

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Troy vs Kentucky

Friday, March 21, 2025
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
Fiserv Forum

Troy Trojans
Scott Cross
Tayton Conerway
Theo Seng

Media Conference

Kentucky - 76, Troy - 57

THE MODERATOR: An opening statement from Troy coach Scott Cross, please.

SCOTT CROSS: It was disappointing to lose the basketball game. Our guys played hard. They went on a run. Our intensity dropped a little bit.

I'm so thankful to the good Lord to have this opportunity for these guys right here, Tate and Theo, the rest of the guys on our team. I want them to remember the great things that happened throughout the year. I think our guys believed that they could win the basketball game.

But, again, Kentucky's a really good basketball team, and the size obviously affected us a lot. Amari Williams plugging up everything in the paint was hard for our guys. I think we were able to get some good looks off the pick and roll, but you go right in and have got a seven-footer shot blocker sitting in the paint, and that's hard to deal with. When you kick it out and your 3s aren't falling, it makes it difficult to score baskets.

But, again, I'm so thankful for our guys and what they've done this season. It's been 17 years since I've been to the NCAA Tournament. I don't take that for granted at all.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Questions for the Troy student-athletes.

Q. Tayton and Theo, you're both seniors. What does it mean to go to the NCAA Tournament in your last



season?

THEO SENG: It's everything to us. Ever since we were kids, it's what everyone dreamed of. It's a dream come true. Especially to do it in our senior year, it's an honor playing for Coach Cross and the rest of the guys. It was an amazing experience.

TAYTON CONERWAY: Definitely just blessed to be here. It's the type of stuff you dream about in the driveway when you're shooting last-second shots. Now you're under the big lights. Definitely a blessing.

Wanted to take a second to thank Coach Cross. Out of JUCO, not a lot of coaches gave me a chance. They looked over me, which is understandable. But Coach Cross gave me a chance to come out and show what I can do, and I appreciate him for that.

SCOTT CROSS: One of the greatest decisions I ever made, Tayton.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys, appreciate.

Questions for Coach, please.

Q. Coach, at the beginning of the season, I'm pretty sure you ranked third in the preseason Sun Belt polls. There's been a lot of ups and downs this season. You ended with a conference regular season championship, a Sun Belt championship and a trip to March Madness. Talk to me about the season.

SCOTT CROSS: Overall, very, very -- one of the best seasons I've been a part of. In fact, it's the first time in my career that we've won both conference championship and tournament championship.

So these guys came together at the right time. We didn't play our best basketball tonight, but what they did during the last three or four weeks is absolutely amazing. We thought that we could do it. We believed we could do it, but, you know, we had a bunch of heartbreaking losses throughout the year. Again, five losses in conference by a total of 14 points.

Our guys put it together when it counted, and this is

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probably one of the best teams I've ever been a part of and very, very thankful to be their basketball coach.

Q. Troy is a long way from Milwaukee. It seemed like you had a lot of people show up tonight. Talk about the loyalty of the fan base and how special the fan base is, being that Troy is such a small school but they're willing to travel 15 hours.

SCOTT CROSS: We're so thankful for our loyal fans. They give us a great home court advantage. In the Sun Belt tournament, they were loud and proud and lifted us, especially in the championship game.

We saw them across the bench, and they were cheering their hearts out. Obviously, we had it close there in the second half before they pulled away and went on that 18-0 run. It was starting to get loud in there. They were making a difference.

We're thankful for each and every one. We have a whole bunch of them back at home in Troy that were cheering us on as well. We thank them, and they're a big part of our success this year.

Q. What will the off-season look like?

SCOTT CROSS: Probably give them a week off, just get back into the academic swing of things and get back in the routine.

And then probably the next week, we'll start lifting weights because we have to get bigger and stronger. Probably do that for two weeks, and then we'll get back on the basketball court and start working and building and trying to develop these guys. I think player development is one of the things that has helped us get where we are and so you can't take too long off.

The guys got to get back in the gym and work on becoming better basketball players and working on the skills. We have a great staff that's always in the gym with them. Our guys do work. We have a great culture of guys putting in extra time. Didn't necessarily show today in the way we shot the basketball, but their time paid off for us throughout the season.

Q. In that 16-0 run, Collin Chandler and Brandon Garrison came off the bench and scored 14 of the first points in the run. When those guys step off the bench, just how dangerous is Kentucky. What did you see specifically from those two guys in scouting?

SCOTT CROSS: We knew they could shoot. You have to have to pick your poison with how you defend them. Brae

was the focus of our attention in terms of the 3-point line. Almonor was another one we knew could flat-out shoot it. We know those guys are capable.

Anytime you hit 3-point shots in the NCAA Tournament, it energizes your team. Once they hit the shots, their defense got a little tougher. Probably our defense dropped down a little bit. They're backbreakers. You can't give up dunks, you can't give up lay-ups, and you can't give up 3s. Teams can make all the 15-foot shots, all the free throws. Those don't really change the momentum.

But the back-to-back 3s, those are backbreakers, and it energized their team. It demoralized our guys a little bit because they pulled away and got it to 15, 16 points, and I didn't think we had the same level of grit or toughness for about four or five minutes there. Our guys made another run, and they did fight to the very end. I'm proud of them for that.

Q. Scott, you mentioned the seven-footer, Kentucky's seven-footer, Williams. You had film on him. You knew he would be tough. When you get out on the court, maybe what unexpected challenges did they pose for you guys?

SCOTT CROSS: His size and defensive ability was greater than what I expected. You see on film that he's a big old guy, but, yeah, standing next to him, he really defended the rim well. I felt like we were able to get some advantages off the pick and roll to where we could maybe play 2-on-1.

But then you drive it in there and he's blocking shots or he's bluffing and getting back and he's walling up guys, it just makes it really, really difficult. About the only thing you can do is pick and pop.

Jackson Fields did that a couple times. He got a 3 or 2. But you can't live and die by a 5-man picking and popping the entire game. It's hard to win. He definitely gives them rim presence, a rim protector, would allow them to be a lot more aggressive. They can make mistakes defensively if they've got a guy like that.

Carr too is a great team defender. He's got size and length. It makes it tough.

Then Butler does a great on the ball. I think he gives them a big lift in terms of their defensive DNA. Oweh is a good defender as well. So those guys collectively, I think, you know, they played a really, really solid defensive game. If they can continue to play at a high level defensively, they're as good as an offensive team as I've seen throughout -- I watched a lot of college basketball.

I've made the comment earlier I think Rothstein first and then Scott Cross second in terms of how much basketball they watch. And Kentucky can really, really score the basketball.

SCOTT CROSS: Thank you.

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They have probably, in Brea, one of the best shooters in the country. He has to be a top three in the country. You have to respect that. That opens things up for so many other guys. Tough to prepare for, for sure.

Q. This was a team that brought back 12 players from last year's team. Any level of this sport, that's not a common thing. Now that you've reached the end of the road of this season with that group, any kind of raw emotions, feelings, thoughts about what the team will mean to you? What do you think it might do for your program going forward in terms of continuity with the players in your program?

SCOTT CROSS: I told them in the locker room I'll be forever thankful for each and every one of them. The other team I was part of that went to the NCAA Tournament, they still have a group message. 20 years later, they're still texting each other and staying up. These guys have lifetime memories. They'll be friends for a lifetime.

It doesn't happen often in any sport, and Division I right now with the transfer portal, my boss is sitting right there. I think he understands too it's probably never, ever going to happen again in the history of Troy basketball, but it did happen this year. We wouldn't be here if it didn't happen. I'm thankful to him for all his help as well as his boss.

But the guys were close. I think their relationships, they saw how many guys were entering the transfer portal. They felt like if we stayed together, we could do this. So it's a beautiful thing that what you set out to do actually happens. It doesn't always work that way.

So, yeah, it definitely will help our recruiting. You can just see people are more interested in the program, recruits. We had a guy that committed to us. And I don't know, if we're not in the NCAA Tournament, does he commit right then? I don't know. I think the effects will continue to happen for the next recruiting class, the next recruiting class, because now all of a sudden Troy is in that championship contender.

We talk about it. We had a lot of successful seasons, but until you go to the NCAA Tournament and you have trophies and banners, it's just a hope. So I think this season definitely changed the trajectory of Troy basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Cross, thank you.

