Coach Barnes and I have got a very close relationship and because I used to be the Tennessee coach and it was great to be a Tennessee Vol back in the -- I think Tennessee fans will cheer for us, and I hope they do.

But they won't be able to rebound for us or put balls in the bucket from the stands. But I think SEC will be represented well tomorrow.

Q. Bruce, Miles is 16 for 29 from deep playing in Rupp Arena this season. How much do you think it's this arena, this gym, these rims that he likes and what a weapon that is having a guy that's that confident right now?

BRUCE PEARL: From what I understand, Mark Pope is petitioning the NCAA to give him another year of eligibility to come after him in the transfer portal. That's what I would



do if I was Kentucky's coach. He's loving what he's seeing, and we will get Miles open, and he will bang shots. There are two things at play. One, I was happy for our guys, because only four guys on my team have won an NCAA Tournament game. Three at Auburn: Chris Moore, Johni Broome and Dylan Cardwell, and then JP won one at Furman.

The rest of the team has not won an NCAA Tournament game. And we got to the Final Four in 2019, but since that time we haven't been to the second weekend. So none of our guys have been past this moment right now. We have a huge obstacle in our way in Creighton. I was happy for the guys to get the one they got, and obviously we will be really happy for us if we can make it to Atlanta, because it will be the first time for almost all of us.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

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