

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

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

## Miami (FL) Hurricanes Coach Jim Larrañaga Isaiah Wong Jordan Miller

Semi-Finals Postgame Media Conference

UConn - 72, Miami FL - 59

COACH LARRAÑAGA: Well, I thought Connecticut got themselves off to a great start making their first three 3s leading 9-0, but we did a good job of recovering. I think it was 19-16 a little later in the half.

But quite honestly, we were never in sync offensively. We struggled. Guys were playing hard. Trying their best. But it wasn't the script we were looking for. And some of that credit goes to Connecticut and the defense they played. And some of it probably just goes because of the venue.

Being in the Final Four for the first time in school's history, the guys being a little bit anxious, and we really never were able to just relax and play our game. We were pretty much out of character the whole night. But these guys are great, great guys, great players. We've had a sensational season. And they'll have memories that will last a lifetime, and so will I.

**Q. Isaiah, you guys have been so fluid on offense this whole season. Obviously Coach mentioned a couple of things. Was it UConn's length or the space they took away. What was the real challenge there that kept you guys from getting into the rhythm that you're so used to being in?**

ISIAH WONG: I'd just say UConn, they're a very good team. Like you said, they're a tall team. They have length on their side. And we struggled a little bit. I feel like Coach said, I feel like we beat ourselves up. We didn't really play our game and pass the ball and get the ball moving. And we just kept it and we took a lot of tough shots.



But if we played our game, it would have been a different story.

**Q. Jordan, you heard what your coach said about you guys being out of sync. Did you feel that way throughout this game?**

JORDAN MILLER: Yeah, they really did a good job of sending two at you whenever we would drive. That bothered us again. Uncharacteristic of us, but all credit to them. They came ready to play. They were the better team tonight. So credit to them.

**Q. How will you look back at this two-year run that you guys have been on, Elite Eight, Final Four, and what do you think it means for the future of this program?**

JORDAN MILLER: It's been special each year. We found a way to make school history both years, which is very rare. I think the core of this team is very young. If everyone decided to come back, they could be very special again.

We just tried to build what every Miami basketball team should try to reach each season. I think we did a good job of laying down that foundation. Obviously it didn't end out the way we wanted it to, but regardless, at the end of the day, if you make history, school history, you're a winner in some shape or form.

ISIAH WONG: I would just say for our last year and this year I feel like we started something big for the University of Miami and just for all the kids that's coming out of high school, coming, just coming -- they might come to Miami and try to just think of a winning attitude and have University of Miami as a winning school and just be in the March Madness every year.

And what we did for these past few years, it means a lot. And for the history of Miami and for the upcoming years for Miami, too.

**Q. Coach Larrañaga kind of took you guys to the side and put his arms around you during the game. Just**

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**what can you say about what he's meant to you personally, on and off the court. And maybe what the message was during the game, when the time was ticking down.**

JORDAN MILLER: I mean, Coach L, man, the legend. He's been very special to me. Not only is he a coach, he's a teacher. He's a leader. He's taught me things about basketball. He's taught me things about just being a man in general.

And to address that final situation, he just told us he loved us. He was proud of us.

ISAIAH WONG: Coach L, he's a great person to be around on and off the court. He helps -- for me, I say this every time, he helped me throughout my four years of college. He just always has been there for me. I feel like he got me to this point, and he's just been helping the team too. And he just loves us all as a person, and off the court he always calls to check up on us. And he always just tries to calm people down when we're stressed out.

He's just a great coach. Like Jordan said, he's a legend, and he's going to keep on proving it with these upcoming years.

**Q. Could you address just what was asked of the players about that last meeting when they're coming off the court and you were waiting for them and you hugged them, said some words to them?**

COACH LARRAÑAGA: I don't know the exact words. But they got the message that I was so proud of them, that I loved them, that I really just been on a magic carpet ride with these young men. They're so much fun to be around, on the court, off the court.

They each have very unique personalities. And they're going to be very successful in basketball for a very long time because all these guys are really good players.

We didn't play that well today. And what I told the guys afterwards was simply that I used to watch a show growing up called "Wide World of Sports." You remember it, Dave? And the theme going into the show was the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat. I said we experienced both.

Now, last weekend it was the thrill of victory and accomplishing something that Miami had never done. Even last year, we got to the Elite Eight. We were not able to move forward. This year we did.

But today was the agony of defeat. The guys -- this will last a long time. They'll have great memories, though, of

the entire season, some of the great wins we have had. I told them all along these memories last a lifetime. You'll be telling your grandchildren about it one day.

**Q. UConn's Adama Sanogo has been having a really good NCAA tournament, had another really good game today. What was your game plan for trying to stop him?**

COACH LARRAÑAGA: You couldn't tell? Obviously what we tried to do not only didn't work, I couldn't even recognize it. I think, again, offensively we were out of sync but defensively we were too. Everybody was playing so hard to guard their man, there was no help like we intended.

So they threw it over the top. He got a layup. They ran a ball screen. He rolled. He scored in that situation. He got offensive rebounds. He was blocking us out.

So he's a terrific player. I think he earned all of his points. But I think we could have done a significantly better job on him if we could have executed our game plan.

Some of it may have had to do with them making three straight 3s to start the game, that the guys are like, wait a minute, these guys are on fire. So we stretched our defense out, which opened up things for him.

**Q. Did you have a feeling from the start of the game or before the game that things were going to be a little off, or did you have the feeling that the team had the same exact energy as they had for the previous three rounds?**

COACH LARRAÑAGA: In our team meeting last night, I tried to get the guys to understand that the expression mental is to physical as four is to one, that the mental preparation, mental and emotional, has to be consistent with the way we've prepared for every game.

And I think they listened, but you could really tell that mentally and emotionally we were not together.

All season long we've been so well-connected, offensively, sharing the ball, being one of the most efficient offensive teams in the country. What did we score today? 59. Is that our low for the season?

We were just out of character. And I think the stage that we were playing on was so huge that every guy wanted to play so hard that they forgot how we play, which is really smart. And we didn't execute what we planned to do at either end of the floor. And Connecticut deserves a lot of credit for that. They were terrific. Three straight 3s. Got

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Sanogo involved early, often. He had like 13 at the half. So we're trying to figure out at every timeout what to do.

And I think at halftime there was a very clear message, one of our players wrote on the grease board, "Share the ball." Because that's been our message all season long.

Then we went out, start the second half, we dribbled one out of bounds. We took a quick shot. It was like -- very, very hard.

**Q. A little bit of the state-of-the-game question. You have three newcomers to the Final Four, first time ever. Is it transfer portal? NIL? What do you make of it?**

COACH LARRAÑAGA: I think the culture of college basketball has completely changed. So I don't know if any of you know how many kids are in the transfer portal right now. But that is the single most important change in the game in these last several years because you see -- and I think everybody knows, we've been recruiting transfers since I got to Miami. But so has everybody else now.

And some of the Blue Bloods that recruited McDonald's All-Americans and they loaded up with young talent, there was not a single McDonald's All-American in the Final Four.

So what's happened is these older transfers who have played at maybe the mid-majors, or you see a guy like Walker Kessler left Carolina and immediately made an impact over at Auburn. You're seeing that. Brady Manek, I forgot where he left, Oklahoma, and transfers to Carolina, what an impact.

It's not happening at Miami. It's not happening in the mid-majors. It's happening everywhere every spring in April, those older, more successful guys with experience who are 21, 22, 23 years old. We played against a guy from Drake who was 25 years old. So that's the name of the game right now. And you have to load up with good players, and some of those are transfers.

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