

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

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

PPG Paints Arena

**Oregon Ducks**

**Coach Dana Altman**

**N'Faly Dante**

**Jermaine Cousnard**

Media Conference

Creighton - 86, Oregon - 73

MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Oregon's head coach, Dana Altman.

DANA ALTMAN: Well, it was a heck of a game, and we had our opportunities, and we just -- we made more mistakes than they did. It was a great effort, especially by my two seniors, Jermaine and Dante. Played their tails off. And we just had our opportunities and made some critical mistakes and didn't finish it in regulation and got ourselves back into it in the first overtime, and then second overtime they popped a couple threes there to start it, and we just couldn't get a basket.

Creighton's got a really good team. Those guys have been together. They're really well coached, and Greg does a tremendous job. Thought it was a heck of a game, and we made some critical mistakes, and it cost us.

**Q. Dante, to play the final 38-plus minutes, to play 48 minutes tonight and have a career high in scoring, I realize this is after a loss, but how do you feel like you played, and that's probably the best game of your career? And I realize it's disappointing and a loss, but how do you feel about that performance, because that was -- that's hard to find.**

N'FALY DANTE: Well, I don't know if it's the best game of my career because we didn't win. I wish I could make that last free throw, that could be the game, but that's on me. There's a lot of things I could do to help my team, but I didn't.



**Q. For both you guys, just I know the loss hurts. Can you just describe the emotions of these last couple weeks and the ride that this has been?**

JADRIAN TRACEY: It's been a great ride and a great journey with these guys. We all bought in at the end of the season and really stayed connected. Dante is going to be hard on himself about that, but it was great working with him. He did a lot of things to keep us in that game, and we had our chances, but they played well.

N'FALY DANTE: It would have been great. We stuck together and we was there for each other. I think it was great.

**Q. You guys didn't get to the line at all. Dante, your free throw there at the end of regulation was like the first one of the game. What was it about their defense that was sort of allowing getting stops without getting in foul trouble?**

N'FALY DANTE: Well, I don't know. I really don't know. We just didn't do everything we were supposed to do, to be honest. I don't know what to even say. I mean this one just hurts.

**Q. When Jackson went out there in definitely the second overtime, I think a little bit into the first, what impact did that have on your all's defense, particularly as Ashworth was able to get free for some threes in the overtime periods? How did Jackson being out affect the defense?**

JADRIAN TRACEY: I mean, I'm not too sure. We had our chances, like I said. We just made some mistakes. He guarded all night very well, and yeah, it would have been great to have him out there, too.

**Q. N'Faly, what was it like battling Kalkbrenner tonight? You guys were epic up against each other. Can you just say something about that?**

N'FALY DANTE: This is basketball, man. Just gotta play basketball. I mean, he's a very good player. I don't know. He's a really good player, so it's a little tougher.



**Q. N'Faly, can you speak about playing with Cousnard what it's been like and just the run that he had today a couple days ago and the last couple weeks?**

N'FALY DANTE: Been great. It's great to play with every single one of them, and they have me become a better player. I think every single one of them and my teammates deserve better than. I think we should win this one. It is what it is. But it's great. I'm going to miss it. It just hurts, man.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

**Q. Dana, you've coached for a long time. What your two seniors did from the second half on, not leaving the floor, Dante for the eight minutes even in the first half, so 38-10 unanswered, all 39 points second half and overtimes. How do you even put into words what you just got out of those two?**

DANA ALTMAN: They played their tails off. Absolutely no doubt about it. Dante, 28 and 20, and Jermaine, we needed some more contributions from some other guys. Jackson going down with I think four minutes in the game left, he's got a knee sprain. And I hope it's not serious, but he couldn't move. And we thought about putting him back in, but he just wasn't moving. And I didn't want to take a chance if it's partially torn or something. I didn't want to take a chance.

So that hurt a little bit with ball handling. Jermaine had to do even more, and we just made some critical mistakes. Up four, you can't foul in transition and give them two free throws. And then Dante just missed a big free throw. That's my fault. I had a freshman throwing the ball in. And I'm as much to blame as anybody. I made some coaching mistakes, and I'm going to have to live with that, because those two guys, last -- everybody talks about the last couple weeks like that's the only time those two guys played. I mean, they've been playing their tails off all year. We've been riding them all year. So it was special to watch those two guys. Just -- we had our chance. Like I said, we had our chance. We just made some critical mistakes there in regulation. And that's on me.

I don't want to take nothing away from Creighton. They're a really good team, and they know what they want, and they've played together and their execution of stuff. But our guys battled. We tried to guard. And rebounding, you know, I was a little disappointed there. I thought we could have rebounded the ball a little better. And that was basically the difference in the game. They had 21 second-chance points. We had 14. And it was 14 to 2 at

half. So that was a big difference.

**Q. You kind of touched on it there, but can you just explain the importance that Dante and Cousnard have meant for this program the whole year and just kind of building what you want for next season?**

DANA ALTMAN: Well, when you coach, you admire guys that fight through adversity, that love the game and fight through adversity. And both those guys had some knee problems throughout their career, and they just kept battling, and they played through it and rehabbed, get back.

You know, I felt bad for Dante and Jermaine just to put such a load on them. Just would have been nice to get them some help and prepared our other guys to step up a little bit more. And that's on me, too. So we really put a lot on Jermaine there late. He had to do everything. When Jackson went down, we had no other ball handlers. And he tried to fight through it. But just came up a little short.

**Q. Dana, looking ahead into what you do address in the off season, what is the priority in terms of talent acquisition? Is it center, defense, ball handler? When Nate says he's coming back, Q says he's open to it, and I'm sure the three freshmen are in a good spot. That's a nice nucleus to start with. How do you feel about how it looks on paper right now and what do you feel like you need to address?**

DANA ALTMAN: James, this isn't a good time to talk about that. We got a lot of work to do. It's a new age. I don't know who's coming back, who's going. You know, my focus was on this team. I owe it to the guys I got. The assistants are working on recruiting some guys, and they put me on the phone with a few, but I recruited these guys, and they deserve my full attention, and now I'll stay up all night thinking about where we're going to go next year and how we're going to figure things out. But you lose two kids like that, holy cow, I mean, we rode those two guys so hard. We're going to have to have some of those young guys step up. They're going to have to make some big dang jumps. That's for sure.

**Q. What's this year been like for you and the way it ended, I know, tonight, but the last couple weeks and how it ended, how satisfying, how would you describe this year for you?**

DANA ALTMAN: You know, up and down. I was so excited at the start of the year. We had so many guys, and I thought, man, depth is going to be our calling card. And then I thought we got Nate and Keeshawn back there and Nate goes down and Keeshawn dislocates that ankle. And

then our depth goes. So it's been a roller coaster. I was so excited all summer and in the fall watching the guys. We got Dante and Nate. We got two seven-footers. We got K.J. at 6'10". We got Bam and Kario, good athletes. And Mookie is going to get back. Jesse was shooting the ball good. Had quick guards in Keeshawn and Jackson. So as a coach you get really excited, you know. Then they start dropping a little bit and you're like, oh, now what do we do? And Dante's got knee surgery and out ten weeks. And you guys that watched the game tonight, you're like what did you do in those ten weeks?

But the other guys stepped up and played okay. And so there was a lot of up and down, but I loved working with this group. They were really good. I don't think they knew how to take me. The trust level, you know, I'd bite them a little bit and they'd think it's personal. I'm just trying to get them to play a little harder. So I got a lot of work to do, got a lot of work to do with guys.

But I want to make clear. They're a good group, and I'm more mad at myself than I am at them. And I couldn't be any prouder of Dante and Jermaine and what they meant to this program and this team and their toughness, you know. I mean they were dead tired and they were just -- they were grinding. You know, they didn't want the season to end. That's a quality that you just -- as a coach, you just love. But I wish Creighton all the best. I hope they get to the Final Four. It would be great for that program. I'd love to see it. They'll swing away. They got a lot of shooters, and they hit some big threes tonight. And we just lost them a couple times, and it cost us.

But, again, I wish them all the best. We made mistakes; they didn't. And they found a way to get us, and it will be a long off season, but we'll figure out a way to try to put a team together and be ready to go next year.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.

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