

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

Friday, March 28, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Auburn Tigers

Bruce Pearl

Johni Broome

Denver Jones

Tahaad Pettiford

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Auburn - 78, Michigan - 65

JOHNI BROOME: I played bad again, bro.

THE MODERATOR: Let's get started with Auburn. Coach Pearl, if you could give us a couple of quick thoughts.

BRUCE PEARL: First of all, I'd like to congratulate Michigan, the Big Ten tournament champions, on an outstanding year. What an incredible first year for that staff to come in and turn that program around.

They were playing really well coming into this tournament, having won the Big Ten tournament. Obviously we went on a 34-8 run in the second half, and it's just the kids' will to win. They just locked down defensively. I thought Dylan Cardwell did an incredible job on Goldin. I thought Johni, Dylan, Chaney were physical with those guys and didn't let them dominate the game with their size, which they do against most opponents.

Then a couple of guards got really hot. They got really heated up. Denver got heated up. Tahaad got heated up. We went to them, and they delivered.

Great win for Auburn. Four teams from the SEC in the Elite 8. That's pretty good.

Q. Johni and Denver, what has Tahaad just meant to this team and the success that you all have had thus



far?

JOHNI BROOME: It's very important. He has a very important role on this team. He does whatever it takes to win. We need a spark, he gives the spark.

And he's a good person, good human being. He listens to us, as being a freshman, but there's not too many freshmen who can take over a game like he can. You saw in today's game he had a spurt where he just took over the game.

DENVER JONES: Man, he's just a special player. Not too many freshmen are built like him. Like I said, some people just got it. Tahaad got it. Very special player, man.

Q. Tahaad, to be a freshman in this position, big shot after big shot, a monster block in the first half, can you just speak on your performance tonight?

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: Started off a little slow, not how I wanted to start, but having guys like this just to back me up knowing that they've got my back, just an amazing feeling.

Just getting out there the second half, getting back to what I usually do. Then obviously having guys like Denver and Johni stepping up too and playing huge minutes and doing what they do best. Just having guys like that knowing that they have my back is a great feeling.

Q. Johni, if any, what were the conversations like before you went on that run to get started on that run amongst the players? Like in timeouts and stuff.

JOHNI BROOME: We were playing bad. Being honest, we were playing bad. We were turning the ball over a lot, and we wasn't even -- we wasn't guarding. But we were still the game.

So everybody said let's get three stops. And three led into four and four led into five stops, and we went on a little run and the crowd got involved, and we started playing Auburn basketball.

Q. Johni, you guys had your 34th 10-0 run of the season tonight. Where does this team's spurtability come from like that?



JOHNI BROOME: The defensive end. We lay our hats on our defense. But then we have guys who can make plays. Denver went on a 10-0 run by himself. Tahaad went on a 10-0 run by himself.

Just guys like that who can create shots, it takes the load off of me. I wasn't playing my best game today, but I had my guards come through and take big shots.

BRUCE PEARL: Wait a second. You had a triple double today. Look at the stats.

JOHNI BROOME: No.

BRUCE PEARL: Scored 22 points, he had 16 rebounds, and missed 11 shots. You had a triple double.

Q. Just kind of for everybody, Pettiford, there's a bunch of Jersey City up in that crowd walking around all night. You've got places to go after this.

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: Yes.

Q. To the whole team there, there was a point in time before the coach called timeout, it seemed like there was some jawing back and forth, guys looking at the bench. You called timeout, Coach Pearl, and you kind of let the team sit and stew by themselves. Can you all just kind of talk about that sequence of events?

THE MODERATOR: Johni, take that one.

JOHNI BROOME: We're brothers at the end of the day. Brothers going to bump heads. Everybody on this -- that has Auburn on wants to win, and sometimes to win you've got to go through some adversity.

Coach has confidence in us to be able to -- we're a player-led team sometimes. A couple guys said what we wanted to say, and you've got to listen to what your teammate has to say. After that, you shake it off and go out there and play hard for the coach, for Coach Pearl.

BRUCE PEARL: The deal was we turned the ball over a little bit. We made some mistakes, and I let them kind of jaw at each other a little bit and then go, hey, man, we're good. We're in a great spot. You guys are just pushing each other.

I love the energy. I love the pace. Just slow down a little bit with the ball. We're just rushing.

Q. Denver, the 10-0 run you had by yourself, kind of talk about what got things started for you today.

DENVER JONES: Honestly, just I seen one go in, and I just felt the basket got bigger. I just wanted to continue being aggressive. Coach was getting me more involved in the plays, and I was just taking more advantage of it.

Q. Bruce, obviously a lot of freshmen this year who have gotten a lot of publicity. We haven't heard as much about Tahaad, but what did you see in him when you decided to add him to this roster?

BRUCE PEARL: First of all, I want to give his father Travis and Ira Bowman, my assistant coach, credit because those guys are family friends.

The biggest thing with Tahaad was we loved him when he was young. People were interested, they were wondering -- no, I want you to be on my team or be our scorer or whatever. I think Tahaad, he remembered that when he was younger. We didn't waiver from it. He trusted Ira, and he's learned to trust me. He didn't know me very well.

I want to give Johni credit in this regard. These guys are best friends. This is a senior in his fifth year. He's got a lot of other stuff going on. But when it comes to just messing around, having fun, he's just sort of loving on that little shit. That's all he's done. He is a little shit, you know, and he's loved on him.

And you know what, so Tahaad, he cares about Dylan. He cares about the seniors on this team. And he really wants to deliver for them.

Q. For the players, in here all of you, how big was Tahaad's 3 when you all came out of the timeout down nine? And also, could you just talk about what it means to be where you are right now in the Elite 8, one step from the Final Four?

JOHNI BROOME: That was actually a broken play. I messed the play up. I didn't know who was coming, but that just shows his shot making ability, and to be able to just be a dog at times and make plays. So he came off the pick-and-roll and shot it, and he made it, cut the lead to six. So I kind of messed the play up. That just shows how special he is though.

Q. This is a quick question for all the players. I just want to know like what was going on with the ball? It seemed like everyone was kind of fumbling it, lose control of it. Was it slippery or just rushing? What was that?

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: I would just say it was a rush, just rushing, thinking about it too much. We don't want to

blame it on the basketball because obviously you can't. So we just have to focus on catching the basketball and making the right decisions.

Q. This question is for Johni or any of you guys can answer it honestly. Obviously you guys are going to enjoy the one that you guys have tonight and so forth, but it's a quick turnaround before you have to start looking at the next opponent. When you just think about who that next opponent is and so forth, what instantly comes to mind? What is your familiarity with that opponent?

JOHNI BROOME: First off, Tom Izzo is a great coach. He's a Hall of Fame coach. And Michigan State is a very good team.

But we're not going to do too much celebrating tonight. We've got another game. We've got to prep. We've got to take care of our bodies. We've got to rest. Let's try to get to San Antonio to the Final Four.

Q. Johni, I believe Danny Wolf scored his last bucket at the 13:06 mark. Between you and Cardwell and Chaney, what were you all able to do to adjust on him to sort of deny his touches and frustrate him down the stretch?

JOHNI BROOME: Coming into this game, we knew we worry about matchups, we care about matchups. We treat this game personal. That's a great front line, but we wanted to challenge ourselves and see -- to make it tough for him and Vlad Goldin.

So I credit my whole front line, even our guards, for extending the ball pressure and not making it easy for them to get any good spots.

Q. Bruce, as I saw you walking off the court, you were embracing the fans and saying one more. What does it kind of mean to have that fan base embrace you the way they did? It was loud in there tonight?

BRUCE PEARL: I would say that our guys really appreciated the fans. Obviously it helped elevate their play. But it all stems back to the grind in the sense that this team, to this point, has only lost one game at Texas A&M to a team that wasn't in the Sweet 16.

That means they respected their opponents. They didn't fear any of them, and they got ready to play every single night. We just really didn't get upset very often.

Giving us the Number 1 overall, which then put us in Atlanta -- the overall Number 1 seed should be able to play

close enough to home for your fans to see it. So they got rewarded.

Q. Coach Pearl, the shots just weren't really falling consistently until about maybe the 15-minute mark of that second half. As a coach and a staff, did you feel like, hey, it's coming, it's coming. What's kind of your thought process through that and trying to coach these guys up?

BRUCE PEARL: If Michigan can turn us over 15 times, Michigan State can turn us over 25 times. So that's a concern, and these guys know it. So we slopped through our offense. Give Michigan credit, they extended, they bothered us, and Michigan State is going to be even better at it. That's one of the best defensive teams in the country.

They're going to be very, very physical with us. We've got to do -- we have some talented players that made some big plays offensively. We have to execute better and work harder and be more physical offensively and take better care of the ball to be able to win the next game.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have. Thank you guys.

BRUCE PEARL: Go ahead. One more.

Q. (No microphone). Is that maybe your standard operating procedure?

BRUCE PEARL: It is.

Q. You turn it over, they do their own thing?

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, it's really standard operating procedure. I want them to talk to each other. I want them to get after each other. I want them to encourage each other. I don't want to start coaching them as soon as they walk in the locker room. I want to just let those guys -- let me tell you something. Coaches can help teams win games. Players win championships. I know you hear that all the time. It's really true.

When those guys talk about getting stops or taking better care of the basketball or quit rushing offensively, it means a lot more than when I say it. So I let those guys, and that's sort of standard operating procedure.

Plus it's a 20-minute halftime, so we had five extra minutes. That's been the way it's been all year long.

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