

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Liberty vs Oregon

Friday, March 21, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

**Oregon Ducks**

**Dana Altman**

**Jackson Shelstad**

**Nate Bittle**

Media Conference

Oregon - 81, Liberty - 52

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

DANA ALTMAN: I thought the fellas came out with a lot of energy. The early threes kind of got us going, but I thought our defensive activity was really, really good. We moved the ball. We made some plays for each other there. Jackson and Kee, Nate hit some threes. I thought the plays that Jackson made right before half, we went 2 for 11 there and he got a 15-footer down and then he made a really good play diving on a loose ball and picking it up.

So then the second half we just -- when we went into Nate, a lot of good things happened, 14 points, 10 boards. So all in all, I thought our energy was really good, our activity defensively was good. This is a team that you don't win 28 games by accident, and they can really shoot it, but I thought our activity and our challenging their shots kind of got 'em out of their rhythm. Their ball movement wasn't the same as it's been throughout the year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

**Q. Jackson, take us through you that sequence at the end of the half that Coach just referred to because it kind of epitomized just how big a gap there was in talent and game IQ tonight. At what point did you realize after the first jumper that when they're trying to neutralize the 2 for 1 by taking the time on the inbound, that you can make a play defensively?**



JACKSON SHELSTAD: I saw him throw the ball in. He kind of rolled it, so I knew if I dove on it, I could get there, so I just jumped on it, and I think they were trying to save some time on the clock, but we got the ball, then we got another possession, hit a shot. So it was just a good way to go into the second half.

**Q. Jackson, that effort transition three you had, I think it was on your guys' third possession or so, what's it feel like to hit that shot and get that rhythm early and was that a shot that Dana liked from you? It kind of seemed like he yelled something at you after that.**

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Yeah, I thought I had space, just tried to get my feet set. I work on those shots a lot, so just try to trust it. And then, yeah, when you hit your first couple shots, obviously it just gives you some confidence, and my teammates did a really good job just getting me open looks as well.

**Q. Nate, you knew you would be bigger than anybody on the floor tonight, but you had the one sequence in particular where you just bulldozed right through a man. You don't get to do that very much in the Big Ten. What did that feel like here and in this venue with the home crowd to literally just push your way through people tonight?**

NATE BITTLE: It's a physical game. Altman tells us all the time that growing up, if your mom told you it's not a physical sport, it is. So we take that into consideration and it's just one of those games where they didn't have anybody that was bigger than 6'-8", 6'-9", so I knew that crashing the glass and going to the rim aggressively was what I needed to do.

**Q. Jackson, the last game you guys played in March was that Creighton game. How much was that in your mind during this game and how much was it just about tonight?**

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Yeah, I mean, that one definitely hurt. We had our chances. We had Dante and Jermaine really leading us and just trying to carry over that leadership from the experience I got last year in the tournament. We have a lot of guys first time playing in the



tournament, so me, Bam, TJ, just got to bring leadership from last year with our experience.

**Q. Guys, your first initial thoughts on an old friend, Arizona, in the second round, meeting them?**

NATE BITTLE: Yeah, we know what we were going to have to do to beat them. It starts with defense and rebounding. We got to fight through screens like we did tonight, active hands, contest shots, deflections, and everything like that. I think if we play defense, everything will fall into place.

**Q. Nate, you guys over the last several weeks, couple of months, have been playing just unreal basketball. I've seen nine out of the last 10 games you guys have won. I know obviously every team in this tournament is great, but do you feel like with the way you guys are playing, that you can beat any team at this moment at this stretch right now for the next couple of games that you guys continue to move on?**

NATE BITTLE: Yeah, we went on that streak because we were playing defense, getting after people defensively, contesting shots, stuff like that, I just said. But the key to winning games is rebounding the ball and playing defense. Shots aren't going to fall every night, but we can bring that defense and get aggressive and make their ball handlers dribble the ball full court against pressure and stuff like that. So if we're active on the defense, it's something that's helped us win a lot of games this year.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll let the players go and take questions for Coach Altman.

**Q. To hold one of the top shooting teams in the country to, by far, a season low until garbage time a season low from 3 up until the very end there, how do you feel about your defensive effort when you knew that would be such a focal point?**

DANA ALTMAN: I thought our activity was really good. We felt like if we could get some hands on some balls and disrupt their rhythm, that we could really take away some of the really good looks they have been getting. I think the first five, six minutes we had seven deflections, and that's where we jumped out to that 18-2 lead. In that, they had one open three. They got one right in front of our bench there. But I thought our defensive activity was really good.

And then to start the second half they got a couple easy ones, but then I think TJ had, like, three steals in a row and kind of got our defense going again.

So they are a rhythm team. Just watching 'em shoot

before the game, I mean, they just -- their shooting strokes, they just throw 'em in. So I'm glad we were able to take 'em out of their rhythm and give ourselves a chance.

**Q. At that under 12 timeout in the first half, you subbed out four to five guys. Didn't look too pleased on the sideline. What was your thinking there? What was you looking to have changed at that point that you called that timeout and made the wholesale changes there?**

DANA ALTMAN: You know, I'm not sure which timeout, but I just thought at times our ball movement wasn't what it should be. We did have 14 turnovers. Most of 'em were just trying to go too quick. They just got a little too much optimism with what they were doing. We need to be a little bit more patient at times.

When we got that thing moving, they really had a hard time keeping up with us. If we just get it on one side and try to attack early -- I want to be aggressive, but we got to be smart. 14 turnovers is way too many. Again, it was either lack of activity or the turnovers. Those, at times, I thought we just let up just a little bit activity-wise defensively. And then, again, I would just -- I thought we made too many mistakes with the 14 turnovers.

**Q. The play that was referenced earlier where Jackson made the jumper, dove right before halftime to get the ball back, is that sort of -- can that be sort of a -- does that kind of embody the spirit you need to play with this time of year and how do you feel as a coach when you see that level of going all out?**

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I sure got excited, I mean, to see him layout like that and go after that ball. No, those are the kind of plays coaches like. I'm glad he hit the three then because now he'll do it again.

But, no, that was a heck of a play. It really was. We took the timeout there. We had a couple bad possessions right before then. They hit a three. I think it was 39-20. We went 2 for 1. I think we had 43 three or 44 seconds, and we just let Jackson penetrate and pop up and hit one. That was the call. We wanted to get a stop and get it back. So they realized what we were doing and tried to slow roll one in there, and Jackson picked up on it and just made a tremendous play.

So, no, it was something that I think any coach would love to see.

**Q. What do you say at the half in a game like this? Do you have to say a lot?**

DANA ALTMAN: Well, we were really pleased with our activity. I can't remember -- I think we were up 9 or 10 on the boards, so you compliment 'em on things that we emphasize. We wanted to be up on the boards and we were. Our activity was good defensively. Got on 'em a little bit about the turnovers. I think we had seven or eight at halftime, so we got to handle the ball a little bit better. Talked about the importance of the first five minutes, not letting 'em get going and get a bunch of easy shots.

So nothing different. We try to stay consistent with the same things we do during the season, same way we prepare. We don't change much. This was like a neutral game that we play in November. The guys realize the stakes and the media attention and everything, but as coaches, we try to keep it as consistent as possible and try to emphasize the same things we emphasize throughout the season.

**Q. You've talked about the bench already throughout the season, but 11 of your players scored, nine had at least five points. What kind of a luxury is it to go to a bench that deep in March?**

DANA ALTMAN: Well, you know, when we had the game in hand there, I didn't want to play anybody too many minutes. We got a game on Sunday, and the transition that Arizona exhibited today, you know, we're going to have a lot of running. I mean, they were pushing the tempo. We've played them a number of times over the last 14 years, so we know the pressure they're going to put on in transition. And so we're a little fortunate there that we didn't have to play guys 35 minutes.

**Q. You talked earlier this week about some of your seniors getting a first opportunity to play in the tournament, can you explain the anticipation you had for them and also I saw you at the end of the game smiling with Jason got the layup and Mookie a couple times. Can you reflect on those guys that don't get to play a lot getting their first crack at the tournament?**

DANA ALTMAN: You know, one of the hardest things is, Mookie is really talented, Jamari is talented, our walk-ons, Jason, Drew and Coop, they have been tremendous. I can't play 12, 13 guys. It's hard when you're talented not to get the opportunity. We played nine extended minutes, but it's hard to play 10 or 11. Those two are the least experienced guys we got, so never questioned their talent, it's just that we don't have injuries this year, we could have sure used Mookie last year when he was out all year and Jamari, those guys would have played a lot for us last year, just it's amazing how different seasons are. But those guys, to hang with it, be great team members, it says a lot about their character, and they have been great, whether

it's the scout team, whether it's energy on the bench. It's difficult when you're talented and feel like you want to play, it's really hard to show that character, because you're going through adversity and you want to play more, so they have done a tremendous job.

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