



# 2007 State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Tournament Game Eight Press Conference March 3 St. Louis, Mo.

## Creighton Head Coach Dana Altman and Student-Athlete Quotes

### Dana Altman

Opening Statement: Well, I'm really excited and proud of our second half defensive effort. I thought the first 12 minutes of the second half, I think they only scored 9 points, and I thought we really guarded pretty good, and I thought that was the turning point in the game. We had given up some easy baskets the first half and it was pretty disappointing at halftime. We gave up a lot of easy baskets. I thought the second half we did a much better job. Nick Porter did a great job on the boards with. He did a great job, and Nathan was great on the offensive end, and Anthony, although he was in foul trouble, did a lot of good things. We rode our seniors pretty hard again. I thought Dane Watts played good. We've got to let it go. It's a quick turn around to play 1:00 tomorrow, so it's going to be awfully, awfully quick.

**MEDIA:** Nate, obviously you guys have played Southern Illinois twice already this year, two very close losses. Describe those games and going into tomorrow. Is there anything you guys do different, or is it just a matter of making a couple of baskets?

**NATE FUNK:** Both games, the one at Creighton and the one at Southern Illinois, were both blood baths. They unfortunately had a game winner against us at home, and we couldn't come back at the end of the game at their place. I expect a real close game. I expect them to play tough defense like they always have. They're one of the toughest defensive teams in the nation, and that's what we expect out of them.

**MEDIA:** Nate, you scored 33 points, the most points ever scored by a Creighton player down here at the tournament. Talk about that second half. You kind of opened up that 12-point lead there early in the second half and your performance in this game.

**NATE FUNK:** Well, every once in a while you get in a shooting rhythm. That's what I was in tonight. It's over now. We've got to look forward to tomorrow. That's all I can say about that. I already forgot about my 33-point performance. I'm just looking ahead.

**MEDIA:** I guess to any of the guys, Dana mentioned the defense in the first 12 minutes of the second half. How much of an emphasis at halftime was put upon guarding and making them take some tough shots?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** Well, I mean, that was everything, you know. They live and die off of transition, and getting easy ones on the break and getting baskets before you get your defense set up, and you know, we knew that if we could stop their transition, then we would be in pretty good shape at the end of the game, and we gave them way too many transition baskets the first half. At the end of the half, that's how they came back and tied it and, you know, they were within 5 at halftime, so we knew that we had to get back on D and not give them easy buckets and also, you know, not let Blake Ahearn keep shooting like he was so everybody did a pretty good job of adjusting in the second half and we came out with a victory.

**MEDIA:** Anthony, could you talk about the connection you feel you have with some of the players on the team, playing high school with them and growing up with some of them? Obviously Deven you were talking to a little bit during the end of the game. Could you talk about that?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** Well, it's a great feeling, you know. I wish we could both win, but you know, unfortunately you can't. I've been on the other side of that a couple times against those guys. They beat us in the tournament here my freshman year, so I've been on the other side, and it's just tough, you know. Somebody has to lose. He played his heart out. Everybody played their hearts out on both teams, you know. It's just great to be able to go out and compete with some of them and hopefully, you know, they'll get a bid, and we can all be in the tournament. Last year, you know, everybody thought that they got a little snubbed, you know, not getting in, but you know, I think this year they have a pretty good chance. Hopefully we can all get in there and make some noise.

**MEDIA:** Nate, I'm not going to let you forget about it yet. This is the largest crowd that's ever been in this building. Talk about getting in a rhythm. Did you feed off that a little bit? I'm wondering if the other guys can talk about being aware of Nate and getting him the ball any time you could.

**NATE FUNK:** Like any shooter, once you hit a basket, it seems to grow. You saw that with Blake Ahearn tonight. He hit a couple big 3s. We weren't up on him. He was 25 feet away, but he still was knocking them down. In his case the basket was pretty big at that time, too, but you know, these guys did a great job of finding me. It's not always the easiest thing to do, but I tried to pick and choose which shots were good for me and which ones weren't. On this occasion more shots were good for me than they weren't, so –

**MEDIA:** Can the other guys talk about Nate?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** He's a pretty good player. He hit some pretty tough shots, you know. Watching him -- it's amazing watching some of the really good guards in our league, you know, watching Southern earlier, you know, Jamaal Tatum hit some tough shots. I was like wow. I thought he was at a whole different level. I'm like that's why they're first and second in the voting for player of the year, you know, so you know, he plays at a different level sometimes, and when he plays at that type of level, I mean, there's not too many teams I think that can beat us, so he knows that and we know that. Nick Porter, too. He had a huge double-double today. They played great. It was great guard play. I try to do my part, you know, whether it be defense, rebounding, or scoring. If Nate's scoring 33, I don't need to score that much.

**MEDIA:** Nick, could you talk about your performance today since Anthony has already touched on it? Nate, could you talk about what Nick gave you today?

**NATE FUNK:** Well, I mean, 14 rebounds says it all. He went after balls. That's what we want from him. We know he's capable of that. He's been one rebound shy on double-doubles on a couple of occasions. Nick will be the first one to point that out because he goes to the stat sheets after the game and he points that out. I said today before we came he was the X-factor. When he plays well, I think we play well. You saw that tonight, you saw that last night, and hopefully you'll see that tomorrow.

**NICK PORTER:** Like Nate said, I've been a couple rebounds short of a double-double a few games this year. I really wanted one before I was done, and I finally got that. I think my teammates and coaches have been challenging me to play harder and go after the ball and rebound and give them what I can give them with my size and my strength. That was the main thing I focused on tonight, to come out and rebound the ball and get guys involved and get them good shots.

**MEDIA:** Anthony, just how difficult is it to make the championship game of this tournament?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** I think the hardest part is these first two games are always a grind, and then once you get in the championship, anything can happen, and you know, people think, you know, we get tired by the time the third game around, but you know, it's a championship game. You find energy. I don't know where it comes from. It's just pure adrenaline. I don't know what it is, but you find energy. So I think the toughest part, I mean, we're through. Now we've just got to play a game, one game, and we're done. We're done with this tournament. Hopefully tomorrow we can come out and just play hard and see what happens.

**MEDIA:** Anthony, you and Randal Falker are two of the better big men in the Valley. Can you talk about some of the challenges that he presents tomorrow?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** Well, like I said, he's a great big man, you know. He's a load down there. He's hard to guard, and you know, we've had some battles, you know, these last couple years, and he's come out on the winning end of all of them. Hopefully we can figure out a way to get us one.

**MEDIA:** Anthony, you just touched on it a little bit, but you guys haven't been able to get past Southern over the last couple years. Are you looking forward to getting one more crack at them?

**ANTHONY TOLLIVER:** Definitely. My teammates are coming at me aren't you saying don't you want Southern to win so you can get them? I'm like I don't care who we play. I know what we're here for. If they make it and we make it, that's who we're playing. That's how it ended up, so that's great. It's another opportunity to get them, but you know, it didn't really matter who we played. I wasn't wishing for them or anything, you know. Since we have them, that's what we've got so we'll see what happens tomorrow.

**MEDIA:** Dana, you've obviously ridden those three guys really hard all year. Have you ever gotten more out of them?

**COACH DANA ALTMAN:** You know, in combination on a given night, I don't think so. Nate had 8 rebounds tonight, and I've been on him pretty hard about rebounding and he led us in rebounding as a junior. Now we've asked him to play the point which takes away all his offensive rebound opportunities, but you know, I thought he did a good job on the boards. I thought defensively he was solid. I'm not sure we've had a better all-around performance for a ball game than Nick Porter's today. We've been screaming at him all year about his rebounding. For him to get 13, I guess, was the official count was great. Then Anthony, all of the foul trouble, you know, he really gave us a presence inside so we have rode them awfully hard, the three very good young men, and you know, I feel very happy for them.

**MEDIA:** Coach, looking ahead to Southern, in an interview before the MVC tournament Coach Hinson of Missouri said jokingly to duplicate Southern's defense, he goes down to the police station and gets a slew of attack dogs. How accurate is that of a description of the toughness of the players on the other side of the ball?

**COACH DANA ALTMAN:** I'm not going to go there. They're a very good defensive team. They've given us problems. Their athleticism is very good, you know. They came up really close this year and just couldn't get it done. They're a good basketball team. I've got great respect for them. We set the standard there for a while. They've set it for the last through years. Everybody's trying to catch them. They showed great determination today, and there were times it looked like Bradley was going to get them, and they found a way to win. We've got great respect for them. We look forward to the challenge. Our guys, like I said, the quick turn around, I just want to get them back to the hotel and get them resting. Our guys will play hard. We'll come and compete, and I know Southern will, and it will be a heck of a ballgame, I think. I mean, if it's anything like the last two, I mean, we lose one at our place, and Nate has a shot go in and out. At their place we were down 2, and Nick Porter got it to the rim and missed a little 8-footer off the board to tie it up. We had our chances in both games. We just weren't tough enough to finish it, and tomorrow we'll swing away and see if we're a little bit tougher.

**MEDIA:** Coach, what have you told the guys to prepare for the championship game tomorrow?

**COACH DANA ALTMAN:** I haven't told them anything. We were worried about today, you know. We've had an opportunity. Nathan has played in his third tournament final, Anthony's second. We don't ever talk about the next day. We just kind of try to focus in on this day and we'll go back to the hotel and probably meet a little bit later tonight and start talking about Southern, but there are no secrets, now. We've played them twice. We've played Missouri State. It's pretty easy preparation. It's not like we haven't seen them before and we don't know their personnel. We know Jamaal is going to take big shots and usually is pretty successful. We know that Matt Shaw is tough. We know that Falker is tough. We know them and they know us, and so it's not like we've got to spend a lot of time preparing, you know. Just resting and trying to figure out way at 1:00 to be ready to go.

**MEDIA:** Dana, with everything this team's been through this year, what's it mean to you to get this group to the position you're in right now?

**COACH DANA ALTMAN:** Well, I'm proud of them, you know. I know that sounds, you know, really corny, but these guys have fought illness, they've fought guys quitting. I mean, they just sucked it up and whatever hurdle was thrown in front of them, you know, they kept trying to battle. It's a tribute to our seniors. Anthony Tolliver is a great leader. Nathan Funk, you

know, those guys have done a great job. The other guys have followed. I like this team. I'm proud of them. I thought they've fought adversity all year, and now we'd just like to finish strong again.

**MEDIA:** Coach, with Anthony in foul trouble, how important was not only Nick's rebounding but his taking the ball, attacking the basket?

**COACH DANA ALTMAN:** I thought that was key. When Anthony went out, I thought Nick really got aggressive on the boards and Manny gave us a few minutes there. I thought Dane Watts -- I'm not sure how many rebounds he had, but he did a nice job during that stretch also. We had Anthony out of the game a little longer than usual, and you know, he fought the foul trouble pretty good and did a pretty good job, but you know, I agree with you. I thought Nick did a great job when he was in.

## Missouri State Head Coach Barry Hinson and Student-Athlete Quotes

### Barry Hinson

Opening Statement: Congratulations to Creighton. They played outstanding, and their three seniors were just absolutely phenomenal today, so hats off to them. They represented our league. We've got two really good teams that are going to play on national television tomorrow, and we're certainly proud of them and what they've accomplished, and I'm proud of our guys and what we've accomplished this year. I think our body of work has been very impressive. I hope we're not judged on this last game. It was an 8-point game with 2 minutes to go. We went ahead and played to win. We've been in this situation before where we didn't, and we were worried about the margin, and we decided -- I decided it's time that we were going to play to win, and I realize the margin got more and more, but it certainly wasn't indicative of the game.

**MEDIA:** Just for all the players, considering what happened last year, what are these next eight days going to be like?

**NATHAN BILYEU:** Well, you know, after last year, you can't really go in looking at all the ESPN stuff, CBS Sportsline and whatnot. It just builds it up for a crushing blow, and you know, we've just got to keep positive. Hopefully things turn out in the right end for us.

**BLAKE AHEARN:** It's going to be a long week, and we went through it last year. I think this team, you know, deserves an opportunity, you know. We had a good season, and you know, like Coach said, I hope we're not judged by this last game.

**DEVEN MITCHELL:** I think we've got to let this game get in the past and next week, like Blake said, go hard and come again and keep doing what we do best.

**MEDIA:** Blake, I know you're going toe to toe with Funk. Can you just even as an opponent can you marvel at what he did today? Kind of talk about trying to match up with him.

**BLAKE AHEARN:** Nate is great player. Great players are going to make some big plays. He did that tonight for them. You've gotta give him credit. They're a good basketball team. They played well.

**MEDIA:** Nate, do you believe -- or Blake, do you believe that making the final 4 tournament here in the Missouri Valley will help you guys push your way into the NCAA tournament?

**BLAKE AHEARN:** You know, you'd like to think so. After what happened last year, you really can't, you know, think for the committee. You don't know what they're thinking. You just rely on what you've done. We've had some good wins, you know. Last year we didn't win our first game of the conference tournament and we did this year. That's obviously a step in the right direction. We got more wins this year than we did last year. This league deserves three teams. hopefully we're one of those.

**MEDIA:** Blake can you talk about Creighton's defensive job in the second half and Nate, talk about the rebounding. That was the big difference in the game.

**BLAKE AHEARN:** Defensively they came out with a big emphasis in the second half. They did a good job making it tough on us, making catches and stuff like that, so you've got to give them credit.

**NATHAN BILYEU:** On the whole rebounding situation, they just came out from the tip and just took it to us. Every rebound was up for grabs. There would be three Creighton guys around it, and it was tough to get them off the boards. That's one thing that helped them win the ballgame. They've just got to keep it up. If they rebound like that tomorrow against Southern Illinois, they should be -- they should be good to go.

**MEDIA:** Nick, can you talk a little bit about your season and I guess these two games from the tournament are kind of indicative of the up and downs and the battles it's been for you to try to be consistent and do the things you can do for this team. You were so effective in so many areas last night and then today was a total struggle for you. Can you talk a little bit about how that's been this year?

**NATHAN BILYEU:** I think that's college basketball, you know. I know I'm not -- I'm not an amazing player. I just go out and do what I can to help the team, you know. I didn't get it done today, and I've got to take some of that fault, that blame, and put it on my shoulders, especially as a senior, but you've got to put it in the past and look forward and be positive.

**MEDIA:** Deven, it looked like you did your best in the second half to try to ignite the offense. Talk about the struggles the team was having and what you were trying to get done.

**DEVEN MITCHELL:** I tried to just do what I could. I don't know. I just tried -- I mean, I don't know what to say. I tried to call for the ball, you know. The second half coming out, you know, I just tried to tell them to give me the ball inside. You could see it paid off, but I don't know, man. I just -- I just tried to play for real, you know what I mean, and you can't just have a couple people doing it and have 13, 12 guys following you. Everyone has got to be on the same page. You can see we weren't all living on that page tonight and look at the turnout.

**MEDIA:** Coach, the same question I asked the players. The next eight days I'm sure will be long just waiting for the outcome.

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** I think it will be a long day. I will say this. I feel better this year than I did last year. Let me -- let me rephrase that. I feel better than what I felt better at the end. Knowing what I know from last year, I'm more optimistic going into the selections this year based on our body of work compared to last year's. The only thing that we don't have that we didn't have last year is our RPI number which we're coming to find out that doesn't mean a lot. What we do have is we have a body of work that should be impressive. We are the third best team and clearly the third best team in a league that's rated sixth in the country. Now, if we were the third best team in the Big 12, we wouldn't be having this conversation. The Big 12 is seventh in the conference power rankings behind us. There are other conferences that are rated behind us that are perceived as BCS conferences. We wouldn't be having this conversation. It's sad that we have to have it today, but I do believe that this league deserves three teams. I apologize for how we competed on the floor today, but please do not let that be judged on our body of work. Last year we did not win the first game. We played an unbelievable game last night. We beat a very good basketball team, Wichita State, and I thought Wichita State played one of their better games. Lord knows I've seen a lot of their film. I think our body of work speaks well, and we have one of the best wins in college basketball all year long with our victory over Wisconsin. We did not have that last year. So as bad as I feel about today's loss, I'm very optimistic about our opportunities and I'm not politicking. I'm speaking from the heart. There's no reason for me to politic. I truly believe that we have a great chance of being in the tournament.

**MEDIA:** Coach, you tried a little of everything defensively against Nate Funk. Is it a little bit of a helpless feeling when a guy gets on a roll like that?

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** I just told our staff in the locker room. I think it's the hardest, maybe the worst feeling in coaching when you've tried everything you can do and you just can't get them on the same page, and you know, Deven's right. For the most part he was -- he was probably the only one that was just basically giving effort all day long. We have some guys that tried, but you know, they've got to compete better. They've got to play better than what we played today. We tried everything, and certainly when you have only one guy that you can look at on a sheet and you feel like that he played well, it certainly makes it confusing.

**MEDIA:** Barry, along those lines, are you disappointed and surprised at the play of your seniors today? Also talking about Nathan a little bit. He's the type of guy that gives you so many things. He's really kind of a barometer of your team in a lot of ways, isn't he?

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** Yeah, Pam. That's a hard question because I love those kids. They're seniors. Creighton seniors had 65 of their 75 points. They were phenomenal. You know, our seniors didn't play well today. Blake made shots early in the ballgame, played well the first half, didn't play well the second half. Creighton had a lot to do with that by how they pressured him. We always judge our success by how hard we played defensively, and our seniors were responsible today basically for their three seniors defensively, and you know, it is disappointing, and it is confusing as well, but I think that's part of college basketball. Sometimes you want to go out there and you want to do things for them, but you can't. Coach Williams always says at North Carolina. He says sometimes the guys in the little white shorts gotta go make plays. We weren't wearing white shorts today, but you get the point.

**MEDIA:** What were some of the things you told the guys when they came back to the locker room?

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** I said we didn't deserve to win the ballgame. It wasn't anything out there. We had every bit of control of that game as far as our own destiny, and Creighton just absolutely whipped our tails. I told them I was disappointed in our effort. I didn't think we played well or well to our capability, but I told them, I said when you come in here, there's no excuses. They absolutely whipped our tails, and we just gotta wait. We deserve -- Creighton doesn't have to wait now. Southern Illinois doesn't have to wait. They don't have to wait these next eight days, we do. We deserve to wait those eight days by how we played today.

**MEDIA:** Coach, I was wondering if you could explain the decision. You said you made the decision that you wanted to try to win the game regardless of how lopsided the score may be. Is that maybe an education from the last couple of years trying to keep it tighter?

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** I can't answer. I know people are going to look at the game and say you got beat by 17 points. It's a single-digit game with two minutes to go. My first year here in 2000 we played Creighton in the finals, and we decided not to foul. We got a lot of flack for that. At the time I felt like I needed to keep the margin close for the committee. Obviously that didn't work in the year 2000, either, so I just made the decision hey, we're going to play to win, all the way down to the wire and with the last 44 seconds, when you're down 44 with 17 or down 17 with 44 to go, you know you're not going to win, that's the only time we decided not to do that. I hope people will respect that.

**MEDIA:** Coach, is it going to be hard not to notice what people are saying about your team in the next week or so, talking about your NCAA chances?

**COACH BARRY HINSON:** Yeah. That's just part of it, Kyle. I've been through it one year. Actually, I've been through it twice, and you know, I think it wouldn't have been as hard had we played better today and competed better, but certainly it's going to be hard, and you know, I'm going to put my trust -- first and foremost I'm going to put my trust in the Lord. The second thing, I'm going to put my trust in our conference commissioner, my athletic director and my president and let them take care of this, and I'm also going to put my trust in our body of work which I really do believe bodes well.