

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Michigan vs Auburn

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Dusty May

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to get started with Coach Dusty May.

Q. Three guys that were on your Florida Atlantic team are playing in the Sweet 16 on various teams. First of all, I'm curious, sort of what that says about sort of the enduring nature of that run for you and also with the talk that, hey, Cinderella dead, you being only a couple years removed from that. Are you buying into the NIL, the portal has killed the Cinderella run?

DUSTY MAY: I really enjoyed watching our entire team separated, when you see the number of guys, we knew it in practice our backups were really, really good. Obviously Alijah and Nelly and Vlad they're such competitors that impact winning and make those around them better. Just them being in new situations it's been fun to watch. We stay in close contact and we're in group chats and follow each other closely. So it's been a lot of fun.

The second part, I don't think Cinderella is dead. I don't think she's going to be making visits as frequently as she did before. I look at it like this, we lost a few players at FAU early on. One left before we thought he was an All-League player. We're obviously disappointed everyone was always upset. My response is, hey, we get paid to coach basketball, to do the best we can. If they decide to leave, we have to support them.

Now, what we have to do a better job of is making sure we keep these guys long enough to be All-Conference. If they decide to leave, then that's part of it. But we can't leave before they become All-Conference players.

I think it's just a group that emerges out of nowhere. Even in our case, we had the year before we were really good.



We had injuries. We lost games we shouldn't have lost. So that kept our guys probably from being recruited as aggressively because we just weren't on the same stage. So a lot went into that, a lot of layers to it.

I don't think Cinderella is dead, especially when we see how good of basketball is being played at the Division II level. Josh Schertz is a close friend. Ben McCollum is a good friend. Jim Crutchfield down at Nova. Those guys move up, and they're good basketball players. So I think it's just going to look different.

Q. The way they use Broome offensively, Auburn, can you talk about how unique it is and how you have to be prepared defensively without giving away state secrets?

DUSTY MAY: I think we're all aware at how lethal he is on the block and getting to where he wants to get to and drawing fouls. He's added a 3-point shot, and then he's a very good passer, and he kind of quarterbacks their offense. So he's a challenge on a number of levels.

We actually recruited Johni aggressively at FAU, and there were four big guys the same year at South Florida, and at that time we couldn't oversign. Giancarlo Rosado committed before Broome. We begged him to wait until the spring, but he wanted to go and get it over with so he committed to Morehead State. I can't imagine if he was on our FAU team as well.

He's a good basketball player. He's always been a guy that's just produced. He's been effective. Even before everyone knew who he was, he was getting double-doubles every night against high level players.

We've just got to make everything tough. We've got to challenge his catches, we've got to push him off a step or two, just make life difficult for him.

Q. Dusty, last time you lost a game, obviously an infamous game or famous game, whatever, against Michigan State. You said after there that you have to get to that level of toughness and culture and everything else. You haven't lost since then. What changed so quickly after that?



DUSTY MAY: Renewed commitment by our players to look ourselves in the mirror and realize we have to do this, this, and this to be better. Credit the staff, they challenged our guys in practice, and our players responded. We changed our -- and granted, we had five games in 14 days, so we really weren't practicing. We were getting a little bit loose. We were getting away from what made us us, but we felt like we've kind of just got to get through this stretch.

We felt like once that happened, we had a week to practice, we had a week to regroup, refocus. When you have good players that care about each other, they want to do better, usually if you just point them in the right direction, they go with it. And they embraced the physical toughness -- the things we worked on in practice, they embraced it, and therefore they made a jump.

I think just the rest also helped, just not having so many games.

Q. Coach, you talked about maybe you guys focused a little bit too much on the regular season title back then. But now under seeded, the edge that you talked about coming into last week, do you feel like this team plays a little bit better with that chip on its shoulder as an underdog?

DUSTY MAY: Probably. When you look at where we all came from, none of us were in the McDonald's game, none of us were in the up-and-coming coaches list. Yeah, probably, it's probably just who we are. We have a chip on our shoulder.

Maybe because of our positioning, where we were, maybe we lost that chip, I don't know. It's obviously resulting, but any time we don't win a championship, I'm going to look back and think I should have done this different, different, different. Maybe made those same decisions along the way.

Nonetheless, I think we have a group that embraces that chip on their shoulder and that underdog role.

Q. Dusty, can you recount your first time seeing Danny on film? Does it like swing open doors of imagination of what was possible with kind of his weird skill set?

DUSTY MAY: Absolutely. Obviously the first thing we look at in the portal is offense and physical traits and winning and whatnot. As soon as we watched Danny, we knew we could make it work offensively. We just had to make sure it would work defensively.

To be honest, the first time I watched him, I thought he's

more physical than I imagined. I'd watched him a few times on television. You're flipping through and Yale is playing Princeton or whatever, and they're both well-coached, so you kind of want to take a peek at it.

I thought at first glance, this guy is more physical than I lot. He has better lateral quickness than I would assume of a 7-footer in the Ivy League.

Then I immediately called and text the guys that were going to be on staff and said, hey, do you mind watching one or two games? Pick out the Kansas game or the Gonzaga game, pick out the games with high major athletes, and let's just really watch and try to, I guess, predict whether he can guard those guys or can't.

Coach Boynton, Coach Church, Coach Williamson, all the guys we knew would be in the fold, all said the same thing, yeah, he can do it. So I'm not crazy. They all were as convicted as I was, yeah, we can make this work.

Q. You and Bruce Pearl both have connections to the state of Indiana. Will this be you guys' first time crossing paths? What is it like battling it out on this stage of the tournament?

DUSTY MAY: It's not our first time crossing paths. I was sitting out as a Division II player at Oakland City. We played in USI's tournament when Coach Pearl had the Screaming Eagles at the top of college basketball. Their university was 20 miles apart.

Actually, in that tournament if I remember correctly, Central Oklahoma State who had Eddie Robinson played there, an NBA player, there were some really, really good teams, and then there was us.

So I'm very familiar with the program he built there. His dad, when I took the FAU job, I was out trying to round up fans one at a time. I'd go to breakfast with old guys coaches and lunches. His dad was in some group with some former players from the Celtics from the '30s or whatever, and they would meet and talk ball for lunch. I'd go and have breakfast with those guys and have lunch.

Steven Pearl and I, we've crossed paths for years recruiting. Extremely familiar with Coach Pearl when I was assistant at Florida was when he came into the league. So there's a lot of -- a few degrees of separation with Coach Pearl. Couldn't have more respect for the way he's been able to sustain winning, build programs wherever he's been, and been at the top of college basketball.

Q. Obviously four coaches in this region have Final Four experience. From your personal experience



when you went through it, is there anything that you're kind of learning lessons or things that you implement from that time that you're bringing into this game and kind of sharing that with your guys on what they should be able to expect this weekend at all?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, a big part of it is simply minimizing distractions -- the tickets, the fans, the people coming from everywhere just wanting to be a part of it. It's all healthy. We want to share this experience with as many people that we love and care about.

But there's also an element of this is -- we have to focus on the work. We have to focus on what we've done to get us to this point. And that, in addition to especially a group that we're not supposed to be here, so we're not content just being one of 16, or we're not content competing for an Elite Eight that we still have.

We feel like we can compete with anyone in the country, so why would we come here and just be complacent and content that we're here? Let's keep our head down, focused on the work, and see where it takes us. Hopefully we look up in a couple weeks and we're really, really proud of what we did in the rear view mirror.

But when we look at it now, it's a waste of time. We're really just -- and for me personally, I was in awe the first time, like, wow, this is happening. It was so different because you weren't at Michigan. Now it's kind of like we have another four-team tournament in Atlanta. We've got to prepare for this game, and we've got to be ready for this, this, and this.

It's allowed me to separate the emotion and the excitement from it.

Q. You have two guys that know how to beat Auburn maybe a little bit more than most people. Obviously you recruited Tre from there after two years at Auburn, and Danny just beat them in the NCAA Tournament last year with Yale. What is insight from both sides of the aisle from a guy that played there and a guy that beat them in a tournament setting kind of give you when you're preparing for such an elite opponent like Auburn?

DUSTY MAY: Obviously Tre has a lot of insight with his teammates, with the system and all that. Coach Pearl is going to change his calls. They're going to have different names. It's going to be similar to every other scout.

As far as Danny knowing how to beat Auburn, if you play a team, if we could beat the Hawks 1 out of 100 times, it doesn't mean I know how to beat Quin Snyder and the

Hawks.

Obviously Danny did say, hey, a couple times against the press, we tried to do. A couple times against this switch, we tried to do this. Really, really good insight.

At the end of the day, it still comes down to execution. I'm not sure any of us know how to beat Auburn other than play really, really good, sound, poised basketball for about 80 possessions hopefully.

Q. In today's age of college basketball, it can be tough to get a team to gel with a first year staff right away. You guys haven't had an issue with that. What would you say your keys to success in doing that were? And was there maybe a defining moment where you saw it all come together?

DUSTY MAY: Number one, we try to intentionally choose like minded people, and like minded people typically gravitate towards those that are like them.

I've said this in recruiting actually in the last couple days in zooms and whatever the case, that A-holes don't like us, and we don't like them. So we just naturally go after guys who have a lot of character and are great people and guys that we want around our families and we want to have lifetime relationships with.

So it's just kind of happened -- I don't want to say even unintentionally, because it's just kind of the fabric of who we are. For whatever reason, we find guys that are like minded and were all on the same page, and we know we all need each other.

Q. I'm wondering if you've ever counted for Vlad between screens, rebounds, post offense, defense, how many collisions he has a game, and kind of how he's maintained his ability to play through all that?

DUSTY MAY: That's a great question. I've been disappointed in Vlad because sometimes I feel like he conserves. When you watch Vlad in the last five minutes of any game since I've had him, he puts his body through torture every day of the year, and there's still a different level in the last five minutes.

He even told one of the assistants recently that in the first half he flashes a lot more, and a lot of his turnovers are on the perimeter in the first half. He basically said, look, there's so many collisions, there's so much contact. I try not to use it all up in the first half for that reason. That's pretty observant.

Yeah, Vlad, he just finds contact. He wants to help his

teammates. So the screening, the ducking in, all the stuff that comes with playing with physicality, helping your teammates is important to him. Vlad's just such a pleaser and an unselfish player that he's going to do whatever his teammates need.

Vlad for 35 minutes and Vlad for the last five, he almost turns into a super hero the last five minutes as far as the things he does with offensive rebounding, running the floor, putting us in a position to win. That's the sign of a competitor. When the stakes are heightened, he elevates his play.

Q. Tre's been a little touchy talking about his experience at Auburn with us at least. How has he been with you talking about his experience? Could there be a little bit more of that insight, this guy likes to go to his left in this situation, like that really inside intel that you can't get from a scouting report?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, but even the player that Tre shared minutes with last year is playing for Alabama right now. The personnel is different. Obviously we all know Johni Broome. He's got a little bit of insight on Baker and those guys, Mazara.

From my understanding, he's very appreciative of his Auburn experience. They won. It's got him to where he is now as a person. So, no, he's never been negative at all about BP or his teammates or anyone. I think it's just he needed a change, and that's not always unhealthy.

I said that the other day that I was in the transfer portal last year, a lot of these players in the transfer portal, sometimes change is healthy at different stages of your life. He just needed a fresh start, and he's found a place where he's been embraced, and he's had a bigger role.

He's certainly produced for us and made big shots and continued to grow. He's getting better day by day, week by week.

Q. You brought up you being in the portal, that kind of brings a question I had. I think there are people that begrudge athletes for chasing bigger opportunities and more money. I'm curious, what would you say to those critics who's don't like the system as it is?

DUSTY MAY: I think every situation is different. Literally, every single situation is different. Sometimes this might be your -- I know what players make in Finland. I know what players make in Cyprus. I've coached them. They've went there.

There's different situations for everyone. If you're a legit

pro prospect in my opinion, you should go to wherever you think puts you in position to make what the Hawks players make. Then there are other players where this might be the end of the road.

We had a really, really good player at FAU that had another year. He graduated. He didn't want a Masters. We talked about it, and we didn't think there was a whole lot of cartilage left in his knees, and it was probably time for him to go make money back home. He's actually having a heck of a career.

If it was today it would be, hey, you might want to go capitalize and make as much money next year as you possibly can because I was a young coach that struggled to have a down payment on a house. I was a young coach that, if your car broke down, it might set you back a little bit. So every situation is different.

Different backgrounds, what's your objective when it comes to education? Is education really important to you, or are you in college just for basketball?

I don't begrudge anyone. Like I said, when we lost guys before anyone knew who FAU was, my message was always, hey, we get paid to coach basketball, and we're going to do that the absolute best we can. We're going to pour into these guys. If they decide this isn't for them, then we're going to give them a hug and cheer like heck for them going forward.

Is it going to sting? Yes, because we want to win. We want to win every single night. But I'm also realistic that everyone has a different background and their situation looks a lot different than everyone else's.

Q. Interested in what else has changed during this hot streak for you guys. Turnovers, L.J. Cason has had a little more of a role. If you had to pinpoint a few things that sparked your guys late in the year, what would it be?

DUSTY MAY: Obviously the turnovers. We've been much more consistent not turning the ball over. Our guards have done a better job -- I don't know the numbers in data, but my eyes tell me our guards have done a better job of defensive rebounding, which has helped our transition offense. We just look like a much more connected group.

I know really since the Michigan State game that you're referring to, since then, when I just sit down and look on the court, I feel like it's a group that just came together and they're trying to win. There's no -- there's no situations where he's trying to get this shot or he's trying to score, or he's trying to do this, or he's trying to do things he's not



very good at.

When I watch us, it's five guys out doing whatever they can and their function to help the team win. That's it. I think every team has a stretch like that where everyone's consumed with one thing winning. Sometimes it's early. Sometimes it's late. Sometimes it's fleeting. But it's really nothing more than that right now.

I look at that and see our guys doing what they do really, really well organically and just trying to make it work.

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