

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - UCLA vs Tennessee

Friday, March 21, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Tennessee Volunteers Darlinstone Dubar Jordan Gainey

Felix Okpara

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Tennessee student-athletes Darlinstone Dubar, Jordan Gainey and Felix Okpara. Questions for our student-athletes?

Q. Jordan and Felix, having Zakai and Mashack as teammates, they were named as finalists for Defensive Player of the Year, and Tennessee is the only team with two among the five finalists. What is it they do that is crucial on the court to how well you have played on defense?

JORDAN GAINEY: Obviously we know how great they are on the defensive end and the impact of what they do. For me, it's their leadership. They have been vocal throughout. Ever since the summer, we have been harping on what our goals were, and those were the two guys that are really vocal about what we really wanted to get done this year.

And it didn't start -- for the main guys that -- you know, our new guys that came here, they knew as soon as they set foot on campus what we really wanted to do and they brought everything they could.

FELIX OKPARA: I would say for both of them, they set a standard for Tennessee basketball defensively. If it's dive on the floor, be in the gaps, try to make those 50/50 plays, they do a great job of doing that, and guarding one-on-one. You know, I think for us as a team, having two guys on the team that can do that, it makes our job way easier, just focusing on rebounding and just being in our gaps.

Q. All three of you, what have you seen from UCLA so far? I know this is a quick turnaround and they're obviously not a team that y'all have played. How much



have you been able to learn so far?

FELIX OKPARA: We watched film on them obviously, and they're a really good driving team, and also they're really good at rebounding. So for us, it's try to eliminate the drives and eliminate the second-shot opportunities.

On offense we've got to attack, get open looks and threes, and try to get them moving around the perimeter so we can get more inside touches.

JORDAN GAINEY: Their tempo isn't really fast, they play a slower-paced game on the offensive end. But they're efficient. They try to play through the post. So limit their post touches and post perimeter threes and we'll be good. And we're going to stick with our same defensive style, make sure we get at 'em, and be effective on the offensive end.

DARLINSTONE DUBAR: They're a great team. Every team came here to win. They're going to play hard. They get out in transition. It will be a good game, but I know we will be prepared.

Q. Felix, how many guys have you played against in your career that are not just maybe a little taller but significantly taller than you? Not many of those people exist in the world. How many have you played, a guy with that height?

FELIX OKPARA: I would say two. I played him last year when I was at Ohio State, too. Probably just him and Zach Edey. So he's pretty tall. It's definitely going to be a battle inside, and I gotta do my job and just try to block out. Try to get early positions to an offensive rebound, because they're so big in there. They got good length and for me, it's trying to get more offensive rebounds than them.

Q. All of you, obviously had a good amount of Tennessee fans here last night. Was curious what you think the crowd will be tomorrow and your pitch to the fans in Knoxville to make the drive up to support you guys?

DARLINSTONE DUBAR: Our fans always come out and support. Tomorrow I'm expecting the whole arena to be packed out with orange. I don't want to see no blue or



yellow. I just want to see orange, gray, and I want the arena packed in all Tennessee fans.

JORDAN GAINEY: Yeah, you know, we have the best fans in the country. They know what to do. They're going to show out and we're going to see a lot of orange just like we did last night. They came out and supported. And whenever we needed it the most, they came through. And we're going to need it for tomorrow as well.

FELIX OKPARA: Like they all said, we definitely need the support, and I think the crowd really plays a big factor in us, how we play. They give us energy when we are not -- those spurts when we aren't going off or not getting a defensive stop. They're definitely going to show out. They always do that, they come support us, and that's what we love about our nation.

Q. Any of you can answer. I'm going to follow up on that question. I asked Bruce Pearl earlier about Tennessee fans since they're going to be in the building rooting for Auburn because you guys aren't in the same region and you wouldn't play potentially until the Final Four. So do you have a message for Auburn fans that are going to be in the building tomorrow potentially rooting for the SEC, which means you guys?

JORDAN GAINEY: We love all the support that everyone brings for Tennessee. And if you're wearing orange, you know, show your love and support and turn out for us here tomorrow in Lexington in Rupp Arena.

THE MODERATOR: Great job, guys, we appreciate your time.

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