

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - UConn vs Florida

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Lenovo Center

UConn Huskies

Hassan Diarra

Alex Karaban

Tarris Reed Jr.

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We're now ready to start the UConn student-athlete press conference. I'd like to remind you one more time please make sure your phones are on mute. At this time, we'll go ahead and open up the floor for questions.

Q. Last night after the game, Coach Hurley said if it wasn't, quote, for his antics and viral moments, you guys would be getting more appreciation and attention for the run this program has been on over the last few years. I'm curious -- any of you can answer this obviously -- what do you make of that? Do you wish there was more attention on what you guys have done, or do you kind of like it that a lot of us tend to focus on Coach instead?

HASSAN DIARRA: The last couple years, the run has been amazing. We've all enjoyed it. We're still on the run, and we still want to continue it.

Q. Hass, you guys faced Walter Clayton two years ago with Iona. How has his game evolved from then until now?

HASSAN DIARRA: He's playing at an All-American level. He can really shoot the ball, shoot the ball off the bounce. We just have to follow our game plan and make it tough for him.

Q. For all of you guys, Alex in particular, you guys go into tomorrow's game as almost a double-digit underdog, which is not something that you guys have seen very often over the last couple years. Mentally, being that underdog, how does that feel? Is it less



pressure in some ways, I guess?

ALEX KARABAN: Yes, it's definitely less pressure, but I felt like we've been the underdog the entire season ever since we came back from Maui. So we're used to being the underdogs for a majority of the season. It's not really a new stage for us this year.

We'll be ready for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Tarris, could you answer that question as well.

TARRIS REED JR: Like he said, we feel like -- other people feel like we're the underdog, that's cool, but go out there and play hard, play like we have nothing to lose. I feel like that's going to be the key to the game, locking up defensively, knowing what type of team they are, explosive on the offensive end.

So being able to hone in on our defensive skills and control the glass.

THE MODERATOR: Hassan, is there anything to add?

HASSAN DIARRA: Yeah, just being an underdog going into tomorrow is nothing new to us. We've just got to be ready.

Q. This is for Alex. Florida's coach was in here earlier saying, after he played UConn a couple years ago, he kind of saw a blueprint for what he might want to build there. Have you noticed after all this success that other teams have started to play like you? If so, what does that look like?

ALEX KARABAN: Definitely, I think teams have started to follow our model and style and ways. That's just been that way with teams across the country. You definitely see teams stealing different actions or defensively as well.

The coaching staff has done a great job of finding that and just establishing that the last two years and this year. It's worked, so other people want to succeed as well.

Q. Alex, you mentioned you felt like an underdog since Maui. How much different do you feel like this



team is today than it was when you got back from that trip?

ALEX KARABAN: It's extremely different. It's two completely different teams. We've gotten a lot stronger since that trip. We've gotten a lot stronger with injuries that we've had to deal with. We're completely different. We've learned a lot. We've learned how to play alongside each other better.

The coaching staff has done a really good job of helping us continue to get to the point that we are this year. It's been a long journey, but we've learned a lot, and we became stronger from it.

Q. Alex, Coach talked about wanting you to take more shots. What's his message personally to you as you prepare for this one?

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, it's the same as it's always been. Just he has so much trust and confidence in who I am as a player, he does want me to shoot the ball more, and I definitely do got to do that at times.

So I've just got to have that confidence in myself as well. Everyone in the locker room believes in me and the coaching staff believes in me. And I've got to, especially at this stage of the tournament.

Q. Tarris, first off, did you bring your saxophone on this trip? Also, you do seem to have like a certain rhythm to your game. I don't know if it's maybe a forced connection, but are there any ways in which being a musician maybe influences how you play basketball?

TARRIS REED JR: No, I did not bring my saxophone on this trip, but it's with me in storage at the gym right now. I feel like playing music has helped me so much on the court and off the court.

Like I said, basketball is a rhythm. Each person has their own rhythm, their own cadence. Once you figure that out, it's easier to guard them on defense. But on the offensive side, you have to know what your cadence is.

For the longest time, mine was a little bit too finesse-y. Getting here in the summer, Coach wanted to make an emphasis on me being more physical, more dominant, more assertive in the post. So I feel like the balance of both worlds is like a perfect balance for me.

Q. This can go for any of the three of you. Playing Oklahoma, an SEC team last night, just how the SEC has had a great season all year long, do you think

beating Oklahoma and the way you guys won in a gritty matchup helps you prepare for tomorrow night?

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

HASSAN DIARRA: I would say it definitely helped us prepare us for tomorrow night. Oklahoma is a very good team, very physical team. They played tough, especially down the stretch, and I think we need to do the same thing that we did. A lot of the same things we did in yesterday's game, we need to do that tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, you're excused. Thank you very much and good luck tomorrow.

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