

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Alabama vs Duke

Friday, March 28, 2025

Newark, New Jersey, USA

Prudential Center

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Jon Scheyer**

**Cooper Flagg**

**Tyrese Proctor**

**Khaman Maluach**

**Sion James**

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference

JON SCHEYER: I'll be brief. I don't have a lot new from last night. Just that I'm really proud of our team for what we did. Looking back, Arizona made some tough shots, made a great run, and I thought we learned a lot from last night.

Alabama, clearly they're a high-powered offense and a great team. We know it's going to be a big-time game tomorrow. For me, being an Elite 8 game, it's the toughest one. It's the highest level.

But for our team today, we'll dive into them some more and I'll let you guys ask these guys questions first. We couldn't be more excited and ready and prepared for tomorrow.

**Q. How many hours of sleep are you guys on right now?**

COOPER FLAGG: I'm not sure. Probably -- let me count. Probably like six? Six, seven hours of sleep maybe.

**Q. Tyrese, having been in this spot specifically, the guys with you not necessarily as much, what is the difference between preparing for a Sweet 16 game versus an Elite 8 game?**

TYRESE PROCTOR: You're playing for a championship. I mean, it's going to be a high-level game, and I think we've done a great job of just taking it one game at a time and not looking too far ahead or in the past. Like any other



game, just focusing on what we have to do leading into this game is the most important thing.

**Q. Cooper, I was wondering if there was a moment last night in the second half, despite the comeback, when you guys realized that you were going to win this game and move on to the Elite 8?**

COOPER FLAGG: I wouldn't say there was a moment that I could look back to or anything. I mean, I thought we just did a good job of staying level-headed through their run. They made a great run, were coming back. But I thought we did a good job of sticking to our game plan and just doing what we do.

**Q. Cooper and Sion and Kon, now that you guys are in the NCAA Tournament, is there any sort of feeling that hangs over you about every game could be the last game for this collection of players that's played so well together?**

KHAMAN MALUACH: No, I mean, that comes from our mind, too, knowing that this could be the last game so that we attack it harder now, go in with the mentality to win, and be prepared the same way we prepare for every other game.

SION JAMES: Yeah, we largely prepare the same way. The biggest difference I'd say is there's just a heightened sense of urgency recognizing that -- I mean, your season is on the line all year, but your season is most directly on the line in these tournament games. And we just allow it to help us with our sense of urgency preparing for everything.

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, I think in tournament games each possession means a lot more than it does in the regular season, so you're trying to live and die by each possession. Obviously you've got to have a next-play mentality, but the importance of each possession can't be overlooked.

**Q. Since Tyrese and Cooper haven't checked in, I'm sort of looking for more of how well connected you guys are and how you feel about this group of people and the chance that it could be the last time that you guys play together. Because it seems like you guys really enjoy playing together.**



TYRESE PROCTOR: Yeah, I think I sort of said it all year. Just trying to cherish the moments that I get with this group. Obviously, I think we knew from day one we had a special team. And I think just the connection that we share off the court, allowing us to play as well as we do on the court, is really cool and something that I haven't really been a part of in this sense.

But I think it's just going out and just having fun. I think we all enjoy playing with each other, and that's why we play so hard for each other.

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I think it goes kind of to what you mentioned about every game could be our last, so I think exactly what Tyrese said, cherishing these moments together, knowing that every game could be our last one together. So just playing for each other and having that connectivity is kind of what's got us to these moments all year long.

Just trusting what we've done all year long, trusting each other, and just following the game plan.

**Q. Cooper, you've said that playing in the NCAA Tournament was always your dream growing up. As you've gotten to experience it now and the further you get in, how has it compared to your expectations, and has the feeling changed the further you guys go?**

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, it's a surreal feeling being here. I think I can speak for myself and all these guys. These are the moments that you think about growing up, being in these big-time games, big-time moments together. It's just a surreal feeling, and I wouldn't want to be with anyone else.

**Q. Tyrese and Sion, can you talk about what it's going to take defensively to limit Alabama on the perimeter?**

TYRESE PROCTOR: I think just sticking to our game plan. I think we have a great game plan going into the game. And just not changing what we do. I think when we play together on the defensive end and stay connected, we're the best defensive team in the country.

SION JAMES: Tyrese said it. Our game plan is just doing what we do all year. They're obviously a really good offensive team, but we've gotten to this point being ourselves, and we're not going to stop it for Alabama or anybody else.

**Q. Cooper, the great Brian Scalabrine has talked so much about when he was 14 -- when you were 14, he was calling Duke and telling them to recruit you and**

**they were blowing him off. Do you remember what it was like when you first started getting recruited from Duke and when they were first receptive for you?**

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I think I first got in contact with Coach Scheyer, I didn't really want to answer the phone. But I'll answer him anyway, give him a chance.

No, it was obviously kind of like a dream come true when you get contacted by a place like Duke. So just to hear from him, it was just really cool, and then to start and build that relationship.

**Q. To the players, just the first thing that comes to mind when you think about this Alabama matchup as it pertains to that team specifically.**

KHAMAN MALUACH: Man, we know it's going to be a war. It's going to be a battle, especially on the glass, so it's going to be a physical game. So that comes to my mind when I think about that team.

SION JAMES: They're very talented and they play hard, so it's going to be -- like Khaman said, it's going to be a fight.

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, obviously SEC team, they're battle tested, so we'll be ready to go.

TYRESE PROCTOR: It's going to be a war. It's just going to be a war.

COOPER FLAGG: Nothing to add.

**Q. Kon, from what you've seen so far of Bama on tape and what the coaching staff has told you, has there been a team that runs the kind of stuff that they run that you have faced this season? And if so which teams would apply in terms of the closest prep you've seen over the past 30-plus games?**

KON KNUEPPEL: I don't think a lot of teams play like Alabama does. Obviously they have the fastest pace in the country so I don't think I could point out one team that plays like them.

**Q. Jon, I know Maliq didn't give you many minutes yesterday, but the four and a half that he did seemed pretty valuable with Khaman and Pat both in foul trouble. How has he responded and what do you think of his ability to come back and play so shortly after suffering the injury again?**

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, I mean, I think it speaks a lot about who Maliq is and what he's all about. Look, he's not

100 percent. He's not close to it. And ideally he wouldn't have played in last night's game. It was more in an emergency. All of a sudden Khaman got two fouls and Pat got two fouls.

I thought he did some really good things in his minutes. We're going to have him ready to go in the next game. He's been a key guy for us all year-round. What he does for us, he doesn't necessarily shoot a lot, so it's about his health and physical readiness, and he just wanted to give it a shot for us, and I think that says a lot. We want to protect him at the same time, and you're balancing when he's fully ready with also the time is running out for the season.

So that's been a balancing act for me, to be honest. It's been something we've struggled with. But the fact that his mindset is to do whatever to help us win, I think is an incredible thing as a coach to have a guy that thinks that way.

**Q. I was just curious what you think of kind of the three-point-ization of basketball, especially on the NBA side, it's gotten a lot of comment. Last night's games were exciting, but Alabama shot a couple of them. And do you think it's ever going to go back?**

JON SCHEYER: I don't think -- unless the rules change, I don't think it can go back because at the end of the day, it's math. And the math just -- when you have that big of an advantage of hitting threes, and obviously the math of getting rim attacks and dunks and lay-ups and getting to the free-throw line, it just doesn't make sense to shoot other shots.

I think last night you saw with really all those teams, all of us that played last night, a lot of threes, but also a lot of rim attacks, which opens up the threes.

The more I've learned, it's a different -- way different than even it was when I was a player. I just think it's about the math.

I still think it's an exciting game, but I'm sure that the game will evolve somehow. It always evolves. I'm not sure why that is right now, but no, I don't think it can change anytime soon.

**Q. Alabama gets up and down the floor, you had the late game, now we have the late game tomorrow. How do you best prepare your guys to be able to go the way that you know Bama is going to want to dictate the pace in this game tomorrow?**

JON SCHEYER: Right, and for us I think that's the key.

Obviously we're really explosive in transition, as well, but we have to pick our spots, too. The recovery is tough. Our guys didn't get back until about 2:00, 2:30 last night until it was all said and done with treatment and everything like that. And let them sleep in today, gave them an initial scout on Alabama, and we'll have to do another deep dive tonight.

And then it's a good thing we have the late game. I'd rather have the late game after doing that last night.

But knowing our guys, we'll be rested. We'll be recovered. We'll be prepared. Playing three games in three days in the ACC Tournament is tougher than this. But obviously this is still a quick turnaround, and you're playing against a team, like you said, they're relentless. They're relentless. They don't stop trying to push the pace and push the tempo, so there can't be any relaxing on our end.

**Q. Jon, congrats on the run. Today is the 33rd anniversary of the Laettner shot, and I've read that you started dribbling a basketball at the age of three. Do you remember where you were when he hit that?**

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, I remember the game was recorded, and I remember being in -- we had like a little -- I don't even know what to call it, but a little room, just a couple steps, and I had a Little Tykes hoop there. And I remember seeing the shot, and then literally the next day, my -- I can't remember -- I think my mom was -- I was Christian Laettner. I think my mom was Grant Hill, my dad was the Kentucky defense, and I think I made 100 game winners that day being Christian Laettner.

That was what first hooked me into college basketball in a moment that I'll never forget, and it's the best shot of all time in my mind. And then there's really the '94 team that I really followed closely and loved and watched an entire tournament run. Duke lost in the National Championship that year. But I'll never forget where I was or forget that first moment of watching that shot.

**Q. Speaking of the SEC, how do you view the competitive balance of college basketball right now? The conference is pretty dominant, but if you guys win it all, you'll have wins over Auburn, Bama, Tennessee, and maybe Florida. Is it healthy for the sport for a conference to have three or four teams in the Final Four?**

JON SCHEYER: Well, my focus is on Alabama, obviously. But I think it's a credit to what the SEC has done this year. I mean, the investment they've had, the teams they've had. You have to give them a ton of credit.



Their league has been awesome this year, and whether that's a trend moving forward or not, I think our league is doing a lot for next year moving forward.

But at the end of the day, I think it just shows it doesn't matter what league you're from as long as your team is at that level. I don't think for us it's -- we're prepared. I could talk about some of the moments we've been through this season in the ACC to prepare us for this game, to prepare us to play Arizona.

But give the SEC a ton of credit this year for what they've done and what Alabama has done. For me, I don't think it's like you can't beat somebody or that entitles you to anything. But they've had a great year.

**Q. This is the spot where your season ended last year in the Elite 8. You haven't been to the Final Four as a head coach. You've been there as a player and as an assistant. But coming around to this time, is there anything you've taken from last year that you're applying and doing differently, or what are you doing similarly to try and bust through and make it to the Final Four for the first time as a head coach?**

JON SCHEYER: Well, look, one, you don't take for granted how hard it is to get to an Elite 8, first and foremost. So when you're in this spot, you have another opportunity to be back, you want to seize the moment. Frankly, every decision we've made since March 31st of last year was to put ourselves in this same position and have the opportunity to capitalize.

I think the biggest thing to understand for our team and our players is you don't have to do anything different once you're here. You have to do it at a high level, but you don't have to do anything different.

Everything we've done this summer with our workouts, the mental preparation has been building mental toughness, and really preparing to be at your best when your best is required.

That's what this game is all about. I feel very confident in our team with who we've been at a competitive level, that that will be there tomorrow night.

**Q. I was wondering, you just alluded to how hard this tournament is, and it's knocked you out at just about every stage, and that doesn't make you an exception. But I was wondering, is the Elite 8 -- I've heard Bill Self and Sean Miller say that's the hardest place to go out. Do you find that true?**

JON SCHEYER: I mean, yes, which means to me, it's the

hardest game to win because you're balancing -- it's two things. One, each team has great momentum going into this game. No matter who you play, each team has won three games in a row. And then obviously you're an inch away from the promised land, going to a Final Four.

I think with that at stake, it brings out really high-level basketball, desperation, the competitive level. Obviously you're that close. And I've been on both sides, and it's heartbreaking when you lose, and it's the best feeling when you win. That's what you work for. That's why you recruit. That's why you build a team. All the time, energy and all that goes into those moments.

It's an honor to be in this game, and I want our guys to really go for it. Like you can't -- you have to really go for it in this game.

**Q. Coach, Cooper gave us his side of the story, but I am genuinely interested in hearing what your side of the story is in terms of when you started to notice Cooper, when you recruited him, and what that was like.**

JON SCHEYER: Well, I heard about Cooper at a really young age. Scalabrino was the first person to make me aware of basically this is a no-brainer. Didn't blow him off, okay. I didn't blow him off. I responded right away. Then just followed his progression. He was only 14 years old at the time.

And then I remember watching him for the first time in person when he was 15 in the Nike EYBL Peach Jam, and I remember watching him and saying, Skal was right. It took me about 90 seconds. From there, it was all out.

There's certain times you can contact or not or all that, but started to build a relationship, and the rest is history.

**Q. Coach, this team is so deep, so talented, but someone we haven't seen a lot of is Isaiah Evans. I know he struggled down the stretch when you guys got into the ACC Tournament in the early rounds, but he provided four solid minutes yesterday. And especially with a team like Alabama that can speed you up, his three-point ability is something you could easily value in this matchup. Is there a world where Isaiah makes an impact?**

JON SCHEYER: Oh, of course. Isaiah has been a key guy for us. Look, part of our team -- there's going to be ebbs and flows in terms of minutes and how that all goes. But Isaiah, I thought he had a great spirit yesterday, came in, hit a big three. That's what he does.

But he's ready to go, and I think absolutely tomorrow he can make a big difference in what we're doing.

**Q. Back to the conferences and the difference between the SEC and ACC and the perceived strength of each conference. Do you buy into it at all in terms of a team like Alabama or any team in the SEC being more battle tested and therefore more prepared compared to you coming from the ACC? I know you said you'd been tested in the ACC, but do you buy that argument at all?**

JON SCHEYER: I think there's -- naturally, in anything, you can take -- there's positives and negatives to either thing.

For us, there's no question we're prepared, and there's no question they're prepared. Playing different schedule, playing different opponents at different times of the year, they both prepare you in different ways.

Of course you're going to acknowledge, like, the year the SEC had with the credit that you get for those wins or some of the battles. Of course, Alabama has had a heck of a schedule. I feel we have, too, but it's been different.

I don't think that gives them any more of a leg up tomorrow based on conference or ACC, SEC. I've been in the ACC a long time; it's always prepared us and had us ready, and this year is no exception in my mind.

**Q. You guys have shot 60 percent or higher in each of your last two games, and then last night at the 15-minute mark you were shooting 70 percent from the field. What sort of explains that? Are you running your sets better, reacting to the leverage of the defense more effectively? Seems extremely impressive. Have you seen a stretch like that in the tournament before?**

JON SCHEYER: I'm not sure. I know we've had teams that have been in great rhythm. I think for us, it's just about we've found our flow in terms of how to play really connected without having to call a set every time down. But we have concepts in what we play out of. I think for young players, always understanding what the coverage is, how teams are playing you, and then what's next.

We've worked all summer in the preseason, not about putting in plays, but about working through what's next and how we're with going to have our system and flow. And I think our team, the last month of the season, they've really come on strong with understanding how to play together, how to put pressure on the defense, and then how to value the right shots.

**Q. Last night you referred to that you would know a lot more about Alabama by the time you got here today, and I was thinking about, you've just finished this really emotional game and then you go immediately to study the next team. What's that process like in the wee hours? Are you eager to do it? Does it require any energy products, anything like that?**

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, for me, my adrenaline was flowing last night, so I didn't need anything else to drink or any coffee or anything like that.

For me, it was literally right to Alabama, watching a ton of film on them. The watching staff was getting me up to date because they had been working ahead on them.

Look, their pace jumps off the chart at you. They're just both ends of the ball too. Defensively they've been really good, as well, and you're watching different games, and you're up late.

Being in this game last year, I knew for me, this is -- I was very thankful not to get much sleep last night. That's the best thing, the best issue I could possibly have. Got a couple hours of sleep, woke up, did the same thing, watching them more. And tonight I'll make sure we get some sleep and all that.

But it's all about the preparation, and it's an honor. That's what you want to have. So I'm grateful not to get much rest.

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