

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Lenovo Center

UConn Huskies

Hassan Diarra

Samson Johnson

Alex Karaban

Media Conference



Everybody is healthy for the most part. Everybody's been in practice, getting after it. So we've got a lot of momentum going into the first game.

THE MODERATOR: Samson, is there anything you could add to that?

SAMSON JOHNSON: No, not really. You've just got to go with it. I feel like a lot of guys have been battling since the start of the season, but I feel like we stayed together.

Like Hassan said, we have a lot of momentum going into this tournament.

Q. Hass, obviously next year is going to be a very new team here, a lot of new players. What do you feel like you've left and this group has left that's going to be picked up and kind of carried on by them? What do you hope at least is the legacy that's going to remain when you guys leave?

HASSAN DIARRA: Just speaking for the three guys up here, I would just say the last three years we've been through a lot, but we stayed resilient. I think that's the main thing. When adversity hits, how do you respond? Your resilience is going to get you through it and ultimately make you successful.

Q. This is for really anyone. When you win the last two years to get to this point in the season, does it feel more like pressure, or does it kind of take some of the pressure off just to get to this spot?

THE MODERATOR: Alex, could you answer that.

ALEX KARABAN: I don't think there's any pressure whatsoever. Having done what we've done the last two years, heading into this year there's no pressure.

This is a completely different team. We've been on a completely different journey. We just want to wear the jersey with honor and pride. If we do that, anything could happen when you play at UConn.

Q. Alex, to that point you mentioned obviously the last two years are different than this year. Is there any difference between thinking about the pursuit of a

THE MODERATOR: We're now ready to begin the Connecticut student-athlete press conference.

Q. Alex, you've been in the tournament now the last three years, each very different. Last year you were kind of everyone's favorite, maybe a couple years ago you were a 4 seed but kind of a trendy pick, this year you're an 8 seed, maybe more considered an underdog. Do those things change your mindsets at all, or is it really the same approach going into the tournament regardless of your position or what people are thinking or saying?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, it's always been the same approach this year, last year, the year before. We do the same preparation every single day. We treat every game like it's our last one. So we want to go out there and just really play our best basketball.

Our practices never changed the last three years, and everything that we do is on such a consistent basis. No matter if we're the underdog or everyone expects us to win, we're going to treat every day like the same.

Q. Any number of the three of you, this has been a season with a lot of players in and out of the lineup due to injury. It's been tough to find consistency and rhythm. How do you think you are as you're now set to begin the NCAA Tournament?

THE MODERATOR: Hassan, could you answer that first, please.

HASSAN DIARRA: I think we've got a good rhythm.



championship this year as being for this year's team versus thinking about it as being the three-peat? Are those one and the same? Is there any difference for you?

ALEX KARABAN: I don't think there's any difference. I think this year, we have so many new guys this year that want to experience the championship. At least for us, we want to help them experience that championship and let them get that feeling.

Then once that happens, then the three-peat stuff will start to sink in for us and how we can possibly make history.

We're going to do everything in our power to do that and just focus one game at a time until we get to that point.

Q. Just to go off that, is the three-peat something you guys talk about and embrace or is it just kind of focusing on today and tomorrow?

THE MODERATOR: Samson, could you answer that.

SAMSON JOHNSON: Going into the season, that was one of our goals, but we take it one game at a time. We don't want to put any pressure on ourselves.

If you don't win the next game, you don't advance. So that's kind of our mentality. Focus on the next game and go from there.

Q. Alex, what have you all learned this week about Oklahoma? What do you feel like are going to be the keys to this game?

ALEX KARABAN: Super talented team, super well-coached. They've played in the gauntlet of the SEC, so they're battle tested. So we've got to be ready from the jump.

They've got terrific players -- Fears, Moore, their surrounding cast. They're a really good team, super well coached. They get it after it defensively. So we have to really bring our A game if we want to beat them.

Q. Porter Moser, the Oklahoma coach, said that you guys are absolutely like an SEC team with the rebounding. Against a team in the SEC with how physical they've been this season, what's the game plan to just make sure you guys are winning the rebounding battle like you have all season long?

THE MODERATOR: Hassan, could you take that.

HASSAN DIARRA: We have to attack the glass with

reckless abandon. We have to get inside position. We have to want it at the end of the day. Playing in the Big East, and the Big East is pretty tough and pretty brutal, and we were able to win a lot of those rebounding margins.

We need to continue to do that, and that's going to be important to win.

Q. Hass, I know coaches often mention and the record has kind of borne it out that the style of play in the Big East is one thing, and when you guys get out of conference, a little more freedom of movement, you could do more of the things that you like to do. How much do you buy into that? Do you feel a different feel when you're playing out of conference, having been through those wars, that you're in a good position for these games?

HASSAN DIARRA: Yeah, I would say I agree with Coach. The Big East is very physical. The teams like to blow up a lot of our actions and make us play a slowed down game. When you get outside of the Big East, it's more up-and-down, more freedom, a lot of transition. I think that's beneficial for us.

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