

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Norfolk State vs Florida

Friday, March 21, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Lenovo Center

## Norfolk State Spartans

## Robert Jones

## Christian Ings

## Jaylani Darden

### Media Conference

Florida - 95, Norfolk State - 69

THE MODERATOR: At this time we will begin the Norfolk State press conference. We'd like to start with an opening statement from Coach Jones.

ROBERT JONES: First thing I'll say, I told you we wasn't a 30-point underdog. Nobody laughed at that, huh?

(Laughter).

The thing I'll tell you is that I'm happy for these guys. We walk out of here as champions. Out of 27 one-bid conferences, we were able to get a bid and become one of the last 68 teams standing for a National Championship.

Credit to these guys, credit to these young men, credit for everything they've done for the program.

Florida obviously is a great team. They had a tremendous first half -- well, first half of the first half, they had a tremendous first half. Once again, we didn't take their punch well, but I think that we showed after that punch the team that we really are, that we really should have been the whole game.

Once again, credit to Florida, and credit to these young men for getting to the Big Dance.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. At this time, we'll take questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Jaylani, Coach mentioned that you guys didn't do a great job early, but what flipped the switch there late in**



**the first half when you guys scored the final 11 points? And then for much of the second half as well.**

JAYLANI DARDEN: We just bought in. We believed in one another -- we believed in each other. We just looked at them as regular people, like they just like us. So we just tightened up. We just tightened our screws up, played more aggressive. That's it.

**Q. Christian, Jaylani, both of you have had really long and varied journeys. As soon as the game was over I saw both of you get in with the fans and thank the fans and just kind of be part of them. What does it mean to be part of this group and be part of that group of fans that supported you?**

CHRISTIAN INGS: They're a part of the program just as much as we are. The fans come everywhere they can be. They come to the MEAC tournament. They come to the away games they can get to. You know they're at the home games. They're just as vital to the program as we are. We want to make sure that they know they're appreciated for all the things they do for us.

JAYLANI DARDEN: I agree with him. That's all I'll say.

**Q. You guys are a veteran team here. I saw you huddle up at halftime before going into the locker room. I'm sure you chatted as a group before the coaches got in there. What was the message to each other?**

JAYLANI DARDEN: The message was we've just got to lock in. There wasn't too much to it, just lock in, tighten up what we need to tighten up.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, do you have anything to add?

CHRISTIAN INGS: We knew what time it was. We knew going into halftime we only had 20 minutes left in this basketball game. I was in the locker room trying to tell my guys we only got 20 guaranteed minutes. If we want anything more, if we want to stay together as a group, we've got to pick it up.

Coming out of halftime, we knew that we didn't start the



game we wanted to, but we was damn sure going to finish the way we wanted.

**Q. This is for Christian. After Coach took you out, you kind of took your time and embraced your guys. What was going through your head with this being your last game and everything like that?**

CHRISTIAN INGS: It was really a surreal feeling, man. It was just like I was overcome with a lot of emotions, you know. It's been a long journey. I've spent four years at Norfolk, probably my favorite four years I've had playing basketball in a while.

It's just a lot, and I got overwhelmed a little bit. I'm glad that my coaches and players embraced me at that point so that I could stay strong.

**Q. Christian for long stretches of the season, Brian was this team's leading scorer. How much did it hurt not having him on the floor for such an extended period this evening?**

CHRISTIAN INGS: I feel like the pain that we was feeling from him being in foul trouble was visible the whole game. You could see we were missing one piece the whole time, the whole game.

Credit to Brian, he had an amazing season, amazing. I really, I'm hurting that they had to do that to him on the floor with the fouls for this game. This is a very big game. I know he wanted a piece of this game.

Hey, you could see it, it was like we were missing like our right arm. We were missing our right arm on the court. It clearly came at a disadvantage for us.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for the student-athletes? Gentlemen, you're excused. Thank you very much.

CHRISTIAN INGS: Thank you. Appreciate you all.

JAYLANI DARDEN: Appreciate you all.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Jones.

**Q. This group hasn't been on the wrong side of a lopsided score like that very often. What did you say to them at halftime? Were there any specific adjustments you guys made?**

ROBERT JONES: The thing I said to them was just keep fighting. Like I told them, I think I said it at the last press conference, the most insignificant score is the halftime

score. It's like just keep fighting, keep fighting, keep fighting.

The second half, it was a five-point half. Unfortunately, that was the second half and not the first half. If we had played like that in the first half, this might be a totally different press conference right now.

With us, we didn't take that blow well. Like the guys said, we played the name too much than actually playing the player. We didn't start playing the player until the final four minutes of that half. I mean, the last media in the first half, they didn't score. It was 11-0 that last media, and it just kind of carried over.

The one thing I will say about Florida is that, every time we got it to about 18, 19 -- I think we got it to 17 one time. It was definitely 18 or 19 a few times -- it would go back to 20. They wouldn't waver too much. They kind of just played us even. They would score, we would score.

We finished the second half shooting 50 percent, and if I'm not mistaken, that's one of the best defensive teams in the country, but I guess we're one of the best offensive teams from a percentage standpoint. I guess nobody was playing defense in the second half. Everybody's just going in the second half.

We didn't get the stops that we needed in the second half to really put the pressure on them because you heard the crowd change. We came with 350 people, maybe a little bit more, but our ticket allotment sold out. Then at one point in that first half, it turned to like 13,000 people was cheering for us and things like that. We could never just get over the hump to get the crowd back with us.

**Q. I'll ask you the same question I asked Christian. How much of a burden was it to not have Brian out there tonight for so long?**

ROBERT JONES: It's tough. It changed the play calling. It changes the overall flow of the game. I'm used to having Brian Moore on the floor. I'm used to having 19 points over there on the right wing. They take away 19 points from the right wing, I guess a team like Florida, when you try -- well at least we tried to manufacture points in the first half a lot, it's tough.

Credit to guys like Jaylani, who's not a real big scorer. Credit to Chris Fields who stepped up to manufacture points when Brian was not around.

Second half, I was trying to get him out, but then he caught another foul, and it was pretty much all over for him.

**Q. Coach, you guys have been to -- you guys have won the championship 3 of the last 5 years, play-in game the first for the first year, and then the last two as a 16. How close do you think you guys are to bursting that bubble and getting past the 16, 15, to really make a run?**

ROBERT JONES: That's about what I said in the initial conference, I don't think we should even play Florida, to be honest with you. The thing is that people are going to say we lost by 26, but most of the 16s have lost by 26, and that could have been anybody in the country that lost by 26, but we shouldn't have been on that line.

I'll say it once again, and maybe it will stick home this time, out of all the 15s and 16s, we were the only ones with a top 100 win. We beat High Point at their place. We were the only loss for them. We beat Alabama State. We beat James Madison, who won their league. There's a whole bunch of stuff you could run down. We played Tennessee close as hell.

Credit to Florida, they're a great team, but we shouldn't have played Florida. We should have played somebody else, and I'll stand by that to the death. As far as moving the needle to the 15, it should have been moved already. It seems like every time it moves, the goal post gets a little further.

**Q. You mentioned that every time you guys got it to 17, 18, that Florida would do something. The one that I recall was when Condon banked in the 3 --**

ROBERT JONES: Oh, yeah.

**Q. I saw you sag. Just what were you thinking at that moment?**

ROBERT JONES: I don't really do too much sagging either. That was like heart breaking for me. He banked it -- it went off the glass, straight away. Clearly that's not a shot that was supposed to go in. Credit to the young man for making it, credit to him, but it was like a five, four, three, two, one type of shot. We had played pretty good defense for that possession. And he banks in the 3 to go back from 18 to 21. Hopefully he would have missed, maybe we would have gone to 15, 16. And now the momentum shifts to us, and the fear shifts to them a little bit.

We were never able to get it close enough that they got tight enough. I know Coach Golden was cussing out the refs, so maybe we got to them a little bit. But it is what it is.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very, very much.