

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Miami (FL) vs Auburn

Sunday, March 20, 2022

Greenville, South Carolina, USA

Bon Secours Wellness Arena

**Miami (FL) Hurricanes**

**Jim Larranaga**

**Sam Waardenburg**

**Kameron McGusty**

**Charlie Moore**

**Isaiah Wong**

Media Conference



a one-point lead. But the second half we were everywhere.

These guys were able to make plays, get into the open court. Auburn is a very high, up tempo team, but we feel very, very comfortable in that environment as well. So these guys ran for layups and made a lot of really good decisions in the open court.

I congratulate all of them. Oh, I didn't see Zay. Hey, Zay. (Laughter).

**Q. This one's for Sam. The smaller, quicker guys held their bigs to 12 points combined in there. Just talk about how you all were so quick and challenged them inside. I don't think they thought you all would really do that.**

**SAM WAARDENBURG:** As we've shown throughout the season, our identity is a pressure team. When it comes to the bigs in the paint, Kessler, they're strong guys with height and weight on this. My job is not to better those guys whatsoever. My job is to front them. If they get into ball screen action, our idea was to, at the five, we were going to hard show -- I mean, trap actually and put a lot of pressure.

These guys do an amazing job of getting their hands on the ball, getting steals, forcing those turnovers. Charlie is always down there. I think we did a great job tonight securing rebounds as well. Looking at nine rebounds from the smallest guy on our team, that's insane.

We just had a great night tonight. It's what we can do every night. Super proud of these guys.

**Q. Kameron, what was working for you all on the high ball screen? Trapping, it seemed like they weren't able to get out of that a lot particularly in the first half.**

**KAMERON MCGUSTY:** That's what we've been doing all season as a team. Like Sam said, we know that's our identity. Our rotations are on point. As a group, we're all one. We did a good job of trapping them, rotating, not letting them get comfortable. Like I said, that's just our

Miami - 79, Auburn - 61.

**THE MODERATOR:** We will open our Miami press conference with some comments from Coach Larranaga. Just a reminder when you ask questions to please state your name and affiliation.

**JIM LARRANAGA:** Well, to begin with, I was tuned in to the games before us, and I listened to Charles Barkley tell the CBS crew that if Auburn won, he would take off his shirt, and I thought to myself, man, no one wants to see that, Chuck. (Laughter). So we did everything possible to make it possible that he wouldn't have to do that.

Honestly, we have great respect for Bruce Pearl and the Auburn program. They've had a phenomenal year. I can't be happier for my guys. They did such a fantastic job of executing the game plan.

Jordan Miller, who's not here on the dais, but he got us off to a great start. We ran an out of bounds play that we put in yesterday and dunked the ball, and then he got another basket, got Walker Kessler in foul trouble. Of course as a coach, you don't want to have to make so many adjustments so early in the game.

Then we just kept plugging away. Our defense is about pressure, keeping pressure on the opponent and trying to force turnovers. These guys did a fantastic job of doing that. At halftime it was a ball game, I think 33-32. We had



identity. That's what we do.

**Q. Kam, can you just talk about what this means for yourself and what it means for this program to get back to the Sweet 16 again since first time since 2016. Thank you.**

KAMERON MCGUSTY: For the program, it means everything. We're typically known as a football school. So to be able to take our basketball team to the Sweet 16 is just amazing, not only for us but for the school, the staff, everybody that works in the basketball organization, just anybody who's had any part of our journey and the success we've had this year. We just do it for them.

Individually it's crazy. Me and Charlie have been in college for six years. (Laughter). For real, like we've been here six years. I went to the tournament one time, lost in the first round. This is a dream come true for every kid growing up, you watch these college games in March all day, literally all day, and you just dream of making a run in the tournament, and this is the start to our run.

It just feels good to be here. I'm so blessed to have these guys with me. We bust our butts every day, all summer, all fall, and it just feels good. I'm so thankful for these guys, and I love them so much. That's the only thing I could tell them after the game when we won, we just tell each other we love each other and keep our good energy up and take it into our next game on Friday.

**Q. Guys, basketball is such an individual sport, but Kam just alluded to this and I'd like to get all of your opinions if possible on this. Does it feel different to win as a team the way you guys literally have been? I mean, obviously you've got some good individual players, but this was a true team accomplishment tonight against a very good team.**

CHARLIE MOORE: We've been playing as a team all season. It's not really nothing new. A lot of guys are shocked we got this win, but we knew we were going to come in and play hard together as a team. We know we have complete confidence in ourself like we've had all season, and I'm just happy for the guys.

**Q. Isaiah, can you tell us about that jam on Jabari?**

ISAIAH WONG: I was just coming off a screen, and they were icing it a little bit. So I just came in and snaked it, and I had an open lane. I was imagining dunking it, and I came in and got my good two steps in, and I was in the air. I saw big man try to jump with me. I was like, ooh, I hope he jumps with me, and he did, and I dunked it. It felt like an amazing experience when I did that.

**Q. Sam, yesterday you had said you were confident about your game plan against Jabari. Now that the game is over, what did you guys see before and how did it play out in the game against Jabari and Walker Kessler?**

SAM WAARDENBURG: Jabari is a very talented kid, you can tell that. It's the reason he's going to be a lottery pick in the NBA draft coming up.

We had a game plan, and we started Jordan on him, and Jordan did a tremendous job pressuring him, making him feel uncomfortable. He's a great catch and shoot guy, and we felt like, if we were able to get him to put the ball on the ground, we were at our best there. If he turned his back to any of us, we were going after it. Yeah, we just executed our game plan really, really well, and that obviously showed tonight in the final score.

**Q. Kam, this question is actually about Charlie. If you could imagine the journey Charlie's been on with all the schools he's gone to, what do you think it means that you guys are in the Sweet 16 now? Can you imagine what he's been through to get to this point?**

KAMERON MCGUSTY: Yeah, like I said, I've been in college for six years, not as many schools as Charlie. I've been keeping up with him since high school. I knew about him and knew who he was. He just had such a long journey. He's always been a great point guard. Every time I've seen him in college or high school, he was always getting his teammates involved, being a leader, able to score the ball with the best of them.

Like I said earlier, it was a blessing he was able to transfer here. Definitely without a doubt, so blessed to have him.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to dismiss the student-athletes.

**Q. Jim, seven turnovers in 80 minutes of basketball.**

JIM LARRANAGA: Pretty good.

**Q. Yeah, what's the explanation for that?**

JIM LARRANAGA: I don't know.

(Laughter).

I mean, we practice the same stuff all the time. The guys that have developed such great understanding of what their role is and what we're looking for. Our thought going into games is force turnovers and limit our turnovers, but

we don't do anything special. We just run our stuff, and the guys make good decisions. We've got really great guards, and the guards handle the ball the whole time.

But Sam Waardenburg and Jordan Miller handle the ball a ton as well, our frontcourt guys. They're not overly big, certainly not bulky, but they can put the ball on the ground and protect themselves. They can make shots and make moves off the bounce, like Jordan did early.

We need to really appreciate the job Jordan Miller did on Jabari. That was amazing. First half he made it very, very challenging for Jabari to get anything going.

We've been pretty good all season long in handling the ball. Hopefully it will continue.

**Q. I guess you said -- told the CBS guys right after the game that you guys have developed a defense called the scramble for this. Was that particular for this game? Was it kind of the same defense with a few variations, or did you do some things completely different against Auburn tonight?**

JIM LARRANAGA: If you want to know about the scramble, you can order it online with championship books and video. I did a teaching tape for high school coaches in 1990, and we've implemented the scramble almost every season I've been a coach.

The difference is I've had some teams that just couldn't do it. They're too slow, they're too big, they didn't rotate fast enough, so we didn't implement it.

When we put it in this summer, we could tell as a coaching staff this may be our only way to play the kind of defense that will work because we could see we're skinny as can be. We're not going to defensive rebound very well. We're going to have to battle for every rebound. The best thing you can do when you can't rebound is don't give them a shot. Turn them over first.

So we decided we'd trap ball screens, we'd rotate on guys, we'd trap a big man inside. We'd try to put as much pressure on the guy with the ball with one, two, and sometimes even three guys going after him. These guys picked it up, not super quick. It took us a while. Sometime in December we started to realize, oh, we're getting good at it. We need to do it more.

Because initially we were only doing it about 10 percent of the time. When we started to have a little more success, we did it 20 percent of the time. Now we're doing it all the time.

**Q. Jim, I'm going to ask you the same thing I asked Kam. What does it mean to make the Sweet 16 again? What does it mean for the program? What does it mean for you? What was your message -- I know you haven't had much time after the game, but what was your message to these guys after the game?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Have you ever seen the movie Braveheart? I'm a big movie fan, and I love the movies. So at halftime I used a William Wallace quote, and I don't know if you'll remember when he basically -- you know, his community was destroyed, and he ended up losing his wife and family and everything, and so he basically recruited an Army. This one day he pulled that Army together and asked them, are you ready to go to war? Are you ready to fight for everything that we stand for?

And that's what I asked the guys at halftime. I said, look, it's a one-point game. Auburn is an outstanding team. We need to know what we're made of. Can we go out and battle them for the next 20 minutes and keep our dream alive?

And that's what it means. We get a chance to keep playing. It's nice, the Sweet 16, okay. Well, we've got to find out who our opponent is, which I know now is Iowa State, and get ready for that game. And see how we match up with them and what we can do on Friday night.

**Q. What was -- can you give us a little bit more insight on what you were trying to do against Jabari and what made it work?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Well, when you play against great players and you're analyzing their game, there are certain things that repeat themselves, and in Jabari's case, he's not only 6'10" and extremely athletic -- he had 15 rebounds tonight -- he's a great shooter. And shooters like space and like rhythm. We needed to take that space and rhythm away.

Jordan Miller was on him, denying him, make him take a step further out. When he went into the post, we doubled him from behind. So Jordan would try to straddle him, and if Jabari caught it, you'd see Charlie Moore and Isaiah Wong go after it and try to disrupt him.

That's the whole key with shooters. If you let them get into a rhythm, Jabari could have made ten threes tonight if he was in rhythm, but we try to take them out of rhythm.

**Q. Coach, you got off to a great start, and Auburn, it took them the whole half to get it back close. Then in the second half, you went on a 7-0 run the first three minutes and put them playing catch-up the rest of the**

**game. Can you talk about that?**

JIM LARRANAGA: We were really concerned about the start of the second half. If you remember, recall the other day against Southern Cal, we had an 11-point lead at halftime, and it completely evaporated, and we fell behind.

So we made a strong emphasis to our guys, hey, we can't fall behind these guys and play catch-up the whole second half. We need to come out and basically go to war -- fight for every rebound, fight for every loose ball.

What really works is when you're a team that scrambles a lot and forces turnovers, some of the shots you get are basically layups. You get a layup or a dunk or someone misses a shot, you get an offensive rebound tip-in, because the opponent is not completely back. All five guys are not back there. And because our frontcourt guys are more like perimeter players, they run the court very well.

So being smaller has its advantages. It has its disadvantages as well, but today it worked very well in our favor.

**Q. Coach, does anybody have more fun playing basketball than Charlie?**

JIM LARRANAGA: No.

**Q. What does that joy do for the team overall?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Man, I love the guy. He's got the greatest smile. He's got the greatest personality. You just love being around him. And he enjoys it.

The great part about Charlie is he brings that out in everyone. All the players love hanging around with him, love playing with him. The coaches love being around him. And I've called him repeatedly, not this weekend, but way back in December, he's like our Chris Paul or our Tom Brady. He has such charisma. He should be doing a lot of commercials now that I think about it.

**Q. To kind of piggy-back on that, Charlie's journey is probably unique even in modern basketball standards. How much do you think that has sort of informed his style of play and the way he attacks the game, the way he approaches, and the way he's clearly not intimidated by being the underdog?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Yeah, it's funny. I don't know for sure. How many games has he played in college? Like 160 or something? It's like a ridiculous number of games. He's got so much experience.

I mean, when you think about your own personal experience, I have friends who grew up in New York, they're still in New York. So their experience is from New York. Me, my wife and I, we've traveled all around. We've lived in so many different states and cities and even lived in Europe for a while.

Charlie played in the Pac-12, played in the Big 12, played in the Big East, and now is playing in the ACC. Is there anybody else in college basketball history that has been on that kind of journey? And then to find a program at the end of that journey that embraces him like my coaching staff and players have. They welcomed him into our program and gave him the ball and said, please lead us to an ACC Championship or NCAA tournament, and he hasn't let anybody down.

He's been a fantastic player, and his journey is not over.

THE MODERATOR: Tonight was his 152nd game.

JIM LARRANAGA: That's it? Okay. (Laughter).

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