

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Michigan State vs UConn

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Washington D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

**UConn Huskies**

**Danny Hurley**

**Alex Karaban**

**Silas Demary Jr.**

**Solo Ball**

**Braylon Mullins**

**Tarris Reed Jr.**

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UConn student-athletes. If you have a question for any of them.

**Q. Alex, obviously like five months ago when you played in the exhibition against Michigan State. Anything valuable you can take out of that?**

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, I mean, you remember the physicality they play with, the rebounding, how fast they play, the pace they play at.

There's a couple key pointers that you can remember. Obviously the personnel, too. I mean, they're so different from October to March, just like we are, how much better they've gotten. I mean, their freshmen have gotten better. Everybody on their roster has been playing better than obviously they have in October.

I think you just remember the physicality and the pace they play at.

**Q. Tarris, Jaxon and you were in the same class, high school. Do you remember the first time you met him in a camp or any of your early matchups?**

TARRIS REED JR.: Yeah, we were in the same recruiting



class 2022, knowing we were one of the top picks in that class. He was committed to Michigan State. I was committed to Michigan. There was a rivalry from the start.

He transformed his game and developed since we were both freshmen, now we're both seniors, has been tremendous.

Seen him a lot in high school, played against him my two years when I was in Michigan. This is probably going to be our last matchup.

**Q. Alex, the Big East has faced a lot of doubts and questions this year. The league was down, three teams from the league are in the tournament. What kind of statement does it make that you and St. John's are both here in the Sweet 16? If both teams advance, what kind of statement would that make?**

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, I think I've always thought the Big East is a tough conference, regardless of how it is. The uniqueness it has, the round-robin. For St. John's to respond the way they did in the Big East, obviously being in the Sweet 16, after the tough non-conference they had, speaks to a lot to who they are as a team.

For us, we've been playing at a pretty consistent level. Obviously wish we could play better in certain games. I mean, we've always had so much respect for the Big East no matter what. It's nice to see that the Big East is well-represented still in this tournament.

SOLO BALL: Yeah, I feel like game in and game out, no matter who you play in the Big East, it's a tough game. They're incredibly physical. There's got to go to be a lot of calls that the refs make. You have to play through I think that physicality is something that isn't within a lot of other conferences that we're able to adjust to. That's actually helped us going into some of these non-conference games, games we're not playing conference teams.

It will be interesting to match up them again if that happens. We're focused on one game at a time.

**Q. Lessons from previous NCAA tournament runs that have helped you so far this March, will help you this weekend.**



ALEX KARABAN: No, definitely. It really is just taking it one game at a time. You obviously want to enjoy the process and really experience every game that you can.

Really just taking it one game at a time. You can't look too far ahead. A couple of us up here were part of the loss to Florida last year. Keeping that pain, remembering how difficult it is to lose in March Madness, just the consequences of it.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, choose a teammate to also answer that question.

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I don't really have much prior experience other than last year.

I would probably say you just got to go into the game being ready, ready for the moment. Like as a kid, a lot of us dreamed of playing in the tournament. Just being able to balance being ready and being a little bit anxious, knowing that it's okay.

Once you get through those first couple minutes of the game, being able to adjust, following the game plan.

**Q. Tarris, Alex said that Michigan State is a much better team now than they were back in October. How do you think UConn has improved since October?**

TARRIS REED JR.: Yeah, I feel like we've been able to really gel together, stick together on both sides of the car. Our defensive rebounding has increased, especially the last two games.

I've been playing against State literally my whole career. It's going to be a pretty fun, epic battle tomorrow night. I can't wait for it.

**Q. Tarris, Alex, Solo, you committed to come to UConn, then a couple months later Dan Hurley was getting offers from the Lakers. There was a lot of stuff going on. Take me through that kind of whirlwind of those few days. When he decided to come back, he said, I'm here to win championships. Take me through that little stretch of committing, few days of not being sure, him returning.**

TARRIS REED JR.: I mean, when the news broke that the Lakers were looking at Coach Hurley, honestly you want to play for him. I came to UConn to play for a coach like Coach Hurley. Felt like we did a good job open focusing on the task, keeping the main thing the main thing. Focused on being better each game day in, day out.

When Coach said he returned, I remember that first practice when he leaked out to the media, posted it on Twitter, he was ready to go from there. I was excited I chose to play at UConn. I wanted to play in moments, games, be in the position I am today.

ALEX KARABAN: I'd say what Tarris said, too. I've had a great relationship with Coach Hurley, still do. Whatever he wanted to do, whatever would make him happy, his family happy, that's ultimately what we all wanted.

For him to come back and want to stay at UConn was a blessing for us. We greatly appreciated that. We just want to repay with him with how we play on the basketball court.

SOLO BALL: I remember when it first happened, I was actually up in the air. I thought he was going to be gone, to be honest, when it first came out.

Over time when you get to know Coach, how he is as a person, all he wants to pour into is college athletes. It's been great.

I don't know how to explain how I was really feeling in the moment. It's just great to have him back. I mean, we couldn't do anything without the coach and the whole staff that we have. Just being a part of a great staff, a great team is electric.

**Q. Silas, how are you feeling and how big were these last few days to recover that ankle?**

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I'm feeling a lot better the past couple days. A lot of rehab, a lot of treatment. Try to get me as close as I can back to 100%.

I'd say I'm feeling a little bit better, doing everything I can. Still going to do stuff once we leave here, try to get even better. Feel like I'm in a better spot than I was last week. Trying to get back to 100% the best I can.

**Q. Braylon and Silas, you played a couple games here, win-or-go-home games that take a little bit of pressure off? Do you get comfortable with the idea we win don't or go home?**

BRAYLON MULLINS: Yeah, I mean, I think just going in last weekend with the two wins, it gives us a bunch of confidence. Just the momentum coming into the Sweet 16, I think we all have confidence in each other, all trust in each other.

Yeah, I think the pressure's not there. We all know the consequences with. I mean, we're all going to play like it's our last game.

SILAS DEMARY JR.: Like Braylon said, the pressure is kind of no pressure at this point. It's like make-or-break time. It's how we're willing to make the plays, continue to practice together, or are we going to be satisfied with being done.

Last week was a lot of defend, those two wins. I think our confidence is through the roof. We have to keep playing together, having joy, having fun.

SOLO BALL: I think the biggest thing that Coach said, we want to keep playing with one another for the rest of this season. We don't want to end the season tragically or anything like that. The biggest thing -- I blanked. I'm not going to lie to you. Can you ask again?

**Q. Having played a couple games in this, win or go home, does that relieve the pressure a little bit, make you feel a little more comfortable?**

SOLO BALL: Absolutely. It relieves so much pressure, especially through the first two rounds. I think the first two rounds, that's where you feel it most, especially because you're playing teams that are seeded below you. You know how each team is coming into this tournament.

Yeah, definitely the pressure's off. We got to learn to trust one another.

**Q. Alex, with regard to the schematics on the offensive side that Michigan State likes to do in terms of pace of play, what is it going to take to be disruptive to how they want to play in terms of speed?**

ALEX KARABAN: Yeah, I mean, we always got to dictate how we play, just the pace we play at, make sure our defense is set, communicating after a made basket. Celebrating, just have to sprint back. After a missed basket, communicate, match up. It's really just mainly communication, communicating to each other, know who is guarding the personnel.

They're one of the fastest teams in the country and we have to be ready for that.

**Q. Silas, you're be matched up so many against Jeremy Fears. What do you think the challenges of him will be?**

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I think he's a steady point guard. I think he's averaging under 10 assists a game. He's very good at getting in the paint, getting everybody shot, getting his bigs the ball. I think he's a very good defender. He pushes their pace a lot. Gets it out in transition and runs.

Hits a lot of passes to Coen Carr to Kohler and Cooper, as well.

That matchup I'm looking forward to. I just got to be able to guard him without getting in foul trouble because he's good at drawing fouls. Being smart and staying down and forcing him into tough shots.

**Q. Solo, obviously playing at UConn, you never know whose night it's going to be. How much fun does that make it to go into a game and know that Coach is going to lean into the hot hand and play that way?**

SOLO BALL: Yeah, that's the glory of this team. We're talented 1 through 15, top to bottom. When you have a bunch of different players that are capable of doing so many different things, you just got to feed the hot hand, like you said. Just continue to get the ball.

When T Reed is underneath the basket, we know there's a guy 50 pounds lighter than him, we're going to give him the ball every time, he's going to score.

When AK is coming off screen and they're trailing him he's going to find right man and make the right play. We know at the end of the day every single one of those players on the team, what they're capable of. Yeah, I mean, we're always going to trust each other.

**Q. Alex and Tarris, Michigan State ranks fourth nationally in rebounding margin. What makes them such a challenge on the glass?**

ALEX KARABAN: I mean, they go every single time. Defensively they're blocking out every single time. Offensively they're crashing, 1 through 5 crashing the glass.

Being up for the challenge, getting ready for the challenge, matching their physicality. It's really about will and determination, who wants the ball, who's willing to continue their season by rebounding the ball.

TARRIS REED JR.: Like AK said, it's going to be a challenge on both sides of the glass. We're going to challenge them. They're going to challenge us.

They're going to try to set the tone early. The game is going to be won on the boards and the defensive end. Whoever gets the most defensive rebounds and defends well will win the game. I feel like we've been doing a good job the last two games crashing the glass. That's not going to change for us.

THE MODERATOR: We thank you.

We are joined by Coach Hurley opening statement from you, then we'll take some questions.

DAN HURLEY: Great to wake up here today in DC. Got beautiful weather. Just excited about the matchup. Obviously to be in this region, there's a lot of buzz, a lot of electricity around DC this week. Just can't wait to have our part in it tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question for Coach Hurley...

**Q. Rick was in here earlier a lot of talk bit today, he said there's no such thing as a blue blood anymore. Where do you stand on that?**

DAN HURLEY: No, I think Coach Izzo right. Nowadays I think tradition, history, it doesn't mean as much as it did to recruits, whether they're portal or high school players.

I think first and foremost right now it's about overall commitment that you're going to make, whether that's NIL, the way you travel, the quality of your facilities.

You can't get by on your brand anymore. Players dreaming of having played this one day, none of these kids care about that anymore. None of the people close to them care about it because the majority of the people that are advising the kids now are agents who are looking at it from a business perspective, or families that are not sentimental about any of this.

If anything, it's maybe a negative because fans don't understand it, media doesn't understand it. You have as good a chance to win at a non-blue blood, maybe even a better chance, because you don't have the pressure and the expectations or the burden of the jersey or the logo.

**Q. I asked some of the other coaches this, I say it without accusing you, there are times that the game does not look to be pleasurable. It's torturous sometimes to watch you guys. You look a little frustrated sometimes. What is the joy? Everyone talks about I love coaching. What is it that you actually, truly love about it?**

DAN HURLEY: I think you love the day-to-day, the grind. I think you love the work. You love the people that you do the work with. Yeah, I mean, that's it. How close you get to your staff, your players when you're striving for things together. It's incredibly difficult to do. You sacrifice and you commit and you care so much.

Like when you're with a group of people that care so much

about each other and what you're trying to accomplish, it's an addictive feeling. That's why I think when I see these coaches, like Coach Izzo, coach into their 70s, Rick Pitino, that's why they can't walk away. It's not the money. These guys got enough money. It's that. It's that connection.

The season, it alternates between relief and suffering. Then I think the joy that you get is from a sense you did a good job. At the end of the year when it's all over and you can look back and say, I got the most out of my team or the team got the most out of itself.

I can look back on that with some level of satisfaction and say it was a job well done based on the team we had. We got as far and as much out of the season as we could.

**Q. Looking back at the October exhibition game, Tarris didn't play, but both of your teams got out to really hot starts to the season. How much did that maybe play a factor, the iron on iron, if you will, to get each team prepared for the season?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, doing the exhibition, there's no greater test than playing a Michigan State or Tom Izzo coached team, this group of incredible players, they got on the team. Yeah, we were very intentional about trying to schedule them for that game right before the opener so we could really identify our vulnerabilities in that game. They were on full display in that game. They exposed us.

I think we gave up six or seven free-throw rebounds in that game, our transition defense was a joke, we got assaulted on the glass. There was a lot there in that game that we were able to show the guys this week when we got manhandled.

We're a much different team; they're a much different team. Certainly it helped us both get ready for November and December, because we're obviously two of the best teams in the country.

**Q. Dan, when you talk to Tom Izzo about what he has built, something that's lasted over several decades, your dad as well, does it inspire you to want to build something at UConn in terms of being able to do it for a long time in an era where it's difficult and things are constantly changing?**

DAN HURLEY: Listen, I wanted a gap year last year. I don't know how he does it (smiling). I don't know how Coach Izzo has done it. I don't.

Obviously the fortitude, the passion that he has, just to be so consistent. I mean, when you look at them, the number of Sweet 16s and making the tournament almost 30



straight years of qualifying for this tournament. This tournament, with each year it's harder to qualify for.

But what gets Coach Izzo up every single day, it's the impact he has on his players, it's how much he loves being a builder of teams, being a developer of men. I don't think he chases...

There's part of him I'm sure that chases the external achievements, but the guy's just an authentic coach that loves being a coach of men.

Yeah, I mean, I hope I'm looked upon when my career's over, I don't know that I'll have his longevity, I can just only hope that people look at me as a coach the way they look at him and the way I look at him.

**Q. You talked about the commitment to NIL from schools. You've said many times that Kimani and Luke are ready to be head coaches. When these guys go in to interview, do you feel they need a minimum commitment of NIL money from schools that they talk to? Seems like a lot of mid-major coaches moving up. Is the number one priority the NIL number they're going to get from the new school?**

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I mean, I don't think it's just NIL. Whether it's Kimani or Luke or any coach right now. Am I going to be able to hire an excellent staff around me? Am I going to be -- I'm playing high-major games. Am I going to be on a Southwest flight C38 with my seven-foot center the next day as opposed to being on a charter?

If you're not all in on a full commitment, you can't win. That goes for mid-majors, too. You got to have one of the best jobs in your league, if possible. If you're going to take a job that's not at the top of the league, you better get assurances in your contract that you're going to this much to spend on a roster, this much for staff and that you're going to charter every flight and nutrition, practice facility. You have to have everything in place.

If you shortcut anything in today's college basketball, you try to get by on nostalgia, you've got no shot.

**Q. Back to the game in October, what have you learned most about your team since then and also about Michigan State's team since then and about yourself as a coach?**

DAN HURLEY: I'll start with Michigan State. Their improvement across the board as a team, 'cause Coach I remember leaving me a message after the scrimmage. I think we spoke maybe a couple days later about our teams. He was really disappointed in how they showed up

for that.

I mean, their improvement, development across the board, just how much better they've gotten individually. The perimeter players, the three-point shooting. Fears' development as the point guard. Cooper making threes, lobs, scoring in the post. Kohler doing the same things, minus the lob dunks. The wing shooting. Your son amongst the issues that we've got to deal with on the perimeter.

For us, we weren't healthy in that one. But we both I think have had a similar year. We both have had great seasons. I thought we both crushed the non-conference. We played at the top of our league in conference play. Now we're both in the second weekend.

I'm just excited. I feel like it's an honorable game for UConn, Michigan State. It's a great crazy Sweet 16 game. Excited to be in it.

**Q. I asked Coach Izzo earlier today about how people in the media often criticize him for 'hard coaching'. He actually brought you up.**

DAN HURLEY: Who?

**Q. Izzo. He said, 'I love Danny Hurley, not because it's a love fest, not because he says the right things. He's not afraid of saying what he has to the players he has. He's even better than me, he takes it to the officials. I love that about him, I really do.'**

DAN HURLEY: He's working the refs, setting me up (laughter).

**Q. First of all your response to what he said, then what does it say about the culture that people see hard coaching and think that's a problem?**

DAN HURLEY: I think that's just society has gotten soft in a lot of ways in trying to develop young people. I think the teachers and coaches that impact young people's lives are not the teachers and coaches that gave them a grade they didn't deserve.

You remember the teachers and coaches that pushed you to your maximum, pushed you beyond your comfort level to get the most out of you. That English teacher that made you do the work, the tests were hard, you had to study hard. I think the same thing applies to coaching.

Feel like I got a responsibility. I coach 18-, 19-, 20-year-old men. There's a lot that I got to instill in them. There's a lot of discipline, accountability. There's a lot of commitment

that I've got to instill in them to prepare 'em for the real world. The real world is tough. It's cruel. You got to be equipped.

So on the flipside of how I'm driving 'em and pushing 'em to be the best they can be, prepare 'em for life.

I also have a very close bond with my players. I love 'em. They know I love 'em. A lot of the relationship that the media doesn't see are times we spend together laughing, joking, making fun of each other. You don't see that part of me. You unfortunately only sometimes see the monster.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

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