

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - North Carolina vs Ole Miss

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Ole Miss Rebels

Chris Beard

Jaylen Murray

Sean Pedulla

Media Conference

Ole Miss - 71, North Carolina - 64

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Chris Beard.

CHRIS BEARD: It kind of starts with our respect for the opponent, a team that really hasn't lost a game since Christmas besides Duke. We knew we were going to get their best shot. We knew their run was coming in the second half.

A really good win for us. A lot of respect for our opponent. First half was one of our best halves of the year. That's what it takes in the NCAA Tournament. Second half, we'd like a lot of things back. Give North Carolina credit. We knew the comeback was coming. Sure enough, it did.

Was really impressed with the poise of our guys in the last couple minutes of the game. As a coach, you never want to be out of time-outs. We had to use some of the time-outs to solve some issues in the second half.

I thought we did a good job late, executing on offense, getting the ball where we wanted it to be and getting the ball inbounds even when we didn't have time-outs left.

We came here to Milwaukee. We set it up as a four-team tournament. We're halfway through it, 40 minutes to the Sweet 16. Proud of these guys in our first victory in this year's tournament.

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



Q. Sean, what's going through your mind after that R.J. Davis 3-point play gets it down to two. You end up with the ball, take the big shot. Take me through that last play and what's going through your mind.

SEAN PEDULLA: Yeah, coming out of time-out, we had something drawn up. And kind of was going through my mind was just get a good shot off. Play confident. Don't think too much.

He went under the screen, so I just shot it. That's really it.

Q. Sean, you made some big shots in your career. Is that the biggest?

SEAN PEDULLA: I think on this stage, yeah, especially because at that point in the game, they were on a huge run and we needed that bucket. So I just, like I said, shot it with confidence and the rest was in God's hands.

Q. Sean, I know you have bigger goals than just winning one game. This is the first victory in the tournament in ten years. What does it mean to be part of a team doing these sorts of things?

SEAN PEDULLA: It's special. I love it for the Ole Miss fans and our family and friends. I especially love it for this group of guys that I go to battle with every single day.

This coaching staff puts in countless of hours so that we can succeed as a team. There's a whole lot of sacrifice that goes into a game like today. Very happy for Ole Miss. Like you said, the first tournament win in ten years. But there's a lot of hard work and sacrifice that goes into that success. So I'm happy to see that.

Q. Sean, were you surprised by -- you know, they were icing screens, then they go under it. Were you surprised by some of the coverages you saw today in ball screens?

SEAN PEDULLA: Again, the coaching staff does a great job of preparing us for each game. So we saw countless clips of how they cover ball screens in the middle of the floor and the side of the floor. So I saw that coming.

We kind of went through what would be open, short roll or



loop behind. So coaching staff did a great job of preparing us for that situation.

CHRIS BEARD: Any questions for Juju, the pride of the Bronx? His fourth NCAA Tournament win today.

JAYLEN MURRAY: We got Sean Pedulla, man. Ask all the questions of Sean. I'm happy to be part of the team with Sean Pedulla, man.

Q. In addition to that, Jaylen, Chris referenced the poise. What led to the poise late?

JAYLEN MURRAY: Just having a veteran team, something that we talk about all the time. We know that North Carolina was a super talented team, so if they went on a run, it's not about panicking, just staying poised. We have a veteran team, we've been through this before. Just calm down, execute plays, and get stops.

CHRIS BEARD: Did you see that demeanor and calmness? That's what I have to deal with every day. Juju, what's going on in English class? Coach, I got it.

Q. For Juju and Sean, if you would, maybe the overlooked part of this with how it ended is what Dre Davis did early. What did that start mean? He was 6 for 6 in the first half. For him to come out on fire like that, how did that change things early?

JAYLEN MURRAY: Dre Davis is a dog. It's just that we've just got to get it out of him all the time. Once we get it out of him, he's capable of anything -- rebounding, getting blocks, scoring. All the things Dre did today, we need him to do that continuously. We've been asking him for a long time now.

SEAN PEDULLA: To piggyback off that, when Dre is playing at his best, he's a damn good player. He's the type of player, you play with and he makes a play and you're like I'm glad he's on my team.

First half he got hot, but again, like Juju said, he was affecting the game more than just offensively. He's the centerpiece of our defense with his vocalness and his ability to guard like 1 through 5. He's a special player, and he showed it today.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you're released. Thank you. Good luck Sunday.

Now we'll entertain questions for Coach Beard, please.

Q. Chris, I know rebounding's been up and down, a search for consistency, but a lot of key defensive

rebounds in the last two minutes. What did that mean to see those guys get that in those moments?

CHRIS BEARD: Interesting thing. I don't know if we've been beat this year when we out-rebound the opponent. Seems like we could figure out a way to always out-rebound our opponent. It's been a challenge this year.

I thought we were very competitive on the glass. Again, the last several minutes of the game being played without a time-out, I thought the veteran players did a good job. We switched defensive coverages a few times without a time-out and then were able to execute at least enough offensively to get the right guy the ball in the right spot.

Q. Oxford's a long way from Milwaukee, but you had a lot of Ole Miss people show up, especially behind your bench. Talk about the loyalty of the fan base.

CHRIS BEARD: It's a special place. Anybody that hasn't been to Oxford, everything you've heard in a positive light is true. It's a college town. We've also got a great state in Mississippi that -- kind of a state divided, but we've got our share of Ole Miss fans.

Our fans travel not only for basketball but for other sports as well. It wasn't surprising but definitely appreciated. Our players were talking about it before the game when they went out for the first warm-ups. So thank you to everybody who came and supported us today. I know it's not easy. It's real time, real expense, real money to get here. So we never take it for granted.

We're in our second year at Ole Miss. We're building something special sooner than people thought, but a big part of it is our fan base, period.

Q. Chris, you mentioned that you knew the run was going to come. Why were your guys able to avoid panicking, especially when you guys weren't scoring for such a long period?

CHRIS BEARD: It's a good question. I think if I'm not mistaken, the last game Carolina played before the play-in game was another comeback type thing against Duke, maybe. So we had mentioned that several times in preparation, that it's going to be a long game. It's a game of runs.

So in those moments, we were just reminding everybody of the preparation we had. I did think in some of those runs, we got some good shots around the basket and didn't make them. They hit a couple. I think both teams benefited from fortune.

R.J. Davis doesn't miss that many good looks. We were fortunate there. But I think the same thing could be said for us. We felt like we got a lot of good shots, especially in the second half, that just didn't go in.

Our guys had a lot of poise down the stretch, no doubt about it. Again, give Carolina credit for a courageous comeback.

Q. You mentioned it a little bit right there, and you mentioned Juju being a cool customer. Seems like Sean is that way as well. Just how important is it this time of year to have guys who can keep calm and stay cool in those late decisive moments?

CHRIS BEARD: Our word is poise, stone-faced, don't get too high or too low. We have a veteran team. Sean and Ju have both played in the NCAA Tournament before. I think that showed early. They did a great job getting some of their teammates that haven't played in this tournament before prepared.

I think a lot of things about our team. I think we looked poised at times. We were composed when it mattered most. I didn't see anything about our team today that looked like there was any fraught in our program. I didn't see that.

I saw a team that had a good season in the SEC just beat North Carolina in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Coach, obviously it's a six-game fight. You guys are here to compete on Monday night. But can you speak on what it's like for your seniors to get a win here tonight?

CHRIS BEARD: We set up every tournament, four-team tournament. We came here to win two games. It's going to be challenging. Our next opponent is one of the best teams in college basketball.

For our players, we've got so many seniors, guys fourth, fifth year in college basketball that have literally checked every box in their careers. Several of them hasn't participated in the NCAA Tournament. We felt that pressure and urgency all the way back from the summer, through our nonconference schedule. To get here, we're really happy to be here.

Now the message is, hey, our story isn't that we made the NCAA Tournament. Let's make a run in this tournament. Really, really pleased and happy for our seniors.

Q. Chris, on that, so much has been made of the roster being so senior-heavy. I don't know if this is a

dumb question or not, but are seniors automatically kind of more composed in those moments, or is there something about this group of seniors that has that, that maybe not all even senior teams do?

CHRIS BEARD: Definitely not automatic. If there was something automatic in recruiting or coaching, we'd do it every time.

I've had some seniors before that weren't associated with poise, but this group is a little bit different. We've got really mature people off the court as well, guys that handle their business and have great balance in their lives.

So, you know, when the season starts, you always go over your strengths and your weaknesses, your weapons or your threats. Consistent across the board, from players to coaches, we did think that one part of our identity this year could be our composure and experience. We've got a group that really never gets too high or too low. That's been a good thing all year.

Q. I think this is Ole Miss's first time beyond the round of 64 since '13. What gave you the confidence this program was capable of making this kind of run when you decided to take this job?

CHRIS BEARD: This is my second year at Ole Miss, and some of our players, it's the first year.

We certainly respect and are knowledgeable about the past in our program. We feel the opportunity and the pressure to do things for our fan base. But in terms of how history relates to our team, again, we've got a lot of players. It's the first season at Ole Miss. So, again, four-team tournament. We're 1-0. Big opportunity on Saturday -- or Sunday, excuse me.

Q. You mentioned that being one of your better first halves of the season. I'm curious, especially, the outside shooting you came out with. I think you made 6 of your first 7 beyond the arc. How much does that set the tone and maybe take the pressure off in this kind of environment?

CHRIS BEARD: It really helps. Basketball is a lot easier game when the ball's going in. We had a similar game in Nashville just a few days ago against Auburn, I believe, where we just couldn't get one to go in. If we'd have shot that day like we shot tonight, might have been a different outcome.

In terms of shooting, we're looking at getting the right shot by the right person. Are we disciplined in our footwork and follow through? Was the pass a strike and not a ball?

Obviously, we hit some shots, but our shots were assisted for the most part in the first half. A lot of things go into that.

Q. Chris, I know you'll talk about this a lot more tomorrow. Iowa State on Sunday -- I know you were focused on North Carolina. Have you had an opportunity to think about them or had a chance to watch them over the season?

CHRIS BEARD: They've got a great coach. T.J. and I have gone at it before. Certainly, our years in the Big 12, the program he's built there and sustained, it's real.

I watch a lot of college basketball throughout the season. So I've seen his team play several times. I haven't started any preparation on that game, but we had staff members working on that ahead of time.

But I know this. One of the best teams in college basketball, period. Defensive identity, really good coach, and a lot of talented players that we've been following for years, both coaching against them, recruited some of those guys.

This will be a real round of 32 game. These are two teams that, you know, are worthy to get in the second weekend. We'll have to play our best 40 minutes. We'll have to play better than we did today for 40 minutes to be successful on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate it. Good luck Sunday.

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