

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

Friday, March 21, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Lenovo Center

## UConn Huskies

## Dan Hurley

## Tarris Reed Jr.

## Alex Karaban

## Solo Ball

### Media Conference



UConn - 67, Oklahoma - 59

THE MODERATOR: We are now ready to begin the Connecticut portion of the press conference.

We'd like to start with an opening statement from Coach Hurley, please.

DAN HURLEY: Credit obviously to Oklahoma and Porter. Porter is one of the best coaches, and he's also an incredible tournament coach when he gets in here.

We knew that we really had to guard today. They're obviously a top 20 offense in the country. Fears was everything that we thought he was going to be out on the court, thought we did a better job on him in the second half.

We survived some stretches of missing some offensive opportunities, but as much as our defense has played this a lot throughout the year, it advanced us today. We're just thrilled to advance and get a chance to play Florida.

THE MODERATOR: At this time we'll open up the floor for questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Alex, you ended up having the 3-pointer that ultimately gave you guys the four-point finish with about three and a half to play came on possession after the charge. What did you see on that play? What are you thinking when you saw that shot go down?**

ALEX KARABAN: I just saw I was wide open, and Tarris had a great screen. I see Fears closing out late, so I decided to take it.

I passed one up in the corner, and I should have shot that one too, and I wasn't going to make that mistake again.

Yeah, I just saw it and just had to let it fly.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for the student-athletes? Going once, going twice, done. Gentlemen, you're excused. Thank you very much. Congratulations.

Go ahead, fellas. We need those tomorrow. You can take those with you when you're done, but you're not done.

At this time, we'll go ahead and open it up for Coach. Let's start right here.

**Q. Dan, with this game seemed to be mirroring a little bit of your season with the angst, I suppose, and all the suffering you talk about. Can you talk about the churning emotions, particularly when they made the run up in the second half?**

DAN HURLEY: It was a microcosm of the season although we got it to nine, we missed a free-throw to complete the 3-point play, and they were starting to get some momentum and some separation.

But then I think we had maybe back-to-back possessions where we didn't finish pretty good defensive possessions and gave them multiple opportunities. One time we fouled a 3-point shooter. Another time we gave up a 3-point play to Wague.

But that's been a microcosm of the season, like whenever we've been able to start playing good basketball and getting separation, we've tended to shoot ourselves in the foot.

But the thing about this team is we're really battle tested, and we've had to fight so hard all year that we showed a lot of toughness down the stretch to execute some things and make some critical shots and make some critical stops.

Yeah, there was a lot of suffering going on.

**Q. I saw the play Alex was talking about, and I saw your reaction there, but I also saw when he passed up the shot, you said something to him. With a player as experienced and accomplished as Alex, what kind of message do you send in a moment like that? Because I know you said something.**

DAN HURLEY: Shoot the F'ing ball. (Laughter). No, I'm not sure that was the exact way I should have said it.

Alex is such a perfectionist and a smart player that like he knows the quality of shots. Just with this team and this roster that he has around him, he's got to take more contested shots. He's got to let it fly more.

He probably should have taken 14 shots in this game, and he cannot make that same mistake in the next one. When you play teams at this level, which is the best of the best in the tournament, like the windows are tighter. You're not going to get the perfect shot.

The only way we're going to win the game, especially with the way that Liam was shooting the ball at that point of the game, it's like Liam and Alex were both struggling. We were on life support. We needed one of them to step up and make some shots, and it was Alex.

**Q. Dan, you tied -- well, didn't tie, but you won your 13th straight NCAA Tournament game, not by double digits. Does it ever show how abnormal the last two years has been when this season is full of angst as the other question was? And obviously gutted out a win today.**

DAN HURLEY: I mean, listen, the last two years are just not -- I mean, like the -- there's only three teams that have done what we've done based on obviously the expanded tournament, where you're got to win six games.

So the only three teams that have been able to do that really since the tournament expanded are us, Duke, and Florida.

Just to be able to come here and, number one, to make the tournament and fight our way in, come out here and fight with some honor and get ourselves an opportunity to play one of the best teams in the country that reminds me some of what we put on the floor in Florida, but there's a lot of honor in us being able to face the last team that went back to back.

I think there's honor in fighting and getting to the round of 32 and making somebody put you down in this tournament

to end this run we've been on. The run we've been on -- you know, if it wasn't for all of my antics and viral moments, obviously there would be more focus on just what we've accomplished as a program the last three years. It's been an amazing run, one of the best runs anyone's had.

**Q. Preparing for Florida on Sunday, Monday the transfer portal opens. How do you kind of have a dual preparation for that in the next couple days through the next, I guess, part of the process?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we have a -- we do, we have an hour meeting with the staff tomorrow again talking about what our -- what the cap's going to look like and all those things. You're definitely having those conversations.

You have, I think, an idea of the players that you think really want to return and will be here. So, yeah, you're probably spending an hour, an hour plus every day on what's about to drop.

**Q. Dan, you still obviously have a number of guys who have played in a ton of games like this the last two, three years. When things got tense in the second half, how much do you think that experience was a difference maker, that separated you from them?**

DAN HURLEY: The championship pedigree, it's still there for us. There's a belief in the UConn jersey this time of year, you know, with the history of success.

It was obviously -- you know, Alex led the way, the guy that's a two-time champion, and then Samson and Hassan were huge.

Then it was like to see Tarris Reed step up and do what he did for us in his first tournament game, somebody's going to have to put us down in this tournament for us to go away.

**Q. Dan, you alluded to it yesterday, but very often when a team survives a game like this in the first round, they kind of loosen up a little bit going forward. You haven't really had that pattern here, but do you kind of sense that, that maybe now that you've got this behind you, that you might be a looser team come Sunday?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, we missed some good threes. We made some real bad decisions in the paint where we had lobs to Samson or we could hit the roller in Tarris and we forced some things. Obviously we turned the ball over a lot.

But we did lead for 38 minutes in the game. Yeah, I think

we're going to obviously -- we know the quality that we're playing against. Obviously we've got a chance to see Florida in some of the cross-scouts of watching Oklahoma, we were able to see them and prepare for that.

Yeah, I think we're a dangerous team. I think we're a dangerous team because, again, most people picked us, I think, to lose the -- probably to lose the first game. I don't think many people will give us a shot in the second one.

**Q. You just mentioned that Florida, what they're doing, reminds you a little bit of what you guys did. What part of the way they're playing right now reminds you of yourself?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean the bigs, it reminds me of kind of what we had with Sanogo and Clingan and Samson Johnson these last couple years where they just keep trotting out big, skilled, tenacious two-way players that are all over the glass.

Then they've got the -- they've got a lot of depth on the perimeter, and they're old. I mean, Clayton, who we obviously faced a couple years ago at Iona. And then we played this Florida team a couple years ago in Gainesville as Todd was just kind of just getting this thing going. Obviously the addition of Martin, I mean, they've got a lot of great pieces.

And he's done a great job, and their roster construction is really impressive. And the coaching job.

**Q. What's going to be the message to the guys to get them ready to take on Florida? You were mentioning a lot of fighter, a lot of underdog. Are you looking to instill some of that chip on the shoulder for a program that has two-time reigning champions has kind of been the hunted for a lot of the last two years?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think for us we're going to obviously seriously have to game plan on this one with them and be able to drag them into a half-court game and just try to slow down their attack. When they get rolling, it's wave after wave.

But for us, we come into this tournament as back-to-back national champions. Obviously for us we'll get these guys back, and I think they'll get a lot of confidence from advancing and a lot of energy and a lot of belief.

UConn and myself getting out of the first round of the tournament, once we get out of the first round, we've been pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Coach.