

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Michigan State vs Auburn

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

**Auburn Tigers**

**Bruce Pearl**

**Johni Broome**

**Tahaad Pettiford**

**Chaney Johnson**

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference

Auburn - 70, Michigan State - 64

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Auburn. Coach Pearl, if you could give us a couple of opening thoughts, and then we'll go to some questions.

BRUCE PEARL: I guess the first thought is there are four teams in the country that are left, and Auburn is one of them. So we couldn't be happier.

I want to congratulate Michigan State on an incredible year. We saw them in Maui, and they were good. I don't know that when we saw them in Maui, that you'd look at that team and say, hey, they're going to go 17-3 in the Big Ten, and they did.

The Big Ten was good, and I thought Tom and I talked before the games, our teams kind of mirrored each other in many ways, the way we defended, how hard we played, the way we try to dominate the backboards, so on and so forth.

But I felt going in that we were better. I felt like I had better players. That's not a criticism at all. I told our guys right now, we haven't beaten a team yet that I thought was better than us. That's why we're the overall Number 1 seed.

We're going to the Final Four with our four 1 seeds. The four teams that advanced, I think they're the four best teams in the country. That doesn't obviously always happen.



Johni Broome stepped up again. Just keep doubting him, and keep thinking that he's not going to be able to get to another gear. One of the reasons why I'm on him and my son Steven's on him pretty good is because I know what he's capable of, I know what he's capable of.

You talk about delivering again at the biggest moments.

Last thing is just grateful for our fans and our families because Auburn looked -- we are a football school. We are. Don't ever forget that. We're a football school. We are. But we're also an everything school. We're an everything school. Our fans represented really well here in Atlanta.

**Q. Johnny, talk to us about you come out of the locker room --**

JOHNI BROOME: Johni.

**Q. Sorry about that. Fans went crazy when you came out, and you got that 3-pointer. How did that feel for you to come back out in that half?**

JOHNI BROOME: All glory to God. When I came back out, when I hit that 3 ball, I called on him again. You got to always call on him. He's always going to deliver.

**Q. Chaney, you and Dylan had to man the paint while Johni was out. What did you guys do to keep everything calm while Johni was out and keep the lead? I don't think you let it go back under double figures?**

CHANEY JOHNSON: Credit to Michigan State because they have incredible bigs. They're real physical, and we just had to continue playing tough. When Johni went out, my heart dropped, but he came to me and Dylan and was like, you might have to finish for us. We were just like, all right, we've got to lock in and continue being tough because toughness wins in March.

**Q. Coach, so much was made out of your comments --**

THE MODERATOR: Student-athletes first.



**Q. Johni, I'll ask you the same question. Coach yesterday mentioned that you guys were more the underdogs than Michigan State, that they weren't the underdogs, and so much was made out of those comments. Was that like a motivating thing for the team? You just said that -- he just said he had the better players. How did you guys take those comments, and was that kind of a way to motivate you guys?**

JOHNI BROOME: Michigan State is historic, amazing, great team. Tom Izzo is a Hall of Fame coach. He wasn't lying. That's a great team we just played.

It had to motivate us a little bit. Obviously he knew the type of players he has. He knows how to motivate us. So shout out Michigan State again.

**Q. Johni, yesterday you told us after you scored 22 and 16, you felt like you didn't play well. What did you feel about your performance today?**

JOHNI BROOME: All right. I mean, we won, so I'm happy we're still in this. All glory to God again for allowing me to be healthy.

**Q. Tahaad, how do you think playing in the SEC prepared you for what you've seen in the postseason so far?**

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: Obviously the SEC this year was like a gauntlet, so every night we had to be prepared. It wasn't no easy game. So I just feel like coming into March, especially a tournament like this, playing every team, you probably will, we were prepared for it because we played against everybody.

**Q. Johni, I'm wondering what did you do when you went to the locker room? How were you checked out? What was your level of concern when you were back there?**

JOHNI BROOME: I went to the locker room. We have a great support staff. I checked my arm out. The Doc said nothing's wrong, you're good. Nothing serious. So at that moment, I just wanted to help my teammates. If that's coming back out and playing and hitting one shot and grabbing the rebound, I was going to do it.

I was sitting on the sidelines before, and I was going to do it. I came back out. Dylan needed a break, so I went in for a couple minutes just to help us win.

**Q. Tahaad, talk about that 3 that you hit in the second half with about 11 minutes to go and the little swing**

**play and the crowd went crazy. What was going through your head in that moment?**

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: Definitely happy to see one go in, but just hearing the crowd and the energy go up after that shot, I feel like that just changed the momentum of the game and just helped us keep the lead that we needed.

**Q. Johni, can you describe the feeling when you were standing on top of the ladder?**

JOHNI BROOME: Man, words can't even describe it. The fact that this team, who's been working so hard from the time we got here to even the first time I told the Coach this was a part of our plans, a part of our goals. To stand on top of the ladder in front of all the Auburn fans still being there traveling and witnessing it as well and looking down and seeing my teammates, the whole Auburn family, it just means the world to me.

To kind of be able to deliver for the Auburn family.

**Q. This question is for all the players. Florida gave you guys your first conference loss this season. How motivated are you guys for that rematch in the Final Four?**

CHANEY JOHNSON: I mean, Florida has a great team. They were good enough to beat us at home, so we've just got to go game by game. It's another team in the way of us getting to the National Championship. So we've just got to continue putting our head down, continue staying humble, continue staying hungry. Just go out there and play with great effort and great energy.

**Q. Chaney, your coach has described you as the hardest working guy on this team. In fact, there's a machine in the weight room, and I think you own every record in it. Can you reflect on your work to this point and what it feels like for all the hard work to pay off?**

CHANEY JOHNSON: Fact check, Dylan did break my record.

JOHNI BROOME: But it's like Dylan, Chaney, Chaney, Chaney, Chaney.

CHANEY JOHNSON: All glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has blessed me with such a wonderful opportunity, I can't take it for granted. That's why I work so hard. I just want to be the best player I can be for my team. That's why I've put in all the hours. I haven't been playing as well as I've wanted to play. I'm blessed with another opportunity to put play against another great team against San Antonio. Like Tahaad said, hopefully I show up.



JOHNI BROOME: He's going to show up. Believe it.

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: He have no choice.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys. You can go back to the locker room.

Let's start with Coach Pearl.

**Q. Just talk about the second half. You had some guys in foul trouble, some injuries. I know you've been pretty -- you know, you've kept an eight-man rotation for most of that series. Was there any point you wanted to go deeper on the bench or felt like you had to?**

BRUCE PEARL: When Johni went out, I immediately thought about Chaney and Dylan, and neither of them went into foul trouble. I knew that we were going to be fine there. I might have timeouts to be able to give them the time they need. If Johni had not come out of the locker room, I probably would've gotten a timeout. It was not going to affect us defensively. Chaney and Dylan can obviously do what needs to be done on the defensive end and rebounding.

My guess is, when Johni was out, we hung in there. We made it difficult for Michigan State to score.

**Q. Did you get a diagnosis from the team doc? Was it hyperextension or anything? Is there anything that he'll be limited doing in the next week?**

BRUCE PEARL: I didn't get any diagnosis. When Johni came out of the locker room, I hadn't talked to the doctor, but I just asked him, are you good to go? He said, I am. I said, well, get your ass in there.

Dylan was ready to come out. Dylan was kind of calling the bench. If Johni had not come out, I probably would have just called a timeout.

I think we won't really know until tomorrow and see what that was. Whether it's a slight hyperextension or whatever it was, obviously the doctors were able to examine it and determine that there was no damage. I bet you it will be pretty sore tomorrow, though.

**Q. There's a lot of conversation yesterday about the building of your team, mixing portal and returners. After now winning this game and seeing your guys battle through that injury and step up, what's that feeling like for you now?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think that both are important. There's such a foundation in this team with Dylan Cardwell or Chris Moore, guys that have been there four and five years.

Johni has been there three years. I think that one of the things that they talked about yesterday was I told these guys, look, I'm going to bring in good guys. So you bring in Chaney Johnson, you bring in Denver Jones, you bring in Chad Baker-Mazara, and it tells the guys that are left, he did bring in good guys and guys that were willing to make sacrifices and want to try to become a great team.

We'll continue to recruit really good high school players that want to be coached and developed, and we'll continue to jump in the portal and get guys that want to be an Auburn man and play the way we play.

**Q. Coach, Auburn basketball is a program you built brick by brick since 2014. Can you reflect on your conversations with your AD John Cohen about the things you've needed to get Auburn basketball back to this point? You got Johni to return. You're going to have the same challenge getting Tahaad to return probably next year. What is it you need to build a successful program in today's college basketball?**

BRUCE PEARL: If you look at my staff, you'll notice that guys have been with me a long time. Steven Pearl's been with me his whole life. Steven has been on our staff for 11 years in lots of different ways. He could have left several times for head coaching positions, but he wanted to continue to help his father, and he stayed loyal to Auburn. Together we make a great team.

Chad Prewett's been with me since we got the job. Mike Burgomaster came as a graduate assistant coach after being a manager at Miami, and I was able to -- he was able to demonstrate to me his knowledge and his feel for the offensive end. So we elevated Mike, got a chance to actually be an assistant coach last year. I think Mike's been with me seven years. Ian Borders has been with me six, seven, eight years.

Mike Jeffrey started as a manager. He's now my Director of Basketball Operation, probably been with me eight or nine years. You don't see that continuity in staffs -- Ira Bowman came from Penn. A guy from Jersey, probably come out to Auburn for a few years, get a couple good players. He hasn't left. He stayed here, raised his family here.

Auburn is a special place. It is a very, very -- it is, it's a special place. I liked every place I've lived. I've never liked any place more than I've liked Auburn.

That's how the program is where it's at because of this staff. I did not do it. And the support that I get from John Cohen, John has built the finest athletic staff since I've been there. Jay Jacobs hired me, and without Jay Jacobs, I would not be at Auburn, and Jay is one of my dear, dear friends. John has put together an absolutely -- our marketing guys are incredible. Our business guys are incredible. The academic integrity.

And John Cohen was a great baseball coach who understands what it takes. With his leadership -- I think the other thing too is the trust that Dr. Roberts has in John Cohen. John Cohen runs our athletic program, period. Dr. Roberts is our president, and he is smart enough to let the experts do what they do. John has been great support to me and great advice and great counsel. We've absolutely done this together.

**Q. Coach, looks like the first time since 2014 two SEC teams in the Final Four. Only the second time since you were in the SEC when you started at Tennessee that that's happened. What does that say about the SEC, this historic role continues. What would you say about the season and what the SEC has in the Final Four?**

BRUCE PEARL: How the SEC does really matters to me. It genuinely matters to me. It starts with Mike Slive, who was a great, great leader in the SEC, and unfortunately we lost him way, way too soon. One of the great things that Mike Slive did was he had his -- his number one was Greg Sankey. When we made that transition to Greg, the hardest thing Greg had to do was replace himself. Our league office is really, really strong and got great, great leadership and really smart people. And obviously put this thing together.

Basketball wasn't holding up its end. It was Kentucky. It was a Billy Donovan coached Florida team, and then every now and then, maybe Arkansas would have a run or Tennessee would have a run, whatever, whatever. There are now 16 basketball programs in the SEC that are all committed to being competitive in men's basketball.

The fan bases -- we did not play on the road this year, except maybe once, where the game wasn't a sellout.

The league has done a great job, and unfortunately, there will only be one SEC team playing for the National Championship on Monday.

**Q. Bruce, the 17-0 run you guys went on in the first half, how important was that to the tempo you guys played the rest of the game?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think, if you're watching that game and you're at home and you're playing against Michigan State, you're playing against Tom Izzo and to watch our guys execute offensively and get great looks and go this is -- and one of the things that I stressed to our guys, we benefited greatly by not valuing possessions against Michigan in the first half. We were sloppy. We were careless. Fortunately, we got it going in the second half.

But we knew in this particular game that was not going to be an option. We got to our spot. We got our real estate. To only have two turnovers against a Michigan State defense is obviously really good.

I just think our guys, they've trusted us with a game plan. And one of the things that we just talked about, if we do these things offensively and then if we do these things defensively, we're going to win the game, and they did, and we did.

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