

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

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Lenovo Center

## UConn Huskies

## Dan Hurley

### Media Conference



game. Obviously in '23 it was the beginning of this run that we've been on. I think that the -- what we learned the most from our failure in '22 was the roster construction piece, which we absolutely nailed the last two years.

I'm looking at -- obviously, as this season has gone on, I've looked at the best teams in the country and how they've constructed this year. I've envied some of the teams that I'm now facing or that I've had a chance to watch.

So I think we all watch and learn from each other on a year-to-year basis. I think it's just -- what they have in terms of their frontcourt is obviously similar to what we've had in our run. Then obviously the perimeter fire power and the veteran guards, us with Cam Spencer, Tristen Newton, you know, big physical guards, Steph Castle.

We've had the formula the last couple years, and it looks like they've got a pretty good formula.

**Q. In the spirit of envying what other teams might have, we often hear coaches talking about remembering the losses more than wins. With that in mind and sharing a building with Cooper Flagg this weekend, how often do you think about or how much does it bother you the recruiting battles you might have? Have you had a moment to think what this roster might have been like if he was on it?**

DAN HURLEY: I think during the course of your career, any time, no matter where you are whether you're at Wagner, Rhodey, when I was coaching high school basketball at St. Benedict's, and Kyrie went to St. Pat's, and Kevin Boyle kicked my ass with Kyrie. I rue the day that I didn't get that guy to come to St. Benedict's.

It's just human nature and part of it, I think you're always, when you see players go to other places and do well, you imagine what that player at different moments, what that would have been like to coach. I think all coaches do that at different times. You don't obsess over it.

**Q. Solo Ball seems filled with joy to be playing the role he's playing with this team. But I think back to last year in Brooklyn and Boston, he was filled with joy to be along for the ride. He seems to have loved his experience. What has his ability to handle two**

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We're just going to go ahead and start with questions for Coach Hurley.

**Q. Just curious about what you make of the development of Clayton. You saw him a few years ago obviously. What makes him special now?**

DAN HURLEY: It's funny, you look at the beginning of our run, he was -- he shared the court with us. You could see the two-way ability, the size, the physical strength. Obviously the shooting is highest level. He looks everything -- he looks the part of first team All-American.

When I asked Luke who has the scout, like he was SEC Player of the Year, he said, no, who the hell got it? All right, Broome. All right.

But shooting is what's taken it to a crazy high level for him. The range, the fact that he does it off the dribble. The fact that he gets it off as quick as he gets it off, I mean, some of the ones he's making or a large majority of the ones he's making, you can't do much about it. They are NBA-level shots.

I don't know where he is on mock drafts, he should be there. He looks to me like a guy who's got some Fred VanVleet type of abilities as a guard. Impressive player with great instincts.

**Q. Dan, Todd was in here earlier saying that, when he faced you guys two years ago, he started to see what he maybe wanted to build his program into. I'm curious if maybe having so much success, that there's a trap there of giving teams a template for how to beat you and maybe seeing teams try to mimic what you've done in recent years?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I've looked at -- I remember that



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**distinctly different roles with the same approach meant to your program?**

DAN HURLEY: You know, just Solo just came into this, into the program -- when you have two great parents like Solo has, obviously loving and nurturing, but also too demanding and high standards, so you're just getting someone in your program that is -- is just going to add a lot to your culture and is going to be a great program guy.

Obviously super talented with the shooting and a guy that's got a high level of confidence and self-belief and is improving in a lot of different aspects of his game.

I think you see the defensive improvement right now before your eyes. I think you see the guard play improvement. Obviously the foul trouble hurt his overall line last night. We've got to find a way to get him four, five more shots in tomorrow's game. We can't have games maybe where he ends with eight or nine shots. We've got to get him 13, 14 shots in tomorrow night's game because he's built for the stage. He's built for what UConn's trying to do.

**Q. Dan, Samson, the all-time wins leader here after last night, I guess this kind of answers itself, but what does that say about him? We all know the Wall potential quote when he came in, that's not going to happen, but is that still a pretty good summary of his career, the fact that he's the all-time wins leader in this program?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, Samson is just the most awesome human being that you'll ever have in your program, just all about team, super talented, waiting his turn, dealt with injuries, had to earn his spot, had to earn a starting spot. He'll do absolutely anything he can to help the team win the possession.

It speak to the type of men we've had and the type of run we've had here in a program. It's hard to make history or do historical things at UConn. Just proud that he gets -- that's crazy that a program like UConn you've won the most games, man.

You're going to make me start crying.

**Q. Obviously before Todd Golden, Billy Donovan achieved a high level of success at Florida before going on to the NBA. I understand you guys have a little bit of a relationship. What kind of sounding board has he been to you over the years? And your thoughts about facing a Florida program that was once led by him.**

DAN HURLEY: As a young coach, those were the teams

that I admired. Billy's always been one of my coaching idols, and he's impacted me in terms of mentors as much as anyone outside of the Hurley clan. He's had as much or more impact probably than most.

Although he's gone dark on me the last couple days here. He's not responding to texts or phone calls from me.

(Laughing).

But, yeah, those Florida teams, those are some of my favorite teams I've ever watched play with Horford and Noah and Brewer, those teams were amazing. To have accomplished the things that my coaching idol has accomplished and how much I love those Florida teams, and we've been able to do what they've been able to accomplish, it means a lot to me.

But the relationship means more to me than anything because he's helped me so much. Billy, he's incredible.

**Q. You're in a position you haven't been in very often over the last couple years in the tournament. It's almost a double-digit underdog going into tomorrow. First of all, I guess, in general, how does that feel different? Secondly, can you use that as momentum or incentive when you're talking to the guys? Is it something you'll bring up? Does it matter?**

DAN HURLEY: I don't think you like walk around saying to yourself, when you coach or play at UConn, you are coming off back-to-back championships. Just with the way the season has played out, obviously we're a -- at our low end, we've had losses that have put us into this 8/9 position, but we're a couple possessions away from, if we don't completely melt down at the end of the Seton Hall game, if we don't -- and if we don't and I don't implode in Maui and blow all three of those games, if we make a couple free throws at the end of that Villanova game, we may be looking at a 5 seed at worst here.

I don't know that when you coach or play at UConn and you're coming off the success we've had that we're looking at ourselves that way. The film doesn't lie about Florida, the challenges that they present in terms of what they do offensively, what they do defensively, what they do on the backboard.

It's eerily similar to what the challenges that we've presented to people, but it's not a best-of-seven-game series. It's a one-game do-or-die situation. For us, there's a distinct way that we're going to want to play this game tomorrow that we believe is going to give us a chance to win the game.



If we could obviously shore up our defense, which has been better late in the year. I thought it was versus an Oklahoma team yesterday that was -- they were a very difficult shot that Kentucky made at the horn to beat them. They were a very difficult shot away from playing in the SEC semifinals, Oklahoma was, and I thought we guarded them very well yesterday.

Obviously our defense is going to be stressed out to the max. Our rebounding is going to be stressed out to the, max. But we've got to do things to give ourselves a chance tomorrow versus this team.

**Q. Dan, Liam obviously has had a lot on his shoulders this year as far as responsibilities with this team. How have you seen -- how does he respond to tough games like he's had a little bit lately? And what do you need from him tomorrow to have a chance?**

DAN HURLEY: He is the exact type of mental toughness and upbringing and work ethic and career success where he could put behind him the kind of a couple of tough games which he's experienced.

I think it makes him really dangerous tomorrow. I think it makes him incredibly dangerous in a game where he has the ability -- if we can execute and get him the type of looks that we've got to get for him offensively from a coaching staff and the players around him, he's convinced that he's due.

Some players will stay in it, and some players will go through stretches like this and say I'm closer to being due. In the back of his mind, he's got that Creighton game against one of the toughest defenses that you'll play against, the guy went off for 38. In the back of his mind, he knows what he's capable of, and in his mind he thinks he's due.

**Q. Regardless of opponent, yesterday Florida just came out swinging against Norfolk State and they've done it numerous times this season. How important against the most efficient offense team in the country, how important is the first four minutes of this game tomorrow?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I just think every possession is critical. I think with them what you see is just the runs. When you play an elite offense and you play elite defense and you're a tremendous rebounding team and you're deep, last year I just talked about we were bulletproof in the tournament because of all of those factors.

When you have a team like that, it just allows you to go on runs. It's those hit a 3, get a stop, get out, transition, get a

dunk, get a stop, hit a 3, boom. You were just up two, now you're down five. That's where they get you.

For us, we're obviously going to have to be in a possession battle. We can't really afford to try to play an SEC type of game against them where we're coming down and shooting within the first five seconds of the shot clock then we're loose on defense and they shoot early in the clock.

We've got to try to play a different type of game than that.

**Q. Since you were talking about ACC-Big East expansion the other day, I'm just curious how much history --**

DAN HURLEY: I didn't bring it up. I was just responding.

**Q. I'm just interested how much history you have in this state, and I know it's become a trend of late for high-major top programs scheduling home and homes. Have you had discussions with Duke and North Carolina? Would you like to play more in this state?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I would love to. I think tomorrow night the Duke fans, obviously they have their history with UConn and that rivalry, but my hope in tomorrow night's game -- tomorrow afternoon's game with the crowd with the Duke people that file in is that the No. 11 Hurley jersey, that that trumps the petty UConn-Duke -- I know our fans can be brutal on social and that digital sewer.

I'm hoping that Bobby Hurley and what he did for Duke and what he did for him and what they did for each other and Coach K maybe blesses it, that maybe the Duke fans maybe help me out tomorrow.

We would like to. For us obviously everything has changed in terms of less MTEs and more wanting to do single -- a couple of single game MSG or somewhere big, somewhere in Chicago for a single game, and then home and homes.

Yes, we reach out to Kentucky. We reach out for Duke and Carolina, Kansas. We're trying to schedule those exciting home and homes or neutral site events that just get people's attention for college basketball November and December. Playing games like that, I think are just great for the sport, and we want to play them.

Yes, we have reached out, and I think we'll be excited -- we'll be announcing some exciting ones that we'll be playing, but it takes two to tango.

**Q. Todd was just up there talking about how with all the success you guys have had in this tournament,**

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**especially the last couple years, your team expects to win. They have that mentality. How valuable is that intangible, and how difficult is that to attain?**

DAN HURLEY: In all fairness to the team, we've been able to retain the staff, but a majority of the players that were part of the two-year run are now starring in the NBA. But we still have obviously some significant players with Karaban and Samson Johnson, Hassan Diarra and J-Stew and Solo Ball, J Ross have all helped last year's team as well. So we still have that DNA.

I think more so for us there was tremendous relief based on how tumultuous the season was and how loud the external noise has been the whole year, both for everything that surrounds me and surrounds UConn basketball with how successful we've been. I think there's just been a great level of relief for our team.

Just to hear our name called, to obviously have gotten through the first game, and now have an opportunity to play one of the best teams in the tournament for the right to get to a Sweet 16.

I mean, we understand the challenges that Florida presents. The tape does not lie. The analytics and the efficiency of their offense and defense, all that stuff does not lie. You can't really get lucky in this tournament.

We know that it's not a best of seven, and we've faced the same type of pressure that Todd and his team is facing playing these games. Like Todd knows what type of team he's got. I knew what type of team I had the last couple years, and when you know you've got a squad, that's like a real thing when you get to these round of 32, Sweet 16, like you know you've got a squad.

I could relate to what he's experiencing right now.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions? All right, Coach, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

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