

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

Sunday, March 29, 2026

Washington D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

UConn Huskies

Dan Hurley

Braylon Mullins

Tarris Reed Jr.

Silas Demary Jr.

Alex Karaban

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

UConn - 73, Duke - 72

THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by Braylon Mullins, Tarris Reed Jr., Silas Demary Jr., and Alex Karaban of UConn.

Q. For Tarris and Alex, the Duke players said they thought that they maybe lost a little bit of a competitive edge in the second half. I think that it could be argued that you guys took your competitiveness up a notch. When did that shift happen, and how did it happen?

ALEX KARABAN: I think it happened in the second half. I think it was the start of the second half we started being more physical. We started really playing to the calling card that we play at.

We just felt like we let our offense really dictate how we were playing in the first half when we necessarily didn't have shots fall or the flow of our offense really got disrupted.

I think, when we took pride on the defensive end, everything changed.

TARRIS REED JR.: Yeah, piggy-back off what AK said, it was definitely that second half. At halftime Coach said, we've got to swing for the fences. We've got to give it all we've got.



We were coming out of halftime down 15 or whatever it was, going down and giving it our all. Keep chipping away, keep chipping away at the lead. Then we get it back, and the rest is history. This guy hit the freakin' game winner.

Q. Braylon, as I'm sure you've been asked already, talk us through it. What did you see? What did you think? What did you feel? How did it happen?

BRAYLON MULLINS: Man, it's just -- yeah, still a loss of words. Still processing all of what just happened. I think that last possession it was just we were trying to foul the worst free-throw shooter on the floor, and Silas ended up deflecting the pass to the other end of the floor.

I had the ball, and I know AK had just hit one. So I threw him it with four seconds left, and man, he just threw the ball back to me, and I knew I had to put one up. Man, I'm just happy that was the one that went down tonight.

Q. Braylon and Silas, because you guys came over with the trap, if you can take us through a little bit of like the defensive play that led to the shot, what was the plan? What were you supposed to be doing? It looked very distinctive.

SILAS DEMARY JR.: I think we were all in the backcourt. I think it was Pat behind us and maybe one more person. So I kind of just sold out and was like, either we get the steal here or they get an open dunk. So just gave them our all, jumped and deflected it, and we recovered it and Braylon that big-time shot.

BRAYLON MULLINS: I think he kind of just spoke that one to a T, I think we were all just trying to get the ball out of whoever had the ball in their hands and trying to make a play on the ball. Silas made an incredible, incredible play, and everything else just happened as it is.

Q. Are you surprised?

BRAYLON MULLINS: I knew we were the back two guys, and we left whoever was behind us, and we were just trying to make a play. Yeah, that's just how it happened.

Q. Alex, we would love your perspective as well. Braylon, did you sense his presence there? What were



you seeing as you delivered the ball to him? Then when his shot was in the air, what were you seeing and thinking in the moment?

ALEX KARABAN: When I saw Braylon, and for some reason I had the gut instinct to pass it to him. I looked at the rim and there was five seconds left, and I thought maybe something better could develop. I had Cam Boozer in front of me, which was a harder, more difficult shot, so I passed it to Braylon.

When I saw him release it, I was like, that really might go in. It went in, and the Indiana kid sent us to Indianapolis. Like that one? I've been using it a lot lately.

You know, he did that. I mean, every time Braylon shoots it from no matter where, it looks like it's going in.

Q. Tarris, coming out of halftime, a lot of production had been coming from you and Duke started to double you. What did that open up for you as a playmaker?

TARRIS REED JR.: Even in the first half where I had a couple of turnovers and where Boozer blocked me from behind a couple times, going into the media timeouts, they were telling me, yo, if they're going to come and double, kick out to the corners, but don't overthink it, at halftime.

Being able to take my time and seeing the whole floor, knowing I had a high production in the first half, knowing they were going to collapse on me in the post, and like I said, trust my shooters and trust the guys around me.

Q. Tarris, the first half kind of felt like you versus the Boozers almost in some ways. Did it feel like, if you could keep your team there, getting that lead from 19 down to 15, that you'd be able to make this second half comeback and the guys would come back around you and score?

TARRIS REED JR.: Honestly, it was just trying to win at this point. It could be my last college basketball game, and they were just like, go for it all. Coach told us before the game, you've got to swing for the fences, go as hard as you can.

I'm I can, like I said, trying to keep the team alive. Eventually guys were going to knock down shots, which they did, and like I said, just trusting in each other.

Q. Tarris, they got you in that matchup when they had Boozer bringing up the ball a lot. How does that speak to your versatility where you were able to take on that matchup and kind of the success you were able to have a little later when you got some of those

switches?

TARRIS REED JR.: Cam Boozer is a terrific player. He can guard at all three levels. We knew it was going to be a five-man job for us this game. We knew he was going to be on the perimeter.

Showing my versatility. Trusting the guys around me. Calling out ball screens, left, right. Really playing team defense and helping each other out and stopping the ball.

Q. Alex, obviously the game wasn't going your way until like the final minute, but Tarris gets that steal, and you pull up for 3. Can you just take us through what you were thinking going into those final moments and hitting that shot, how good it felt?

ALEX KARABAN: It felt really good. I knew eventually the shots would fall. We had so many good looks this game, they just weren't falling. You can't really let your confidence die down when you don't see shots go in.

So just continuing to believe in myself, continuing to thank my teammates to trust in me no matter what, and when I shot it, it looked good.

Q. Tarris, you've had a lot of those top of the key pokes free, then you break out in transition and slam down a dunk. That was a big momentum swing for you guys today. Have you worked on that timing for those plays? You've racked up a couple of those in this tournament.

TARRIS REED JR.: Crazy you say that, Coach gets mad at me all the time in practice, don't steal, don't reach, don't play sometimes too aggressive when I can get easy fouls. Like I said, this is the game on the line. This is my career on the line. I was going for it all.

Knowing that have good hands, good timing, and try to do something, a couple of breakaway dunks this March. Looking forward to getting some more.

THE MODERATOR: Want to congratulate Alex, Silas, Tarris, and Braylon. We'll see you next week in Indy.

DAN HURLEY: Obviously that's an epic, just another chapter in the UConn-Duke NCAA Tournament dramatics. Obviously a really tough way for their season to end. I thought they played great. I thought they punched us in the mouth with incredible force.

The Boozer boys, I've been admirers of their approach to basketball. All I've ever watched these guys do is just win everything that they play in over the course of their career

and grassroots and then the impact they've had on Duke and obviously across the board.

Just their program, you couldn't have more respect for Jon Scheyer and what they've done since he's been here.

I think for us, the story was just that that game was a reflection on the season. It's been a season where we've been dealt with injuries to key players at critical points of the year that we've had to overcome, and we've had to show a lot of fortitude and resilience and just kind of claw our way through the season. Thought just the game was a microcosm of that. We fought, we clawed, put ourselves in position to take advantage of a mistake that they made.

And one of the most brilliant shooters you'll ever see shoot a basketball made an incredible, legendary March shot.

Q. Obviously you just mentioned one of the great March shots, and you've seen -- you were in the stands for the Laettner shot. Have you seen anything like what Braylon just did to seal the game?

DAN HURLEY: No. I mean, I've had it done to me. I've been on the bad side, maybe not a shot like that, but just in a game of that magnitude, especially when we were -- they make it tough on you because they're obviously an excellent defensive team, but we probably, we're going to look at film, and see shot quality on a number of the 3s we missed and say, hey, man, it felt like a little bit of some type of justice.

We missed a lot of really good shots throughout the game, and then we had to make a really hard shot. Things just evened out at that point, let's say.

Q. Dan, what does it take, you go down 19 in the first half against a team like that. They've only lost twice this year and the players that they have. But what does it take for your team to stick in that and for you to stick in as a coach and come back?

DAN HURLEY: Strong men. It takes strong men. It takes a strong team. It takes a tough team. It takes strong men. It takes a bunch of players that let us coach them, let us coach them hard. That starts in June. We run a very intense program.

We're on these guys. We stress them in practice. We put a lot of pressure on them on a daily basis to do the right things, to do everything at game speed, to do everything hard, to do everything tough, to be prepared because that's what it takes to win games like this or to stay in a game like that where you're getting outplayed.

You're having a really bad shooting night at the absolute worst time, but what kicks in at that point is just a bunch of strong men, a strong team, players that let their coaches coach them hard and prepare them for tough moments.

Q. Coach, how are you doing?

DAN HURLEY: I'm doing great, bro. I'm doing great.

Q. What's something that happened tonight that you saw that didn't show up in the stat sheet but radically changed the momentum of the game?

DAN HURLEY: I just thought to start the game we were a little bit -- I just thought we were a little bit on our heels. I thought we were too defensive defensively. We didn't get after them and try to pressure them or make them uncomfortable. I just think that we probably maybe gave a little bit too much respect to their individual players.

I just that Malachi Smith with some ball pressure, I thought Silas with some ball pressure, I thought Jayden Ross -- I just thought we got after them a little bit more and turned them over. Turnovers have been an issue for them like they have for us.

Just upping a little bit of defensive energy, I thought helped us a lot.

Q. Three Final Fours in the last four seasons. Just curious, what do you think are the similarities from those teams to this team and some of the differences?

DAN HURLEY: I mean, the '23 and '24 teams, they just smashed everybody. We just ran through this tournament like it was nothing. So more of a team that had to be clutch, that's had to be clutch the whole year. We've had to win a lot of close games throughout the year, and I think that that honestly just gave us a level of comfortability in a game that it's a one-possession game, it's a two-possession game, we've been in this spot before.

I think that's what's really helped -- this team's got NBA players, NBA-level talent, just like those teams from a talent standpoint. But I think maybe just a guy like Tarris Reed just elevating his game for this tournament and changing his legacy, changing his trajectory, put himself, I think, in position now to walk away from this tournament, it looks like he's playing himself into the first round.

I would just say not as dominant, just a resilient team that's got a lot of confidence in close, late games.

Q. You guys started 1-of-18 from 3-point range, finished 4-for-5, and hit the game-winner from 3. How

ironic is that? What turned for you guys down the stretch there?

DAN HURLEY: What the hell did you just say, 1-for-18? I knew it was bad. I kept asking the assistant coaches, and no one would tell me what it was. I knew it was bad.

I thought a lot of them were pretty good looks. You're not going to get great looks versus Duke or great defense. When you play great defenses, the windows are tighter. Obviously, we were kind of wearing Tarris out in terms of catches and stuff. We couldn't have made him more of a focal point, but if we were going to win the game, we were going to have to make a couple of 3s down the stretch.

I thought we were getting decent looks. Obviously Braylon's look at the end was a bomb, but Silas' looks, they were clean. I thought we got a lot of good looks. We just -- you know, for whatever reason, this team has not shot to Solo Ball, Braylon Mullins, AK -- those are three of the best shooters in the country. We just haven't had that shooting magic, but then we did.

Q. Coach, what's the thought process after that steal and not calling a timeout and just letting Braylon and Alex make a play?

DAN HURLEY: It's scary, man. It's like what the -- because Duke is so good defensively, it just felt like you're almost -- you're watching Alex and seeing kind of like, as Braylon's catching the ball, does he look like he's in some type of a rhythm? Does he look like he's going to kind of rip drive it?

You're torn right there, and you're almost like -- and you're just, it's instincts. It's gut instinct. But I think with their size, their length, their ability to switch everything, it just felt like the window where you've just got to let March Madness take over, March Magic.

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