

# Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

## Miami Hurricanes

### Jim Larrañaga

#### Postgame Press Conference



Miami 79, Pittsburgh 73

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, I'm a great believer in numbers, and the numbers today were very indicative of the terrific win we had. After our Boston College win, I could see the energy in our team and the excitement of just getting a win after struggling for almost the entire regular season.

And then you see today where we go 22 for 28 from the foul line, terrific job there. We battled them just about even on the boards, 37-36. They won by one.

We had 17 assists and only 6 turnovers. That was a huge statistic.

And then the job that Anthony Walker did on Justin Champagnie, the first-team all-conference performer, he ended the game 5 for 20, 1 for 8 from 3. So you've got to give Anthony and his teammates a lot of credit.

And then points in the paint, we had 38-28 in points off turnovers, 22-6. So we're very, very happy with those numbers.

We're excited with the victory and looking forward to playing in the next round tomorrow.

**Q. Why do you think it is -- you brought up all those numbers. I've written down all those numbers, too. Is it just the energy and excitement that they got to a new tournament and have a clean slate, a fresh start? Why do you think your team wasn't doing this earlier? It was still the same guys, but all five guys end up with double figures and you have like barely any turnovers, all these assists. Where was this a few weeks ago?**

JIM LARRAÑAGA: You're asking the wrong person. You've got to ask the players.

You know, one of the things that happens is you try to keep your players upbeat and try to remind them one game you lose it, move on to the next one and get ready.

I think our players almost felt like it didn't matter what we did. We played close so many times and came out on the short end.

The perfect example was the Virginia Tech game at home, down 11, make a comeback, up three with two seconds to go. And then all of a sudden, they make a three to put it into overtime. We got so deflated by that that it was very hard for the players to just bounce back immediately.

Yet that's what you really have to do. You have to live constantly in the present. You've got to figure out what the game plan is. The coaches are going to figure out what the game plan is for the next game, and then the players got to bring the energy and effort and execution to that game plan to make it work.

Today, like against Boston College, we scored 80 points against Boston College and 79 today. We haven't seen even 75 in a month.

Kam McGusty, I've got to give him a lot of credit because Kam's has been playing a lot of the point, so he's like the fourth point guard for this season. We started without with Chris Lykes, then he got hurt; then Harlond Beverly, then he got hurt, then Isaiah Wong. And then we thought Isaiah is just doing too much. We move Kam McGusty over there, and he ends up with 14 points, 4 assists, and only one turnover with two steals. He has a terrific floor game.

**Q. Can I ask a follow-up about Elijah Olaniyi? Can you talk about what he has meant to this team and this game today, some of the assists he had and what a big factor he is? No one talks about him quite as much as some of the other guys.**

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, we nominated him for all-defense because I think of all the guys on our team, he's our best defender. He can guard the ball. He can guard guys off the ball. He's been asked to guard guys like a Matthew Hurt at Duke or he's even guarded Aamir Simms at



Clemson for part of the time.

When you have a player who plays hard and he's pretty physical, he's got good athletic ability, I think he's been instrumental in these last two victories.

Today he ends up 5 for 11 from the field, he has 6 rebounds, 14 points, 3 assists, and again, just one turnover. When you play within yourself, you don't try to do too much, and that's really what we want him focusing on. He made some threes today. He was two for six from three, but what helps is he did that early, made a couple of threes, and now all of a sudden he's feeling good about himself. The opponent is thinking, wait a minute, we've got to guard him better. That opens things up for somebody else.

One of the biggest baskets of the game was Isaiah Wong throwing the ball to Nysier Brooks and then cutting to the basket and getting a dunk on the return pass. This team has battled so hard to get a win like this in the ACC Tournament, again, I hope will energize us for tomorrow.

**Q. How would you describe your players' reaction to getting this win after everything you've been through this season?**

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Very, very excited, very emotional. One of the things we asked our bench to do because we've got so many guys not in uniform -- we've got Rodney Miller who was cheering like crazy, Earl Timberlake cheering like crazy, Harlond Beverly. That emotion that they bring, that team spirit that they bring to the bench is very important for the players when they come out of the game to know they're not in this by themselves; that their teammates are there for them. They might not be in uniform, they might not be able to contribute on the court, but they're not sitting there on their hands, they're not distracted watching the whatever. They're into the game.

**Q. What you can say about if you feel like the team is catching their stride at the right time after having that six-game losing streak and just how COVID has affected you and what you've seen from the team in such an interesting year where it could be hard to find that comfort zone, especially with injuries and whatnot.**

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, COVID has changed coaching. You know, you have teams that have pauses, teams that games get canceled. It disrupts everything. Those kind of distractions put a team and a coach in an entirely different mental state of mind. You're trying to figure out what do we do.

In our case, we've had so many injuries that we haven't had time to truly practice correctly. The nice thing about where we are right now with just six scholarship players is those guys know they're going to play. They know we have basically a walk-on to sub, play some minutes, and Deng Gak, who did a nice job today on the boards. But when guys know they're going to play and they're getting to handle the ball a lot, even without a lot of practices, they've developed kind of a sixth sense of, hey, we're going to play multiple positions.

Isaiah Wong starts at the point, then Kam McGusty plays at the point, then Elijah will play at the point. We've got different guys playing different roles, and it takes a while for them to learn every position. And that's why you lose a lot of close games because, hey, you're really not in sync because you don't really have a point guard anymore.

When we lost Harlond Beverly, that changed everything for our team.

**Q. With Nysier contributing the way he did with the points from last game, how much does that help you guys to get that inside presence from him, scoring the ball? And he had rebounds, blocked steals, and then also the challenges of playing Clemson? You've been high on what Aamir brings to their team.**

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Yeah, Aamir Simms is in I'd say a class all his own. I think he's the one guy that can play incredible defense on multiple positions. He offensively can score inside, from outside. He can drive the ball to the basket, and he's a good free-throw shooter. He's a major handful for anybody in our league. He will be the topic of conversation tonight with the coaching staff, and then the message to the players because he's certainly not a one-man team. He's got a lot of help, a lot of guys who are playing very, very well.

Dawes in particular is someone that you have to concern yourself with because he handles the ball and he shoots the three very, very well.

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**Q. Nysier, the other night you said after the game that crazy things happen in March and that maybe that win over Boston College was the momentum that you guys needed going into this tournament and that you said crazy things happen in March. What's happening with your team right now, last game and this game? Can you just tell us the mood of the team, the energy of the team right now, and what's your mindset?**

NYSIER BROOKS: Our energy is a lot higher because -- from the win in Boston College on senior night and then coming into this game today, we just had a lot more enthusiasm in us and just more energy. We're just more alive. Like more alive, I would say.

This win tonight can definitely help us for tomorrow and just help us with momentum just to carry forward to have another good game to where we come out a victor.

**Q. The numbers, you guys had very few turnovers, you had a lot of assists, all five starters in double figures. Can you just talk about the overall team play today and where has that been in recent weeks? Why weren't you guys able to do this earlier in the season?**

NYSIER BROOKS: Stuff like that, I would just say that we just get more comfortable with each other because, as you know, injuries have made the starting lineups vary from different players starting from others. And I would just say that our chemistry is just getting a little bit better by each game, and hopefully it can come to a point where we're very sharp and crisp and hopefully just keep winning.

**Q. Just what you can say about how this team has dealt with almost no bench and all of the injuries on top of COVID? Just what that's done to develop you as a player and develop this team to be able to**

**essentially be able to bail each other out at different positions if and when need be?**

NYSIER BROOKS: Yeah, it shows me as a player that life is full of adversity. And during those times when you're dealing with adversity, that's when the person who you really are and the team who you are, that's when it shows who you really are. It's easy to be negative, give up, and quit. Like that stuff is easy.

But it's hard to just keep pushing through, keep fighting, and just believing the guys that's around you to just be able to see that the sun is going to shine another day. We've just got to get through what we've got to get through.

**Q. How would you describe the mood in the locker room after this one?**

NYSIER BROOKS: The mood in the locker room is very high. The energy is very high because, as you know, it's been a long season. And we're just trying to just keep winning, keep getting -- just keep playing, and maybe just everybody is happy while we're playing on the court.

**Q. The scoring numbers you've been able to put up the last couple games, what's kind of changed for you? You're finishing with dunks and things like that and hitting free throws. What's kind of changed with you? And then also you faced Clemson already a few times. Just the challenges in facing them and containing Aamir?**

NYSIER BROOKS: Can you repeat that one more time?

**Q. Offensively you've been able to score the ball more the last couple games than you had previously. What's kind of changed with you? And then also facing Clemson again, you've faced them twice already, what is the challenges of facing them again and containing Aamir?**

NYSIER BROOKS: The challenges of facing them is just that they've got good players, and they can shoot the ball, 1 through 5, from behind the line. And just trying to game plan for them the right way, I would say more so.



And with me scoring more, Coach has just been running a couple more plays for me. And the guys have been executing the plays and being able to get me the ball, and I either get a score, get an assist from the action that's given to me.

**Q. Can you just describe the locker room mood? Were you guys dancing? Was the music playing? Were you throwing Gatorade around? I would think winning an ACC Tournament game is a big deal for this team.**

NYSIER BROOKS: Yes, it's a big deal. We actually didn't get to that point because we had to go take a corona test right after. But we can't start just celebrating right here because it's a long weekend. It's a long weekend. We're trying to be here Friday, Saturday, and that's when we might have something to cheer about.

But until then, we've just got to stay humble, stay poised and just keep trying to just win the next one. We're not worrying about Saturday right now, we're just worrying about win the next one.

**Q. You all lost a numerous amount of close games by three points or fewer this season. Just how good did it feel to actually win today, and what was Coach Larrañaga's message in the huddle at the end of the game?**

NYSIER BROOKS: His message was just don't let them get an open three. And the games that we lost by close points, those are games where I know later on in the season when we get a little bit more experience playing, that I feel like we can just execute the close-out in the last two minutes of the game, and tonight we proved it here. We've just got to keep being able to execute effectively, and hopefully we just keep winning because it's a one-game season from here on out.

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## Anthony Walker

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**Q. Anthony, can you talk about the energy and the mood of this team right now? What happened between the Boston College game and now, the way you guys are playing right now is very different from how you were playing a little earlier. What's happening here with this team right now?**

ANTHONY WALKER: Like I said earlier in the year, we believe we're going to win every game. Going into that Boston College game gave us a lot of momentum coming out with that win. So just going into this tournament, we think it's a new season. Right now we're 1-0, so we're going to keep going, keep this energy as high as we can keep it, and we're just going to keep rolling.

**Q. I know it's kind of hard not to look ahead, but with potentially having to play five games in five days and so many games in such a short period of time potentially, how do you maintain your body to get yourself prepared not just for tomorrow's game but maybe potentially games down the road?**

ANTHONY WALKER: Right now we're about to go do treatment as a team. We're about to make sure that everyone is okay. But as best as we can, we're just going to keep our bodies as fresh as we can and we're just going to come out and play hard, 120 percent every game all the way up until -- that's it, we win.

**Q. What can you say about this season -- I spoke with Coach about it, having to deal with all of the injuries as well as COVID and all the protocols. Just how this team found its way to where you are right now, and if you feel a rejuvenation or maybe a rebirth at this point.**

ANTHONY WALKER: Yeah, we won two games in a row, so we feel really good about ourselves, and we're just

going to keep this momentum pushing as much as we can. We've got to go watch film on this next opponent, and we've got to game plan. And we're going to come out tomorrow with the same amount of energy we came out today with.

**Q. Coach L gave you credit for your defense on Justin Champagnie. What did you focus on to hold him down as well as anybody has all year?**

ANTHONY WALKER: Yeah, he's been dominating this league all year. I tip my hat off to him. Today my game plan was just to keep him off the offensive boards and away from the basket as much as I can and turn him into a jump shooter. But he's been playing well all year, and he's got a great future ahead of him. He's a tough matchup.

**Q. Do you anticipate that you're going to have the assignment on Aamir Simms tomorrow?**

ANTHONY WALKER: We've got to go back and game plan for that. I don't know yet. I've got to talk to my coaches about that. We've got to talk as a team. It don't matter who we have on Simms. We trust him 100 percent, and we believe we're going to come out and guard him 100 percent.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about Nysier Brooks. He's had two really big games in a row. I know he's been a vocal leader, spirited guy all season. What do you think has changed in his game, and is he a big reason -- that's one thing that has changed the last couple games is his offensive production. What does he add the last couple games? What do you think has changed with him?**

ANTHONY WALKER: He's our anchor and our motor, so just getting him more touches in the post. He's a great passer out of the post. He's a great scorer out of the post. So just getting him the ball more puts him in a better position and puts us in a better position. So as this tournament goes on, we're going to continue to find him more, and he's going to continue to help us win in a big way.

