

# NCAA Men's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Kansas City

Friday, March 29, 2019

Kansas City, Missouri



## Bruce Pearl J'Von McCormick Jared Harper Auburn Tigers

Auburn - 97 North Carolina - 80

THE MODERATOR: The victorious Auburn Tigers are with us. They are on to the Elite 8 to play the winner of Houston or Kentucky. Head coach Bruce Pearl is with us. J'Von McCormick, Jared Harper. We'll ask Coach Pearl to open up with a statement on the game, and then we'll have questions for all three gentlemen from Auburn.

Bruce, please.

BRUCE PEARL: Well, congratulations to North Carolina on another great year. This is Roy's third No. 1 seed in four seasons and a piece of the ACC championship. Roy was to gracious in defeat. I will remember and appreciate that forever.

We're pretty emotional because it's a bittersweet accomplishment because of Chuma getting hurt late in the game. Nobody works harder, nobody gives us more courage. When it gets tough and you got to go to a matchup, we got five and you don't. That's how we felt.

In a game full of guys that -- that have got a chance to play at the next level, I thought he was the best player, and that has happened a lot to us this year. So, we're disappointed he may be lost, but we are very, very grateful to be moving on and representing the SEC and Auburn in the Elite 8.

THE MODERATOR: First question is right here.

**Q. Coach, you start the second half on a 10 - 0 run with two 3s from Harper and Brown. How big was that in kind of setting the tone for the second half?**

BRUCE PEARL: Well, we are who we are. Bryce didn't score in the first half, and I was probably on him more for his defense than it was for his offense. We knew he would come around. Jared got two fouls in the first half

and had to play limited minutes and J'Von came in and extended our lead because they couldn't stay in front of him. He got downhill, and then when Jared came in in the second half, he was able to take the game over, getting his teammates shots and.

He did some heavy play calling and late in the second half. And as I predicted in the some pregame interviews, Jared is pretty -- you know, some offensive coordinators, they should be a little bit harder to read. Jared is almost always going to go to the hot hand, and I just stayed out of the way.

**Q. Can you give us any more update on Chuma, what the injury is, likelihood of him playing?**

BRUCE PEARL: It's a knee injury. We don't know the status, but we think it could be serious.

**Q. The second straight defeat of a blue blood. You have a chance, depending on if Kentucky wins, on knocking off the top three schools all time in wins. What do you think about that?**

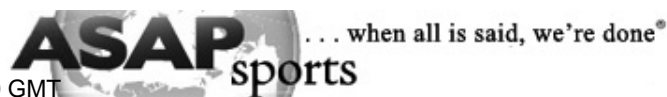
BRUCE PEARL: I take it one at a time. You know, for me seeing Houston and Kentucky in a Sweet 16 game, I was at Boston College in 1982 -- actually it was '81. I think we played a Hakeem Olajuwon in St. Louis for the Midwest Regional Championship. To me, Houston is kind of a blue blood also because of the great Guy Lewis, incredible rich and history of tradition. It will be a challenge regardless who advances.

**Q. Jared and J'Von, do you feel like you did a better job this second half of forcing North Carolina to play at the speed you wanted to play, especially when you pushed the ball?**

J'VON MCCORMICK: We knew coming into the game that it was going to be a big key, transition defense. And I felt like for the first half, we did a good job and second half we picked it up.

JARED HARPER: I'll just say we know our offense builds from our defense being able to get those key stops we did in the second half starting out on that 10 - 0 run. We did a good job of that. I'm just gracious to have the teammates that I do that help me out and play well defensively as a team to win like that, and we shot the ball also well also in the second half.

**Q. Bruce, the impact of the loss of Chuma Okeke?**



**Can you talk about that, what that means to you guys?**

BRUCE PEARL: He's a nightmare to matchup with because he can guard any position. He can score inside and out. So, as a play caller he gives you incredible flexibility. He's our most versatile player.

I thought our bench did a tremendous job responding. We got 40 off our bench tonight. I thought Danjel Purifoy stayed right and ready, and, you know, we probably don't hold on unless we have Danjel sort of ready to be able to go in there.

Think it's a great lesson for teams. Danjel is playing behind a great player in Chuma Danjel is very good. He could have packed his bags and waited until next year or some other opportunity, and instead he stayed ready, and so many guys are thinking about well, where can I now go to get more shots or more playing time. And even though he was only playing what, five, ten minutes a game, and these guys did a great job of encouraging Danjel and making sure Danjel understood, hey, we need you and you got to be ready if your number gets called. As a result, we beat North Carolina to go to the Elite 8 because he stayed ready.

**Q. I'm not sure I've ever quite seen a moment like what happened with Chuma where your whole team went over there at one point and Carolina players, too. Can you just describe what that was like, both in terms of the moment, but also obviously that could be a pivot point in the game, keeping your team's composure?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think in those moments, you begin to see what these guys are made of, both teams, the fabric. We started to pray. We asked God to watch over our brother. And Carolina did it and our guys did it. Our guys said -- as soon as he went down, they said, "Let's play." Blessed that we live in a country where we're able to do that. That was I think everybody's first thought. Wasn't about the score or the next possession. It was about our brother.

**Q. Coach, sometimes you know it's your night when things happen that are unusual. And I wonder in that second half when you banked in the 3 from the top of the circle, if you got a feeling at that time that it was going to be your night?**

BRUCE PEARL: Well, we made 16 other ones that didn't even hit the backboard so -- I felt -- Anfernee McLemore was the guy that shot it. He can make that 3.

So, I don't know that I ever felt that way. I think when we would engage defensively and take guarding seriously, I thought we had a chance. We had some situations where look, Carolina scored 80 points. We

had to put up 97 to win. That's not going to be a formula to advance. So, we're going to have to pick up the defense. Fortunately, we didn't get overwhelmed in the rebounding. We had some very, very weak defensive possessions that could have cost us this game.

**Q. Bruce, understanding that it's still early, how do you feel about Sunday's matchup, whether it's Houston or whether it's Kentucky?**

BRUCE PEARL: We played Kentucky, and they physically overwhelmed us in Lexington. We actually went into that game playing pretty well, and we got manhandled.

We haven't lost since that game in late February. The lesson there was we didn't -- because we respect Kentucky so much and we recognize they had a great night, these guys weren't destroyed. Kentucky really beat us. We didn't play great, but we got it handed to us because they played so well.

I know Kelvin Sampson is a great coach, one of the most underrated coaches in our game, and I would say this is going to be a great matchup of two really good defenses. Coach Cal does a phenomenal job with his defense. Both teams play hard. I don't think we'll get near 97 or 80.

**Q. Bruce, going back to the 3 pointers, I mean, I don't have a chart that shows how many uncontested 3s that you had, but it seemed like a lot. Could you just talk about the kind of spacing that the guys had on the perimeter and the ball movement that allowed you to get good looks?**

BRUCE PEARL: You know, we thought -- there was some things we could do offensively to get our guys open, we thought. They got to be the ones to make those shots and then when you get great point guard play. These are the two of the quickest guys in college basketball. And they're a load to stay in front of us, and they're incredibly unselfish. And if we've got a guy on the perimeter that we can get open, they're going to find them.

**Q. Jared, it seemed like every single time Carolina started to get some momentum back in the game, you guys came back and just got another 3, stayed under control, and didn't let them get any of those momentum swings in the game. How important was that for you to -- as a point guard to kind of captain that?**

JARED HARPER: I just think we did a good job as a team just recovering, not trying to get to up, not trying to get too down. We went on runs. We knew they were going to make runs. But just trying to remain, just stay solid defensively and play our game, be able to

spread the court, get in the lane and just find people and make shots.

**Q. Both of the players, how important was that last sequence in the first half where you scored the 6 straight points to take the lead, and do you kind of feel like that carried over into the second half?**

J'VON MCCORMICK: Yes. We needed that momentum going into the second half. We knew coming out, we needed the stars to push us and get a good start for us.

JARED HARPER: I was in foul trouble in the first half. I think I wanted to get in the game late, but our coaches, our teammates, we all do trust J'Von so much. He made some incredible plays tonight, and just that play at the end of the first half when he was able to go down the lane and finish was a big play.

**Q. Jared, how important is Chuma to the team how are you guys going to rally around the fact he's probably out?**

JARED HARPER: I think Chuma is our most valuable player. He rebounds, gets assists. He scores inside, outside. He can guard all five pockets. He's always in the right spot. But I think the good thing going forward is we have nine other people. Over the past month, we've got contributions from all ten of our players. So it will take all nine of our players to be to play and step in his role, make sure we're in the right spots and rebound. I know our team is ready for the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else for the Tigers of Auburn?

**Q. Talk about the offense from Tom Davis.**

BRUCE PEARL: Dick, if you ever want to pay me a compliment about my team, tell me they look like Tom Davis' team. If you're any good at what you do, there's a chance you had a really good mentor, really good teacher. I was just lucky enough to be with him for so many years. Deflected all the credit all the time. Loved his players. Was a tremendous -- had tremendous patience.

The base of our offense is our flex cut and reverse action stuff. It gives great spacing. And I think Tom probably borrowed that Carolina break. We try to run the Carolina break, pass the ball. You saw two mirror images of each other. I know Tom is a great historian of the game. I know Tom is really proud that his system was able to take on the North Carolina system and with respect, be able to come out on top.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Best of luck. We'll see you Sunday.

# 2019 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship



**Midwest Regional – Sprint Center**

**Friday, March 29**

**Auburn 97, North Carolina 80**

**Auburn – LOCKER ROOM QUOTES**

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## **MALIK DUNBAR**

**(on turning it on in the second half)** – "We knew they were a good team and we knew we had to keep them out of their fast break. We were watching a lot of people (this week) on media saying they thought they (North Carolina) would win, so that just pumped us up."

**(on hitting 17 3-Pointers, one of the highest totals in an NCAA Tournament game)** – "We knew we could hit them. We have a lot of guys who can knock 'em down and tonight we just got on a roll."

**(on Auburn's confidence)** – "We have the right amount of confidence. We believe in these guys and these coaches."

## **BRYCE BROWN**

**(on when he thought Auburn had done enough to win)** – "When Chuma went down, I knew we were already competing hard, but I knew we had a whole other gear in us. At that point, I knew that was going to bring us together."

**(on motivation for Sunday's game)** – "Three games away. That's the bottom line. I'm a senior. I'm the leader of this team and I want to be able to lead my guys to a National Championship. (This is) an 11-game winning streak ... three more games is nothing."

**(on Chuma Okeke's injury)** – "Player down. One of our best rebounders down. One of our best defenders. Just trying to pull it out for him. If he was out there, he would have done the same. The message was 'let's do it for him.'"

## **SAMIR DOUGHTY**

**(on continuing in the tournament)** – "Beating a great team like Carolina and knowing there's only eight teams (left), it's a great feeling."

**(on Chuma Okeke's injury)** – "It didn't affect our performance, but we kept him in our prayers throughout the rest of the game. We wanted to keep the lead that he helped us build. We just wanted to take care of business once he was off the floor."

**(on Auburn's first Elite 8 appearance since 1986)** – "It's an amazing feeling. We're just making history. We aren't done yet. We still have three games to play, but we just want to continue to make history."