

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Oklahoma vs UConn

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Lenovo Center

## Oklahoma Sooners

## Porter Moser

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We're ready to start the Coach Moser press conference. Coach, could you please give us an opening statement.

PORTER MOSER: I know our guys, like everybody, is rally excited to be here, but we're also excited to compete.

With the grind we went through in the SEC, the resiliency these guys showed will be this team's trademark of how they've been resilient battling through this league, battling through ups and downs, and playing their best basketball right now.

**Q. I asked the players this, what are you looking forward to? It's been a couple years since you've been here in the tournament. What are you looking forward to the most tomorrow, whether it's the atmosphere or the pregame buzz or anything that goes into that?**

PORTER MOSER: This tournament, there's nothing like it.

The thing you look forward to, you work all summer, everything, to be on this stage to where it's win and advance. So what we're looking forward to is to competing, to competing to get a win and one at a time.

I think the guys are really -- especially guys like Sam and Jalon, who just got gut punched a year ago when we felt we were in and then there was five bid steals. But for us to get in, and I think what's been evident the last four days of practice is they're just not happy to just be here.

Obviously we knew the first step was getting in, and now I think they're really looking forward to competing.

**Q. So much talk about how physical the SEC was this year with the style of play. How did you see that as you went through it and how do you think that's going to translate to the tournament? Do you think it will**



**help, or maybe it could be a little iffy if the officiating is different.**

PORTER MOSER: You don't really know right now. I don't know the feel yet of the officiating.

But I will say this, going through the SEC, the positional size was absolutely phenomenal, like going right down from the 5, the 4, the 3. But where it was different that I felt, of any place I've ever been, any level I've ever been, was the offensive rebounding. The push to get offensive rebounds, that positional size, the physicality in the paint is what's going to be interesting in this league because there's some of the best offensive rebounding teams in the country in the SEC.

The way they just go get it off the glass, I think that's what this tournament is going to see too is the positional size, athleticism, aggressiveness on the offensive glass.

**Q. Porter, we know Sam Godwin provided an emotional lift the last couple weeks, but is there an update as to whether he might be able to play Friday night?**

PORTER MOSER: Sam has done absolutely everything you can do to get back. He's done probably almost three-a-days. He's right there. He did some stuff with the team today.

It's going to be hard for him. We'll see. We kind of started out saying, hey, 10 minutes, you can give us a lift. But you don't want to put him in a position -- for Sam, he says, this is it for me. I can't tell you how hard he's gone after it these last two weeks.

It's a sprained MCL, so it's an injury that takes a little bit of time, but we'll see. He did some stuff this morning. It's going to be hard for him to go tomorrow night, but I know we're going to wait and see how he does shooting around and also tomorrow in our walk-through.

**Q. Would you mind describing your experience with Jeremiah so far and just what makes him such a dynamic player in general and also over the last few months? What are some areas he's really learned to impact the game even more?**



PORTER MOSER: I'll tell you, my journey with Jeremiah started when we were recruiting him at the Peach Jam, and all of a sudden he was going to reclassify, so he missed the whole summer. It's one thing to be a reclass, but another to miss that whole foundation of the whole summer.

My journey right from the beginning is I saw a man with no ego. I saw a young man who didn't come in here entitled. I actually didn't start him the first couple of games for that reason. I wanted him to fight at his young age, and just fought through it.

For him it's been a growth constantly. There's no one in the gym that's more. There's no one who watches more film on his own. We got off to a great start, and then we went into the league. Right out of the gate in the SEC, they're all older point guards. Go down the list, Wade Taylor, Zeigler, Sears, Pope. I mean, one after the other, they're older guys.

For him to fight through this, I just see growth. There was a big play in the Georgia game when he was getting to the foul line, he was making some baskets, he was scoring. Then on a big basket he drove to the left and like the whole thing converged. Instead of making it a tough shot contested, he kicked it out to Jalon Moore for the 3. He's seeing the floor, making the right play.

My thoughts about my journey and my relationship with Jeremiah is about a young man that's coming in who had dreams and wanted to reclassify. He has worked. He has worked, and he's not entitled. He means a lot to our team.

**Q. You talked about the offensive rebounding in the SEC. Do you see UConn as a similar type of team with that offensive rebounding?**

PORTER MOSER: Absolutely, that's a great point. We talked about that with how you can talk about -- and you do get caught up talking about the elite movement of UConn, just elite. We've seen it on the national stage here for many years winning the championship.

But their movement is as good as anybody that I've seen. They'll do multiple sets. So you get caught up in talking about staggereds, flares, flares, re-Po, but the thing is you have to rebound the ball. They absolutely are like an SEC team with the offensive rebounds, Reed in there, Karaban gets in there and gets his hands on, McNeeley goes. They have great positional size too.

So we know we've got to guard their actions in multiple efforts guarding their movement, but the job's not over.

The job's over when you get the rebound because you know they'll go get it.

**Q. Great scouting report on Connecticut, but when you break down the fact that they won the two last National Championships, Dan Hurley's got an amazing track record. You guys get back in the tournament, and this is who you play, that's who you get, kind of the proven commodity that they have, if you could talk about that.**

PORTER MOSER: Well, they've earned that respect. Everything that UConn has their way has been earned with the back-to-back National Championships, but that is in the past.

For us, our focus is on this year's team and all the confidence, all the respect we have for their players this year, what they do. They play tough. They play hard. They move it. They share it. They play the right way. And they've earned the right to say back-to-back National Championships.

For us, we're coming in here like we do every opponent. We've faced the Number 1 team in the country probably three different times this year. 14 of the 16 SEC teams spent time in the top 25 this year. So we're not stranger to playing a top team in the country.

Each time we go into it, we call it a confident respect. You have confidence in our ability to come in there and win the game. You respect their strengths. And UConn obviously has a lot of those strengths.

**Q. We talk about Jalon Moore a lot, but just go back to the initial time that you met him and how he's grown on and off the court and what he's meant the last two years.**

PORTER MOSER: Jalon was in the portal leaving Georgia Tech, and just like it is right now, there's a frenzy, and you're looking at stats and analytics, and Jalon averaged, I think, 4 or 5 points. I think he shot 17 percent from 3, making four 3s.

We just loved his positional athleticism. I loved his energy level. I related so much with his smile. He has this infectious smile and energy level, but then when he gets on the court, he's got this -- and he brings that to the game.

Some guys are athletic. I've said this. Rick and I used to talk about this, some guys are really athletic, but they don't play athletic. They don't get their athleticism in the game. Jalon gets his athleticism in the game -- the way he runs the court, the way we rebounds, the way he drives to the

basket -- and it's a credit to him.

His work ethic, for him to look at where he's gone from a guy that averaged 4 a game to being 17 a game, to being a two-year 40 percent shooter from 3, around that neighborhood, that's a tremendous jump in his skill level. He's going to be able to play after college, and that's a credit to his work ethic, his skill development.

Last year at this time, for those of you that don't know, we sat one-on-one, and he just said, I'm in, Coach. I'm in, I'm coming back. That's so much of an unbelievable joy to go through this and then to be -- to have him and our program rewarded to fight through this hard.

I'll always think of Jalon of fighting through hard because he wanted it so bad this year, and there was a moment this year where it was easy for everyone to quit, getting gut punched, and we just -- life lesson, staying with it, persistence, faith, resiliency, fighting through hard.

To get these wins down the stretch and play your best basketball, Jalon Moore has been the heart and soul of our team for that.

**Q. You mentioned obviously last year you guys thought you were in, devastating not to get in. What have you learned about yourself as a coach, and what have you improved about yourself as a coach this season and leading your guys back?**

PORTER MOSER: I've been in it a long time, and what I did is I leaned on my faith. My faith is my foundation for everything. My family is my foundation for everything.

365 days ago, or whatever that was, that Selection Sunday, was one of the hardest profession algorithm days to where you're sitting there and you're clearly in, and all of a sudden there was five bid steals and then we were out.

Just to go through that with those young people too because as a coach you have more and more opportunities. As young people, you don't. A guy last year like a Rivaldo Soares, who just wept because he wanted it so bad.

What I learned is that like everything, how you think is how you feel. How you feel is how you act. How you act defines you. How I thought is God's got a plan. There's a resiliency, an energy level you have to have in life to fight through hard, and there were a lot of hard times dating back to when we didn't get in.

Then when there's times we were getting punched in the face, losing some last second shots. But if you lean on

your faith and you lean on your family and you lean on your locker room, your friends, your teammates, your co-workers, those people are the ones that matter.

It wasn't that I learned that about myself, it was that those are previous lessons I learned on my life journey, that that's what you do when times are tough. That's when I'm happy for these young people because I think they learned that lesson too this year. A lot of young guys were in there fighting every day.

I swear everybody thought I was Bill Murray hitting the clock on Groundhog Day. We'd come out with a tough loss, and I would come in the locker room, guys, we have a path. We have a path. We've got to play better basketball, we've got to do this. They just kept on getting up, we just kept getting up and kept getting up and fighting through hard. That's why this team's story line is resiliency.

**Q. Porter, you talked about offensive rebounding. What do you see as a couple of keys for Oklahoma to win this game tomorrow night?**

PORTER MOSER: Multiple efforts on defense. You can't take a break. Like you have to have multiple efforts. You're going to have to guard a staggered. You're going to have to guard a flare. You're going to have to guard a shuffle cut and a flop on a stagger. You're going to have to have multiple efforts defensively.

You can't waste possessions. It always comes down to turnovers with that. When we're playing our best, we're high assist, low turnovers, so that's been a mantra.

They get to the foul line very well. We've got to be able to play really, really hard, guard all their actions without fouling, especially with their depth.

Just when you think of, when you watch UConn, it's that multiple efforts on defense and then end the possession, end the possession with a rebound against UConn.

**Q. You have two of the best -- some of the best freshmen in the country on the floor tomorrow night. What stands out about Liam McNeeley that has marked him as an NBA first round pick?**

PORTER MOSER: I've known Liam since I almost got the job at Oklahoma. He started in Dallas. Great kid, great family.

The thing that I've always seen is a combination of a tremendous toughness to compete. He's a competitor deluxe, combined with his IQ, feel for the game, and his skill level.

He can pass. He's got really good positional size at 6'7". His range on his shot and going to pass. I think his intangibles of feel for the game and toughness are just two really huge attributes that you can see that he doesn't look like a freshman with those attributes.

THE MODERATOR: We need to do one Zoom question.

**Q. Porter, you've been in the NCAA Tournament before and had some great runs, but as you mentioned, this is the first time for your team and these guys on your team, and I know you notice everything about them or you pay attention to what they do. Can you kind of describe what it's been like for them this week as they've gone through practice and they've done things to get ready and how much joy that's brought you and your staff to watch them to get ready to play in this tournament?**

PORTER MOSER: I tell you, every coach in their career will go through moments maybe almost every year, where you have some players, if you go through a tough time, you might have a young man not playing or this, and you say -- they say to themselves I'm not having any fun. Every coach will relate with that statement, I'm not having any fun.

What reminds me of this team is, when we were in the SEC Tournament and we beat Georgia and we were preparing for Kentucky. We had a late night, and the next morning they were on the terrace eating breakfast together, talking about the game, talking about that, and I stopped them. I said, this is what's fun -- competing, going through hard, and winning.

The grind to compete and win isn't fun. It's very hard to compete and grind. The fun is that, enjoying that success together. The fun, we talked about it, was after Selection Sunday, the pure joy of watching their face see it come up.

Then why I know they're such high character is walking them come to practice the next day and turn it on, turn that competitive nature. We went after it one of the hardest couple practices in the next days.

But that's what's fun. Fun is fighting through hard in life, fun is fighting through tough times with a group of people you love, and not just -- some people want it the other way around. You want the fun first. This group fought through hard, and what it was like to see players I love learn that and go through that and have that fun together and have them get rewarded because they kept on fighting and fighting.

Sometimes we weren't rewarded this year, but they learned that in life sometimes you don't get instant gratification. This group fought through it, and that's what I'll remember about this team is watching these last couple weeks unfold.

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