

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Ole Miss vs Michigan State

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Jaemyn Brakefield

Eduardo Klafke

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Yeah, just being honest with guys and not sugar coating anything. Obviously me and Coach Beard had a great conversation in meetings last summer, so just getting the game plan of what we wanted to do and just getting rid of all the bluff.

Q. Coach Beard talked a little bit about chemistry and buy-in. When did this team feel like it clicked, not just as teammates, but as a group that could make a run in March. Was there any specific moment?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: In the summertime, we'd been through a lot of adversity early, and the coaching staff did a great job of creating those environments for us. Them putting us in those opportunities to be us and be the best version of ourselves. They've done a great job of that.

EDUARDO KLAFKE: As Jaemyn said, since the first few days and weeks, I feel like we bonded together, and we created a great relationship with each other since like the first week.

Q. Eduardo, 29 years ago, your father played for Brazil, and Scottie Pippen played for the Dream Team 3, about a mile and a half away for the Olympics. And now you're playing here and Scottie's Son, Justin, although he's in the portal, is on Michigan's team. Do you feel like it's a full circle moment, and who's the best athlete in your family?

EDUARDO KLAFKE: It's a great feeling for me. My dad said that Scottie was probably the greatest player he ever played against. It's a great feeling to be here close to his son now. I'm definitely going to be the best athlete in the family.

Q. I have a question for you about NIL. I know there's often this idea that it's the wild, wild west, and all that. I'm curious from your perspective, how has it helped you, and how has it served you in a way that maybe it couldn't have before this?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: It's great. Obviously it changes lives. I don't know if you've seen my story, obviously with my little brother, being able to change his life and move him out of the situation that he was in and move him to Oxford and be like the father figure for him, it's been great

THE MODERATOR: We're here until 12:25 with Jaemyn Brakefield and Eduardo Klafke.

Q. Jaemyn, what does it mean to get Mikeal back this week? I know you've missed him a couple weeks, but just to have his presence back on the bench.

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: It's great. Obviously he has a great personality. We enjoy everybody's spirit on the team, but having him come back, it brought life to the locker room even more.

Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed like as a player you were pretty active in kind of the recruiting process of getting some of these portal guys here that are contributors in this year's team. If you recall in retrospect, what are those conversations like with them, especially as someone who had already been there a couple years and knowing what you had ahead of you?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: They were direct and honest, with each and every single person. I was pretty much on everybody's visit that is at Ole Miss right now. So just having those honest conversations and being able to be real to know what we're trying to do, which is win a National Championship.

Q. Jaemyn, Coach Beard mentioned bringing guys back was part of his plan, but he wanted to bring back the right guys who could make a jump in their game. How do you think this year has helped you do that personally?



for me. Obviously I wouldn't be able to do that without NIL.

Q. Jaemyn, I believe the very first loss of your career was to Michigan State. Is there any sort of -- have you been waiting your whole career to get this game?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Yeah, for sure. Izzo is a great coach. He recruited me out of high school. So just having that relationship with him, and taking that first loss, I've been thinking about it ever since.

Q. Could you actually expand a little bit about your brother and kind of that story.

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Yeah, for sure. His name is Brandon Hill. I met him about eight, nine years ago when he was 8 years old. I met him in Huntington, West Virginia, where I went to prep school. He's the nephew of my high school coach. So just him being around, he was like our little brother, little manager, and he just hung around his uncle all the time just to get out of trouble, so stay away from trouble.

Just him being around, I felt his energy. I kind of seen myself in him a lot. So just him being around a lot, I took him under my wing early.

Then just stayed in touch all these years and just treat him like a little brother.

Then just realized as he got older, realizing his situation, I wanted to better his life. With the help of NIL, I was able to move him to Oxford this past summer, and we've been able to build a bond. I got him in Oxford High School, so it's been a great road. He'll be at the Sweet 16.

Q. For either one of you, Coach Beard has talked about considering these type of games as four-team tournaments even though it's obviously six games in three weekends, obviously you all played in a four-team tournament in San Diego back in November and get some real stiff competition. I know it was a while ago, but do you feel like that environment, that experience against that level of competition is something you're able to draw from going into this tournament?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Yeah, just like I said, the coaching staff does a great job of putting us in those environments early and giving us those opportunities. Obviously they schedule those games for a reason against two great teams in San Diego, BYU, and Purdue.

I feel like that tournament prepared us. Obviously we fell short, but we're prepared.

Q. My question is for Eduardo. It's becoming harder for freshmen to earn time and minutes in a game, but you've played in 35 and averaged 10 minutes a game. What's it been like trying to carve out a role, especially with a lot of veterans on this team?

EDUARDO KLAFKE: For sure. It's just about knowing what you have to do and knowing your role. I feel like since day one was very specific what I have to do to play in this game with veteran people.

So it's just about knowing your role and knowing what you have to do to be on the court with these guys.

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: I'll speak on that as well. I feel like for Eduardo it comes with preparation. He's done a great job with that. If you all don't know, he was here early in January of last year. So he kind of had a head start. I don't treat him as a freshman. That's why I get on him every once in a while, act like a vet.

I feel like he's somebody who's been under Coach Beard's wing and my wing. So him being ready to go in the game is no question.

Q. Jaemyn, to go back to the NIL stuff, if you could speak more broadly of teammates, kids you know, how you've seen NIL impacting their lives, aside from your story, obviously very impactful.

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: For sure. Obviously it allows you to be a pro on and off the court. I see guys really take care of their bodies. Their diets are really good. I feel like with the chance of having the financial stability, they're able to do that. So NIL has been great.

But I feel like everybody's been leaning on each other, and I feel like we've got great nutritionists, great staff all around to help us even away from NIL.

Q. For both of you, kind of the same related question. Eduardo, first of all, what's it like to be treated like a veteran by Jaemyn and the other guys? How does it make you feel that you've earned their respect? And then along those lines, Jaemyn, have you over the course of the last couple years, sort of become almost like a -- not a coach on the floor, but a mentor for a lot of these guys?

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Yeah, for sure.

EDUARDO KLAFKE: It feels really good. I feel like since the first days of practice, I feel like I kind of earned their respect just by playing hard. They know how hard I play

and how competitive I am inside the court and off the court.
So it feels really good to be treated like that.

I know that I have some kind of responsibility playing
alongside these guys being a freshman, so it feels really
good.

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Like I said, it started early.
Obviously this is my fifth year, so having a lot of experience
and knowing what I want to get done at the end of the year.
Five years of college basketball is a lot and a lot of
knowledge I've been able to not only gain myself, but to
impart to others.

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