

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Miami (FL) vs UConn

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

UConn Huskies

Coach Dan Hurley

Jordan Hawkins

Adama Sanogo

Tristen Newton

Semi-Finals Postgame Media Conference

UConn - 72, Miami FL - 59

COACH HURLEY: We were just all over our identity today.

Plus nine on the glass. Obviously the turnovers at times got a little bit sloppy, but we were sitting on that 20-plus assist number. We were hurting them on the inside. Hurting them from the perimeter.

Obviously the defense was the key, though. The effort that these guys gave defensively was unbelievable. What Adama did in his matchup with one of the most physical interior guys we've faced. What Tristen was able to do in terms of his floor game, in his first half, in particular. And this guy next to me who has felt like death the last two days, to be able to give us what he gave us, obviously these performances are why we're moving on.

Q. Adama, the two 3s in the first half and the pump fake drive layup in the second, what did those plays say about how different your game is today than it was a year ago?

ADAMA SANOGO: Yeah, like you said, this is something that I worked on all summer, especially shooting. Like, I know like guys, they don't expect my shots. So as soon as I saw him like dropping, and I wait a second to see if he's going to close out, and he didn't close out, all right, this is my shot. I took my time, and I shoot it. Like for sure something that when I watch this game, they're going to be like -- they won't expect my shots, so make the game easy for me for sure.



Q. Adama, when you came out of the game for the last time, do you remember what did you say to Coach or what he said to you; looked like you had a little exchange there?

ADAMA SANOGO: He asked me what I'm doing, I forgot to give him (indiscernible) you should run this way now because last thing I was -- us being able to play Monday night, like give me off for like for that. Yeah.

Q. Jordan, you guys are beating teams by an average of 20.6 points per game. What do you think has happened for you guys in this tournament where seems like you've gone up another level?

JORDAN HAWKINS: It all starts with the defense, on the defensive end we've been very elite, taking away matchups, rebounding the ball, getting out in transition. Playing to our strengths. So I think that's the biggest difference we've been doing from other teams.

Q. Jordan, how are you feeling? How did you feel all day? Is there anything, any reason to be concerned you would not be available on Monday?

JORDAN HAWKINS: I feel great. No reason to be concerned on Monday.

Q. Tristen, wondering with Andre Jackson getting into foul trouble what you felt, how you approached defending for the rest of that first half?

TRISTEN NEWTON: Obviously Andre is one of the best defenders not only on our team but in the nation. Wong is a really good player. He got in the gaps. That was the game plan the whole time. Get in the gap, force them to shoot tough shots.

Q. Adama, you've played a lot of really good big guys in the league and out. What problems did Omier pose for you and how were you able to be as successful as you were?

ADAMA SANOGO: Coming to game depth, definitely I know it was a good like defense -- it was a good defender

and as a big man. I know it was a little bit like undersized, used that against me a little bit that came in -- most of my points was that came in a couple of times because I knew it was on that side. Like I said, I used undersize against him.

Q. Tristen, what was it like coming onto the court right away just with the drama from the game before ending between SDSU and FAU?

TRISTEN NEWTON: I don't think that game affected us at all, honestly, because we were in our own bubble, focusing on what we've got to do for our game. So that game didn't affect us at all. We were just focusing on executing our game plan and coming out with a dub so we could play whoever won on Monday.

Q. Adama, what's it like being one win away from a national championship?

ADAMA SANOGO: Definitely a lot, like I say, there's a lot of teams that want to play Monday. It means a lot to us. It means everything we work for. The work has paid off, and still going and keep working and be able to go Monday night.

Q. You talked a little bit yesterday about trust and trusting this team. Got down to eight, felt a little hairy, you didn't call timeout, down to ten, you didn't call a timeout. Is that about the trust? Three months ago is that a different situation for you?

COACH HURLEY: Yeah, I just think obviously the group has shown their quality so many times in terms of the level that we could play at. And I think we experienced everything in that month of January. It's a battle-tested team. And obviously I was comfortable with the things we were calling, and the guys were able to manage the situation.

Q. With Adama, there was points in the game when Andre was out, he was pointing out guys' positions, calling out plays. I wonder if you can speak to the development of his understanding of the game and his communication and just that progress that you've seen?

COACH HURLEY: He's come such a long way. And he re-classed up. He's a younger player than the junior that he is. He's grown so much, his knowledge of the game. Obviously him and Andre are the two leaders of the team. Andre is the vocal leader and emotional leader, and Adama is the by-example guy.

But for a guy that's only been playing basketball for six

years, he's a sponge. His work ethic is off the charts. He watches tons of film. He's learned a lot of basketball concepts, which it's tough for international players that don't have the experience, especially coming from Mali.

Q. 20.6 points per game average. Your guys made it look easy. Why do you think you have been so dominant?

COACH HURLEY: I think what we're doing -- when we're playing harder than the other team, which is our calling card, going like plus nine on the glass, playing elite defense and having a lot of answers on offense, there's nowhere where we're weak as a team, and we're deep.

So we're able to kind of body blow our opponent and continue to just put together quality possessions at both ends and the backboard, and it has a cumulative effect. It's been able to break opponents. And we are a unique team in terms of our style of play, which hurts you in conference play because people are a lot more familiar. They see you twice. The games are much more physical. When people see us for the first time with the two centers and all the shooting, there's no real players like Andre Jackson in the country, he's so hard to prepare for. So we're a unique team.

Q. There was one point in the first half, right around the 7:40 media timeout. Miami had come back. They had tied the game. Coming out of that timeout, your team looked a lot more coherent on offense. They looked more dominant on defense. Was there anything that you said to them at that timeout that kind of tied it all together?

COACH HURLEY: We needed to put more pressure on the paint. I thought we had a little bit of fool's gold to start the game. No matter what Kimani Young and Luke Murray tell you, it was not their idea to have Adama make two 3s to start the game. In a stadium.

So I just thought that we were shooting a little bit maybe -- it was fool's gold. We weren't doing enough at the paint, but we were guarding, but then we were losing our defensive intensity. Some of that had to do with Andre missing pretty much the whole first half.

But I just thought the start of the game at the beginning was a little bit of fool's gold, needed to do more at the paint get our defensive edge back. And they were all over the offensive glass, which usually doesn't happen to us.

Q. Your brother spoke to the media on Tuesday, and he was raving about you and what you've been doing this season. He said he even feels like he's living this

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

with you and just how it makes him feel so good with what you've been able to do with this program this season. What's it like just to have the support of your big brother, especially during possibly one of the biggest moments of your career?

COACH HURLEY: I mean, you and your big brother should be best friends and you should love each other and support each other in every possible way. Our relationship -- I would say when we were younger it was a sibling rivalry that evolved to each other's greatest supporters, outside of our wives and our sons. And obviously I'm lucky to have my dad and mom and my wife's family.

But, I mean, it means everything to me. He's gotten in early to these -- got early to Vegas to see me the night before. He got here early so he could see me last night. You couldn't be closer.

Q. You got a talented transfer in Tristen, and San Diego has several, like Matt Bradley. Has the transfer portal just changed college basketball forever? Has it helped maybe lower profile teams maybe advance deeper in the tournament?

COACH HURLEY: It's weird, I guess. We're not paying much attention to it, but obviously we saw some high profile players today going to the portal on Twitter. And I think who knows where this thing is going to go. For us, I don't want a kid to pick my school because we matched an NIL offer or we gave the best offer. I want kids to come to UConn because they want to play for me. And obviously you hope that they can take the best possible advantage of NIL.

But times are changing. And it will be interesting to see whether people still do it regular kind of the way we've done it. We don't have a player on our team that is at UConn because of NIL. And we're still going to do it with high level high school recruits that we're going to develop over the course of time and supplement those guys with transfers out of the portal that make sense for our culture and the way that we run our program, which is more old school.

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