

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Drake vs Miami (FL)

Friday, March 17, 2023

Albany, New York, USA

MVP Arena

## Miami (FL) Hurricanes Coach Jim Larranaga Nijel Pack Norchad Omier Wooga Poplar Media Conference

Miami - 63, Drake - 56

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the University of Miami. We will open with comments from the coach.

JIM LARRANAGA: That was a heck of a win. I was so impressed by Drake's defense. We read about it. We saw it on tape. But not until you play against it.

We kept telling our players you can't take a second dribble into the paint because they're going to swipe it. We started with like straight turnovers. We took an ill-advised three. We threw a long pass right out of bounds. So we did not play a very strong first half. A lot of credit has to go to Drake.

But the guys really rallied in the second half. We made some adjustments with what we were doing offensively. We really stepped up defensively. Norchad was a monster on the boards with 14 rebounds, and then Wooga and Nijel were just sensational at the offensive end, making threes, making twos, finding the open man.

It takes a lot to survive, and we fortunately survived today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Nijel, you guys put together a 16-1 run to end the game. You were a fixture of calmness throughout that. Talk a little bit about what was going through your head as that moment evolved.**



NIJEL PACK: Yeah, we went to the last media timeout, and I was like, man, this can't be the way how it ends. I talked to my teammates. I felt like they felt the same way. We kind of brought some inner energy from within us. We picked up our defensive pressure.

We were able to pressure them and get some steals and kind of put them on their heels. We kind of got the ball rolling, and we were able to get to a tie game. Then we had to make a big shot and get a stop.

That's what it came down to, making big shots and then ended up getting our free throws to close the game out.

**Q. Norchad, I wanted to just ask was there ever any question that you were going to play, or you knew you were going to play? How did you feel going out there? What responsibility did you feel you had to this team? Why the smile?**

NORCHAD OMIER: I'm smiling all the time. It was up to my coaches and athletic trainers, doctors that helped me. We have spent endless hours in the training room getting treatment. I wanted to help my teammates. They come out here, work hard. I just wanted to be there, support them, and have their back.

**Q. For any of the players. When you all came out after warmups at halftime, it seemed like everyone was kind of glancing up at the big screen. What's going on in y'all's heads when you're seeing what's going on somewhere else? Obviously you didn't see the final seconds of it, but when you're seeing what's going on with Fairleigh Dickinson at that point.**

NIJEL PACK: Did Purdue end up losing that? Yeah, that's what March is all about. Every team in the tournament is really, really talented. I feel like the seed number next to your name really doesn't matter at all. Every team is really good.

That's how we came out today. Drake's a really good team. They could have been a 12 seed and we're a 5 seed, but the seed really doesn't matter. I feel like we



played really, really hard.

At the end of the day, no matter what seed we play next or who we play next, we've got to keep the same mentality when we come out.

**Q. Nijel, I wanted to ask you, obviously Indiana still has to play, but if they were to win, that's who you guys would face. What does that mean to you coming out of high school from Indianapolis? Does it have a little bit more meaning?**

NIJEL PACK: You can't worry about things like that. Whoever we end up playing, I've got to keep the same mindset. My teammates got to keep the same mindset to go out and play our game. No matter the opposing team's jersey, we've got to worry about Miami and what Miami does best.

**Q. Wooga, you had 15 points. Just talk about your performance and the run you guys had at the end.**

WOOGA POPLAR: It was basically just my teammates. My teammates just give me the confidence to shoot the ball. Basically, that's it. That's all.

JIM LARRANAGA: A man of few words.

**Q. Nijel, how big of an emotional lift was it to know that Norchad was going to be able to play and start today? It was a slow start, but how much did it mean to have him in the game?**

NIJEL PACK: It was great. We knew he was a warrior. To see him go out, no matter how much percent well he feels, to see him go out and play his hardest, and he still had a double double, it just means a lot.

He cares so much about this team. He knows how important this March Madness tournament is to us and to himself. To see him come out here and fight, it really shows.

**Q. I think it was the final media timeout, Jordan Miller gathered you guys around, and he gave you some kind of talk. He had like a long little chat with you guys. What was his message at that point? He and Isaiah were struggling. What was his message to you guys at that moment?**

NIJEL PACK: We knew this was the last media. We had the last media timeout. I think it was about 3:50 left. We were like, man, we've got to leave it all on the court. There's nothing else. After this, if we lose, we're done. There's no other games. So we leave it all on the court.

So that's basically what he told us. I feel like we went out there and did that. We got some stops and some big shots from this guy, Wooga, next to me, and we were back in the game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll now take questions for Coach Jim Larranaga.

**Q. Yesterday you described Tucker DeVries as a versatile player, someone that would be tough to cover. He was 1 of 13 tonight. So, yeah, he got off 13 shots, but what did you guys do well for those to not be clean shots?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Well, there were several guys responsible for guarding him. The one most responsible was Wooga Poplar. So not only did he play a great offensive game, he played a great defensive game.

He got rest. Harlond Beverly went in and did a good job on him, same result. Then at the end of the game with Wooga at four fouls, we took him out because we didn't want him to foul out in case we needed him on offense. Jordan Miller went to him and did a terrific job.

Then we switched quite a bit, and even Nijel Pack would switch onto him and try to keep him from catching the ball in his sweet spots.

So overall a great team effort, but a lot of individual efforts too.

**Q. Jim, how worried were you? Now nervous or worried were you? Especially with -- Isaiah and Jordan had always been such calm leaders, veteran leaders, and they were struggling. At what moment did you think you guys really were going to win this game?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Well, if you're asking that, I knew as soon as the final horn sounded. There's never a time that, as a coach, I ever think the game is over. There's just too many strange things that can happen.

We didn't have any timeouts left. They came up and pressed. If they had made a shot and were pressing, we turned it over, I can't call a timeout or I can't sub or anything like that.

But here's what I would say about our team. We've been in so many close games throughout the season, and this is just another one of those nights. Jordan didn't have a particularly good night. Isaiah didn't. But Wooga and Nijel had terrific nights. Bensley Joseph came in and did a great

job defensively.

So it takes a total team effort to win a game like that.

**Q. With the off night that both Isaiah and Jordan had, in the last two minutes, you pressed them full court, and I thought that won the game for you. You know, you ended up on that nice run at the end. Did you think maybe you should have started that earlier, and did it win the game for you?**

JIM LARRANAGA: Well, first of all, there's no way we're starting that earlier. We felt like at that point, now the pressure is on them. During the game, there's no pressure. You're up six. You're up eight. They can run right through the press because they're still going to be in attack mode.

What happens to teams when they get ahead, they start to play it safe, and that's basically what happened. We got some turnovers. Jordan Miller was terrific pressuring the ball. We got a good trap. And then I know Nijel got a steal, and I think he hit a three. Wooga Poplar got a steal, and he ended up getting fouled on a transition. He made two free throws.

A lot of things have to happen in our favor at that point, and they did.

**Q. What did you tell the team at halftime? What was your message to them at that point?**

JIM LARRANAGA: The offenses we normally run, we have a whole series. You might call it a package versus certain defenses, and we try to run. We didn't think they would pressure us that well.

So at halftime I talked to the coaches, and we were trying to figure out what we can do to soften up that pressure. So we just decided what I like to do against Carolina and Duke is set up a ton of ball screens and make their big guys have to come out and guard it.

So Brodie was tremendous at the offensive end and he made some terrific defensive plays. He had several blocks. But we wanted him away from the basket, and Nijel was able to use Norchad as a ball screener and get some shots. Once he did, the guys were sharing the ball. Wooga got those same shots.

It was a good adjustment, but it's the players that have to make that work.

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