

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - BYU vs Alabama

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Newark, New Jersey, USA

Prudential Center

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Nate Oats

Mark Sears

Aden Holloway

Chris Youngblood

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Alabama 113, BYU 88

NATE OATS: That was a fun game if you like offense. That was fun for the fans, I'm sure, at least for the Alabama fans.

Listen, I've got to teach these guys some math. I told Sears there's a thing called regression to the mean. His last six games he was shooting 14 percent, 5 of 35. He's not a 14 percent shooter, obviously. They had been going under ball screens just about every game we watched. I told both those guys, Holloway and Sears, man, I hope they go under us because we're going to rein them.

So we were in the gym last night, the night before. These guys show up for voluntary shooting every time it's available to make sure that they're ready to go, and that work pays off. We want to base our program on hard work.

I told Mark he's playing chess, not checkers, he just kind of set everybody up with that 5 of 35 thinking he was in a slump and he's going to come out and shoot -- 63 percent ain't bad. 10 threes, I think the first guy in NCAA tournament history that had at least eight threes and seven assists. Not only was he scoring it, he was moving it. Helps to get assists when you've got guys like CY and Aden Holloway making shots like they did, too, so between these three guys we had 21 threes. We've had 22 before a couple times, I think. I think maybe 23. We've never hit 25.

BYU with their personnel, we knew that once they started



going under -- they always collapse. They kind of have to. They got away with it against some teams that don't space like we do. But I told these guys going in, if you move the ball -- we end up with 27 assists. I'm not sure that ranks in tournament history. But if you'll move the ball, our offense is designed to beat a defense like this.

They're heavy in the gaps, they over-help, and we did.

Now, they're a really good offensive team, too. Everybody questions whether we had the defense to win. For some reason nobody was talking about our offense, though. We've gotten to know Mike D'Antoni a little bit. He made the point, your offense only has to be one point in the efficiency better than your defense to win the game.

Now, we were trying to get stops, and I thought we did a pretty good job. They went on a run. Sears got a steal when they started to make a run there in the second half. It was a big play. We got a bunch of O-boards. Our second-chance points, I thought we had some threes off that. We gave them too many second-chance, but we did hit some threes of it.

It was good. We were able to rest some -- our top-minute guy was Sears with just over 30 and then nobody else -- CY and Grant, 27 and 25. Whoever we play, we were able to get these guys a little bit more rest than normal.

So proud of our guys. We're in the Elite 8 for the third time in school history and back to back. Sears has been in the middle of it. These two guys came to play with him, and they're an unbelievable backcourt together. I thought Labaron did a good job moving the ball tonight, too. He went 2 of 3 himself. He ended up with six assists. I thought everybody played well in their roles tonight.

Q. Aden, we talked yesterday about how you've matured through the tournament, last year with Auburn, a first-round exit. This year you hadn't really had the game that put you on the map. And today whenever Mark went out in that second half, almost like it lit a fire under you and you were able to answer each BYU three with your own. What about tonight made you so successful and allowed you to perform at that level?



ADEN HOLLOWAY: My teammates just found me, honestly. That's all I'll say about that. It was just a good game. My teammates found me, and I just tried to not focus on shot making and focus on everything else. And shot making ended up working out a little bit. Just shout-out to my teammates for finding me all game.

Q. For Mark, is it possible to feel a game like this coming for you, and what is the feeling like when they're just going down like that?

MARK SEARS: Honestly, like Coach said, we've been preparing all week to get our shot right. The amount of preparation we put in, it led to the success we had tonight.

Q. Mark, when Coach says, hey, regression to the mean, hey, they're playing you -- how much do you believe it, and how much do you expect it I guess is the better word?

MARK SEARS: Yeah, even when I was shooting 14 percent my confidence was still high. I never stopped doubting myself and stopped believing in myself, and my teammates kept encouraging me to keep shooting it, keep shooting it, keep shooting it. That just shows trust in them that even though when I'm not at my highest peak, they still trust me and want me to shoot the ball. So that's a big shout-out to them. They went under the ball screen and I was able to get my rhythm early.

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: To be honest with you, before all y'all talking about 14 percent, I had no idea he was shooting 14 percent because I never really pay attention to -- Mark is an incredible player. All I know is when he gets the ball, the defense is collapsing on him, so it doesn't even feel like he's shooting 14 percent.

Regardless if he is or not, his gravity that he has on defense is something I never played with before, so yeah, you don't really realize he's shooting 14 percent.

Q. I checked the stat sheet at halftime; 80 percent of field goal attempts were from three. You guys slowed down a little bit in the second half. You finished the game, 77 percent of your field goal attempts were from three. Usually you're a little bit less than half. Sometimes you go over half, like a couple more shots. What went into that tonight, with 77 percent of your free throw attempts were coming from three?

ADEN HOLLOWAY: I would say just for these two guys next to me, an open three is kind of a lay-up, so we're happy with 77 percent of our shots coming from three today.

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: Like Coach said, to start off, the way they played defense, they're in the gaps heavy. But we have proper spacing, and if we don't take one dribble too much or we're playing selfish, ready to move the ball, we're capable of having 80 percent, 77 percent of our shots being threes. That's pretty simple.

Q. Mark, I want to dig a little bit deeper. You made 10 three-pointers tonight. That's one shy of the NCAA Tournament record. Could you take us into what it feels like to play that well against a team that good on a stage this big? Are you physically conscious of what is happening as it continues to progress? Because it looked like you were in a zone and knew they were there for the killing.

MARK SEARS: Like, like you said, I was just in a zone. Once I seen the first three fell in, I felt the basket was as big as an ocean. And every time I shot I felt like it was going in. Just lost myself in the game and just let everything else happen.

Q. Chris, obviously you got a great coach up here with you. You played four years before that under Coach Amir Abdur-Rahim. What did he do to prepare you for this season, for this moment, and do you think about him when you're out there playing?

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: The most important thing I think about probably every practice, every game is playing selfless. Because you know, previous four years I was the main guy. So I've got talented players like Mark beside me, so really just being an ultimate team player, not really worrying about myself, playing in the flow of the game and losing yourself within the game, within the team.

I end up with 19 points or might be five points, but as long as we get a win, we're considered a winner.

Q. Coach, everybody talks about three-pointers made, but can you talk about your three-point defense?

NATE OATS: Try to play analytically sound on both sides of the ball. Free throws, number one; at the rim is number two. Obviously uncontested at the rims as much as possible, and then kick-out threes.

And then on the other side of the ball, we're trying to not put them to the free-throw line. So we didn't do a great job of that in my opinion. They had 20 free throws, we were fouling too much, particularly in the second half. We tried to take away the three, they ended up getting 30 off, which is too many. We were trying not to let them get that off, but I did think we contested enough. They didn't shoot it great, were 6 of 30 and obviously we're not trying to give up shots

at the rim.

Our defense is designed not to give up threes. Sometimes we do a good job of it, sometimes we don't. But we try to guard all the pick-and-rolls with just two guys. We saw some other teams always pulling a third guy in. And Demin is so good, a 6'8" point guard catching that. We were trying not to give those up, didn't want to give up any transition threes. And then obviously not trying to give up -- penetrate, over-help, kick. I remember we gave up one of those in the second half, and we gave up a transition one back to back. Wasn't real happy with that.

But we don't want to give up threes. Our defense did a fairly decent job of it at times, but not to the level we need to. We try to play analytically sound basketball on both sides of the ball.

Q. Coach, the record that your team broke for most threes was Loyola Marymount's team in 1990 in the second round against the defending national champion at the time, Michigan. That was one of the most seminal moments in NCAA history. What does it mean to you that this team is now going to be along the lines of that Loyola Marymount team and has surpassed them. And any memories of that game knowing that Loyola Marymount was kind of intrepid in shooting all those threes? That wasn't happening in the NCAA.

NATE OATS: I loved watching them play. That was my freshman year in high school that year. I remember Bo Kimble shooting left-hand free throws in honor of Hank. I loved watching them play. They got up-and-down. Maybe part of the reason we coach the way we coach. It's a little more fun that way.

I didn't know that they had the record in the tournament. I guess it's nice to beat their record. It's interesting. Michigan won it in '89, right. So before I got into Division I, I was the head coach at Romulus back in Detroit. And Terry Mills from Romulus, he played on that Michigan team in '89, I believe, when they went and won it, I believe. Because I won that state championship in '86. We got the only two state championships with Romulus. Al Wilkerson coached Terry, and then I coached pretty good kids in 2013. It's an interesting history, but I loved that Loyola Marymount team.

I do believe that the record for threes made in a game is held by Troy right out of Alabama with 28. We wanted to get to 28 tonight, but 25 is not bad.

Q. Before you took over, Alabama had been to one Sweet 16 in 30 years. Now it's four in five and you're

playing for the second straight Final Four on Saturday. What do you reflect on how far the program has come in such a short amount of time?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I mean, obviously when I got the job, we didn't have the transfer portal, eligibility immediately, NIL, so it was a little harder to turn it around immediately like you can now. So we had Quinerly, who by the way, we're in his back yard, which is great. He showed up to practice and has been hanging out with our guys.

But he couldn't play. He had to sit that year. That was like the last guy the NCAA wouldn't let play. You can't flip your roster like you can now.

We got saved by COVID that year, so we can say that we made the NCAA Tournament every time since I've been to Alabama because I don't think we were making it that year.

I've been fortunate to have some really good recruiters on staff to get us some very good players. We were fortunate to walk into some good players, John Petty, all time leading three-point shooter was already there, Avery left us some pretty good talent, Herb Jones who's been a pretty good NBA player. Those guys -- Alex Reese was here. Alex hit the big three in our second year to accepted it to overtime in the Sweet 16.

We kind of turned it in year 2, made that Sweet 16 run. And then the recruiting, Brian Hodgson, Antoine Pettway. Now I got Preston Murphy. I've had some of the best recruiters in the country get some really good talent to play the way we want to play. I love playing this way. I think players want to play this way.

It was fun. BYU plays an NBA system. We had some better talent than them tonight, but it's a lot more fun way to play basketball, if you will.

When you play this way and you show everybody -- even our first year, we played this way. We just didn't have as much talent to do it. And now we've been able to get the talent and hopefully we get to continue to get the talent, we keep the resources where we need to and keep making these runs. I think the Alabama fans like us making deep runs in the NCAA Tournament. At least I do.

Q. Nate, what do you and your coaches need to do to best give your team a chance to repeat on Saturday what you did here tonight? Obviously asking to go 50 percent from three is a tall task. But to repeat it as much as you can with your habits and preparation, is that doable?

NATE OATS: Yeah, we've had plenty of games where we



haven't shot it well. I think we've been really focused on making sure we don't overdo practice, legs are fresh, minds are fresh while still getting the scouting report in.

They're supposed to be off their legs as soon as the media gets out of the locker room. Let's get them back to the hotel, let's get them off their legs, let's get the recovery started. Tomorrow it'll just be walk-through, and then we've got to be ready to go.

Now, we've got to keep moving the ball. Obviously whether it's Duke or Arizona, their defense is going to be a little different. They've got some probably better rim protection, try to build out on us. We've got to do a good job on the offensive side of the ball, showing them how they can get the threes.

But people ask me how many threes would you like to get off every game. Well, kind of depends on how they guard us. If they guard us like we knew BYU was going to and stay heaving in the gaps, we'll take 50, 51. If they're going to build out -- we've had games where we've scored 60 plus -- multiple games we've got 50, 60 plus points in the paint, too.

You know, if Duke or Arizona, whoever ends up winning decides they're not going to give us some threes, that's fine, too. Let's get to the rim. Now, the rim protection is going to be a little different. We're going to have to figure out how to deal with that a little bit. Because obviously -- I don't want to pronounce it wrong, Khaman has a 9'8" reach. So rim protection a little different. We're going to have to do a really good job on the offensive side of the ball.

The other thing is our defense is going to have to be really good because they both have very good offenses.

I don't know that we're going to repeat 51 threes attempted, but we're going to have the guys ready to play the right way in my opinion and fresh. And if we get stops, it's a lot easier to get out in transition. You can get some threes in transition, too.

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