

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Miami (FL) vs Houston

Friday, March 24, 2023
Kansas City, Missouri, USA
T-Mobile Center

Miami Hurricanes

Jim Larranaga

Isaiah Wong

Jordan Miller

Norchard Omier

Nijel Pack

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Miami - 89, Houston - 75

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin our news conference with the Miami Hurricanes and Coach Jim Larranaga. Coach has brought four student-athletes with him tonight, Isaiah Wong, Jordan Miller, Norchard Omier, and Nijel Pack.

Coach, congratulations on your victory. Welcome back to the Elite Eight.

JIM LARRANAGA: Thank you. Am I supposed to make an opening statement?

THE MODERATOR: Yes, sir, if you could tell us about your thoughts on tonight.

JIM LARRANAGA: First of all, we have the utmost respect for Houston, especially their ability to defend, force turnovers, rebound. We use the expression that on defense you need to be omnipresent. You need to be everywhere all at once. In watching tapes on Houston, I think they did that, they've done that throughout the year.

So in preparation for the game, we really emphasized like sharing the ball and finding the open man -- I'm sorry. My phone is ringing. I'll stop it.



We emphasized moving the ball and finding the open man, and the guys did such a fantastic job from start to finish. We only ended up with six turnovers. So that's the name of the game. And we tied them in rebounding.

A great performance by our guys. These four plus Wooga in our starting lineup. The guys off the bench did a great job. We're very, very happy to be back in the Elite Eight for the second year in a row.

Q. Jim, you reached the Elite Eight for the second year in a row after the women's team reached it for the first time. Does that mean that Miami is now a basketball school?

JIM LARRANAGA: Here's what I would tell you, I've heard people describe schools as football schools, basketball schools, whatever. My opinion is we're a great academic institution. We're one of the top 50 schools in the country. It's a private school with an absolutely awesome campus.

I was in the lobby last week with our cheerleaders and dance team. They were all studying. They're great students. These guys are all students. We're graduating all our guys.

So I don't look at it that way. Our football team has won five National Championships. Our baseball team has won four. I think we've got a great athletic department and great leadership in the administration.

Our AD Dan Radakovich, the administrators in the president's office, they do a great job of providing us the resources to be competitive. And I'm so proud of Katie Meier and her staff because they did an amazing job. They not only beat Indiana, they beat Indiana at Indiana, the Number 1 seed. So hat's off to both men's and women's basketball programs.

Q. Can you just talk about the performance that Nijel Pack had tonight.

JIM LARRANAGA: Yeah, it was a joke.

(Laughter).



He was ridiculous. I don't know how far those shots are. People say to me, what do you say when he misses one of those long shots? What I say is keep shooting. The guy is a great shooter. These guys are great offensive players.

At one of the timeouts, I just said to Coach Courtney, we've got to keep scoring. These guys are tough. They're driving the ball to the basket.

I was very concerned about Nijel getting in foul trouble. I took him out very early in the second half because they were just attacking the rim, and I didn't want him picking up a second or third foul. Then eventually he ended up with four, but he was able to stay in the game. He had a sensational game.

Q. Nijel, it's not your first time in this arena. 7-for-10 from three-point range. Was familiarity any part of that, or did you just have it on tonight?

NIJEL PACK: It's a blessing to be back in this arena for sure. My teammates found me early and kept me going. They instilled confidence in me from the jump ball. They kept feeding me and telling me to shoot the ball, and I shot it with a lot of confidence, and they were able to go in.

It feels good to play in this arena today, but it was all for my teammates. If they weren't here helping me, I wouldn't have had the game I had today.

Q. Jordan, there was so much talk about Houston's defense. Did you guys feel that your defense -- people never talk about Miami's defense. They just talk about the offense. Do you think you had something to prove defensively, or are you underappreciated on the defensive end?

JORDAN MILLER: I wouldn't say underappreciated. We play a style that it's hard to prep for. When we plays teams in the ACC we usually play them once or twice, so the second time they are familiar. The game is usually closer. But we know we kind of have an advantage when it's the first time we play a team.

Again, though, credit to Houston. They played hard, but we just found a way to pull this one out. We had a lead, and we just didn't want to give it up.

Q. Norchad, all week we kind of heard about Houston's physicality, but particularly on the offensive boards. Today theCanes had 35 rebounds, the same as Houston. How were you able to kind of match Houston's physicality out in the paint?

NORCHAD OMIER: You got to give them credit because they're a really physical team, but I think that we've got to worry about them, but they've got to worry about us too. I don't know if they thought about Miami, that we're not physical, but I think I'm pretty physical. I love the physicality, and I think my teammates do.

So I think they've got to worry about us too just as we've got to worry about them. But credit to Houston.

Q. Jim, kind of going off that question, Houston had fourth-highest offensive rebounding percentage in the country heading into tonight. What did you see as the biggest key to sort of taking away that strength tonight?

JIM LARRANAGA: Can you repeat the question? I want to be sure I understand it correctly.

Q. With Houston coming in as one of their biggest strengths being offensive rebound, what did you see as your biggest key to kind of eliminating that tonight?

JIM LARRANAGA: Last night in our team meeting, we put a three-second lane in the video room, and then we packed everybody in it. I told them to beat Houston you've got to have five guys in the paint, everybody's got to block out and everybody's got to rebound.

Then the guys left the meeting and got on the elevator. They packed 12 guys into the elevator, and it got stuck, and it took a half hour for the firemen to get them out of there. And I just told them today at our shootaround, hey, our defense was too stretched out. You guys got to be in the paint like you were in the elevator yesterday. And they did that.

Q. One for Jim and one for Jordan or any player that cares to respond: Jim, what was the name of the dance in the locker room you were doing? Could one of you guys, Jordan maybe, just kind of evaluate your coach's dancing skills.

JIM LARRANAGA: I'm not evaluating it, but I can tell you the song. It's by the Commodores. It's called "Night Shift." It's kind of in memory of Marvin Gaye. So I listen to it all the time. My wife is tired of me playing it.

JORDAN MILLER: Yeah, I think we can agree it was like an A. Not an A+, it was a little stiff. But he's still very mobile for his age.

JIM LARRANAGA: What do you mean for my age?

JORDAN MILLER: Yeah, so -- but it was great. We were

all hyped up. We love when Coach L dances. That's probably the best celebration we could look forward to.

No offense, Coach.

Q. Nijel, I wanted to ask you, did you guys watch the women's game together and everything? Did that victory kind of get you guys in a winning mood? This is the biggest day in UM basketball history, period.

NIJEL PACK: I'm pretty sure we were all in our separate rooms getting prepared for our game. I know for sure me and Norchad had the game on in our room, and we were cheering them on. I'm sure the rest of the guys did as well.

It was really fun watching their game, seeing them beat Villanova, when they were expected to lose. Making the Elite Eight for the first time in their program history is something that people didn't think about at the beginning of the year.

It was a really big accomplishment for them. They still have a lot of work to do. We do as well. But right now we're going to celebrate together.

Q. Jordan, your team had that run that extend the lead from 3 to 17 in the second half. What do you think was the key to that run?

JORDAN MILLER: We just wanted it really bad. We came into this game as the underdogs. We had a lead throughout the whole game. I wouldn't say a comfortable lead, but a lead, and we just didn't want to let up.

I think we did a good job executing. I think we did a good job getting stops, rebounds. Really with the game plan the coaches came up with, I think we really executed it to a tee. I think that's why we were successful.

Q. I just wanted to ask Norchad about the ankle in the second half. He kind of went down and went out for a few second. Just wanted to see how that feels and how are you moving forward.

NORCHAD OMIER: I'm good. We have the best team in the country taking care of me, Sam Johnson. I'm going to go get some treatment. I just got a little scared. I didn't want to get hurt again. So I went down just to prevent it, but I'm good, thank God.

Q. Jim, where did you like the matchup best? Just to get the visual right, did you use tape to tape off a lane? In the video room.

JIM LARRANAGA: So the message to our players is these

guys are a very good three-point shooting team, but they're an absolutely fantastic two-point shooting team. And in the first half we gave up those threes. We tried to stop them. We tried a hand in the face and tried to guard Marcus Sasser and those guys. But they made some great threes.

But we told them at halftime, they had 17 threes in the first half, and they normally only take like 15 in the game. They're going to start attacking the paint, which is their game. If you notice, the first thing that happened is Shead went right to the basket, scored, got fouled, went right to the basket, scored again. Then he drives in there, gets into the paint, and kicks it out for three.

So that's really why I subbed for Nijel because I didn't want him getting in foul trouble. And we just reminded the players, we've got to pack the paint. We can't let Shead or Sasser get in there because we'll end up either fouling them or they'll kick it out for a three, or quite frankly, they'll dump and off and dunk it on us.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we are out of time. Thank you very much for coming tonight.

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