



2007 State Farm Missouri Valley Conference Tournament Game Nine Press Conference

March 4

St. Louis, Mo.

Creighton Head Coach Dana Altman and Student-Athlete Quotes

Dana Altman

Opening Statement: That was a long celebration. I didn't know if anybody would hang around, but it was a great game by our seniors, a great tournament by our seniors. I feel really good about the way these three guys played. Southern's really a good basketball team. They've given us fits over the last couple years, three years, and so it was a good win for us, and you know, they're in the tournament. They're going to make a great showing for the league, but today, you know, we just made a few more plays. We had two knock-down drag-outs with them during the season and lost a couple of real close games, and this one just went our way.

MEDIA: Questions for the student athletes? Nate, what does it mean to you that your team is the champion of the Missouri Valley tournament here in St. Louis.

NATE FUNK: It's an unbelievable feeling. This is my third experience, and it doesn't get any better than this. It's a great feeling. I'm happy for these guys. I'm happy for my teammates, and it's just fun.

MEDIA: Anthony, you guys had 44 points in the paint and 7 three-pointers. Talk about your ability to get under the basket and get the high percentage shot.

ANTHONY TOLLIVER: My teammates did a great job looking for me down low. That was part of the game plan, get inside. We know they're a very strong team on defense, and we felt since they were all pressured out that the opening would be inside, so my teammates did an unbelievable job of looking for me and I finished a couple plays.

MEDIA: This question's to all three of the players. We'll start with Nate. Congratulations on the award. Just talk about finally getting over the SIU hump, so to speak, with those guys having beaten you twice in the regular season, about what it meant to beat them here in the regular championship.

NATE FUNK: I'm pretty sure that they beat us eight straight times. The last time was my freshman year on this floor. It's not a rivalry any more because they just dominated us. In the previous two games this year they were both hard-fought games. They could have gone either way at any time, but it's a good feeling to finally knock them out one time.

ANTHONY TOLLIVER: Basically the same thing, you know. Me and Nick, that was our first win over them. Nate, like he said, has beaten them before, but that was just one of our things that we came into this game. We came into this tournament and we're like well, it doesn't really matter who we played, we just want to go and win this thing. It doesn't matter. Once we saw that they won yesterday against Bradley, you know, we were determined, you know. We were like we've got to beat them this next one, so we'll get Southern again. It's our last chance of getting at them. We got the better of them, so it's a great feeling.

NICK PORTER: I felt that during the season they squeaked by us twice. We thought we had them at our house. They had a tough shot during the game there. We went up to Southern and played hard and just fell shot. I just thought we had them, and to get another crack at them down here in this situation, with this much as stake just solidified a great feeling we had after we won.

MEDIA: Nate and Anthony, you guys have basically had to change your identity over the course of the team from a team that liked to press a lot to a team that had to play up tempo. Can you talk about the transition and how you've adjusted to that?

NATE FUNK: We've played about ten different ways. We started out pressing, and you have to make adjustments throughout the year with your personnel and the fact that we had guys leave. We had some injuries along the way with Josh. You've got gotta come out every game, you know, with a game plan against a team that you're playing against, but we have gone through a lot of ups and downs this year, but it's always nice to end like this, and hopefully keep on going and we'll try to make some wins in the tournament.

ANTHONY TOLLIVER: I guess the same type of deal, you know. Most teams throughout the season, I would imagine, you know, they have to change a little bit, you know, because if you keep doing the same thing, somebody's going to figure you out. The coaches did an unbelievable job of really identifying the best way for us to play with the personnel that we have, you know, and we've just tried to play hard in whatever system, whatever way we want to play. We just trying to go out and play hard either way, so you know, it's just a great feeling.

MEDIA: Nate, did you feel you guys needed to win this game to get in the tournament, and does that add motivation today?

NATE FUNK: Well, you know, we weren't certain whether we were going to get in or not. I believe we were right on the bubble. The only way to guarantee our spot in the tournament was to win this game. Besides Southern, you know, the rest of the league had to win the tournament to get in to solidify their spot, to make sure they were getting in. That's the way we came into this tournament, that we had to win three to get in.

MEDIA: Nate, obviously no matter what would have happened here this weekend, you would have went down as a great player in Creighton history. Do you think you've raised yourself to another level by what you guys accomplished here?

NATE FUNK: I didn't want to go out a loser, that's for certain. It hasn't been picture-perfect this year for me, but to play this well towards the end of the year, put three games together the way we've played, especially on the defensive end, you know, for myself to have a decent tournament and a final showing here, it feels pretty good, you know. As far as going out as an outstanding player, you know, that's for you guys to decide. I just go out and play the game, you know, the best I can.

MEDIA: Dana, your take on the same question I asked Nate. Has he raised himself to a different level by what he accomplished here?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: Well, see, you guys judge, you know, things strictly on games and I don't. I've been with Nathan for five years, you know. Whether we won or lost a tournament, it wasn't going to change my feelings toward him as a player, as a person. I'm glad for him that he was able to experience that because he played awfully well, and last night's performance overall with points, rebounds, taking a charge, defense, was as fine a performance as we've had in this tournament since I've been coaching for Creighton. I'm happy for him. I'm happy for Nick. As far as changing how I view him, that wasn't going to change.

MEDIA: Coach, it was almost four years to the day the last time you guys defeated Southern. It was in the 2003 conference championship. talk about being able to look up at the score board today and saw that you guys came away with a victory and just give that sigh of relief.

COACH DANA ALTMAN: I mentioned yesterday we've got great respect for Southern, and in the last four years we've lost a lot of close games. We've weren't tough enough or athletic enough or whatever the case may be to finish it, or we weren't coaching well enough to finish it. I'm happy for those guys to finish a game and, you know, get that done, you know. The win in 2003, I joked with our players that we just got them really upset and they've been paying us back ever since, but this one was a good effort, and I'm glad we got it done.

MEDIA: Since you've turned this program around, has it been your most challenging season?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: No, not really. I mean, 2004 when Tyler had the cornea transplants, boy, that was scary. You're worried about a player losing his eyesight. We got off to a great start with 12-0. Everything looked like it was going great. Then we were really worried about that. That was kind of -- that was a funny year, but you know, this year was just a little disappointing because our fans' expectations, their expectations were so high and we didn't play well in November and December so everybody came down on the team pretty hard, and you know, our guys, if you look where they're from, they're all from the Midwest. Their families were all involved, and they were carrying the weight of the world around because they felt like they were letting everybody down, and so that was -- that was tough on them, but I really enjoyed the group. I mean, they're a really good group of guys. We've just -- we've had crazy things happen this year, illnesses, and poor Josh with his knee and then his finger, so you know, it's a good group, and they've been a lot of fun to work with.

MEDIA: Dana, how much beyond just scoring points and grabbing rebounds is a culmination of you staying loyal, the administration making a commitment to you, to the program, the brilliant arena, the city backing it, and just sort of an example of you're a university and a city is willing to invest in a program, this is the type of stuff that can happen?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: That's really the situation we have. Thirteen years ago we went our entire first season and drew 39,000 total. That was our total draw, and to see where we've come, we've had tremendous support from the president, Father Morrison and now Father Schlegel. I've had one athletic director who was unbelievable, Bruce Rasmussen. The first three years was nothing to write home about. We were bad. In the fourth year, you know, we didn't win a tournament game. We didn't have anything going. But then we got it kind of going, and we really got some good young men to work with, and then the city really started jumping in there when the Qwest was built we were fortunate, and we were worried about getting anybody to come. We thought it was an awfully big building and it was nice, but would anybody show up. The people in the city have been just unbelievable. You see how many people we had here, you know, so it's -- it's been a great relationship with a wonderful city and I think our university's really a unique place. We've been fortunate and people have been great to our staff and our team and my family, so you know, I think Omaha is special. I think Creighton's special, but I'm very biased in my opinion.

MEDIA: Coach, what do you feel you guys did different today to beat Carbondale besides score more points against them?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: Well, I just -- the difference in our game would have been just one or two possessions, and you know, today I really thought the start of the second half when we made some plays and got some easy baskets and got a little lead that was the turning point, and I felt like from there if we just didn't turn it over to get them easy baskets and hit our free throws that we were going to be in pretty good shape, so I think that was just the difference, just a couple loose balls that we got. We beat them on the boards which is always an important factor. We only turned the ball over nine times today, so those things, you know, add to that one or two possessions and it ended up being a 6-point game. It's not like we blew them away. We just made a few more plays than we did in the previous two games.

MEDIA: Coach, after you guys struggled a bit defensively against Drexel and Illinois State, you were kind of able to put it away defensively in this tournament. What was the key to your team's defensive efforts?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: I didn't do a very good job. I really let our team down against Drexel and Illinois State. I didn't make very good adjustments, you know, and I kind of left them hanging, to be real honest. So after those two games I just said well, you know, we're going to change a bunch of things. Here's the way we're going to play, you know. I don't want to hear any argument. This is where we're going to go, and our guys did a great job with it, you know. In those two ballgames I let them down, you know. I didn't make adjustments. I didn't help them out at all. They cost us two ballgames. I said this is the way we're going. Fortunately we have young men who were coachable. They did a great job with it.

MEDIA: Dana, given just the high level quality play of your seniors and also the confidence and the determination that seems to be evident with your team right now, do you feel good about taking this forward to the NCAA tournament in terms of, you know, maybe compared to some other years? You think you're in really good shape going in?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: We do, but we've always felt good going into the tournament. It's a crap shoot, you know. Matchups, who's playing well, who's not playing well. The only thing I don't like is this long layoff. You play three games and now we've got a week until selection Sunday and then three or four more days before we play. At this time of year, you know, 10 or 11 days off is an eternity. What do you do? You practice them all year, they're tired of you, you know, you're a little bit tired of them, and you know, what do you do? That's the only bad part about this tournament being early is it's just a long time.

So we're going to do something different, just take a few more days off, try to get some things going, but it's all about matchups, you know, and how that team's playing that you play, you know. Whether their strengths match up against your strengths, whether their weaknesses match up against yours. Hopefully we'll get a good draw and make something happen.

MEDIA: Coach, continuing on the question about the tournament. Now that we know the results of the conference tournament, what do you think the Valley's prospects, hopes, number of teams, etc. into the NCAA is?

COACH DANA ALTMAN: You know, I've always really shied away from those questions whether my team was involved or not because the people who make those decisions, you know, have a lot more information than I have, and you know, their integrity and the work they put into it by a bunch of coaches lobbying, I'm not sure does the process every good -- any good. With that being said, I think our conference had a great year. Southern, no doubt about them. We won the tournament so we're in, and Missouri State and Bradley deserve a lot of credit, you know, and consideration. That's all that we can hope for. For me to sit here and say they should be in, you know, I don't have all the information. I haven't watched all the teams play, but I know that Bradley and Missouri State are pretty good, and they deserve consideration, and I hope like heck they get the opportunity. They deserve a good look, and then whatever the committee says, you know, it's tough. It's tough if you're excluded, but we've got a process. We've got men of great integrity on that committee, and I know they'll do what's best for college basketball. I just hope it includes our conference. That's all we can hope for, and we hope that it works out for our own league.

Southern Illinois Head Coach Chris Lowery and Student-Athlete Quotes

Chris Lowery

Opening Statement: You've got to tip your hat to Creighton, man. They came and really played very physical and really did a good job of forcing the action offensively, not doing as much of their stuff. They got to the free throw line. They really did a good job of driving to draw fouls instead of driving to score, and we did a very poor job of guarding in the paint, being tough in the trenches. We couldn't get motivated enough to play until the last two minutes, and when it's a 1 and done situation like it's going to be from here on out for us, we've got to be ready.

MEDIA: Do you think you could have done any more when it's the end of the game and you're trying to take over in that last two-minute span?

JAMAAL TATUM: I don't know. That's a tough question. I'm sure there's always extra you can put in and try to contribute to the win, but at that time I thought I was doing all I could. I think everybody else thought we were doing all we could at that time, too.

MEDIA: Matt, was this the most physical of the physical games that you guys have played against Creighton this season?

MATT SHAW: I mean, it's hard to remember specific games, and you know, how physical they were, but they did a great job as Coach said in the paint, getting in the paint, drawing fouls, getting us in foul trouble. The players were extremely physical today. That's something uncharacteristic of us to not fight back.

MEDIA: For Jamaal and Bryan, I guess this loss will be pretty useless unless you guys gain something from it in terms of what you learned. Is there anything in particular you already know or might take in stock down the road here?

BRYAN MULLINS: You know, when we lose, we obviously know if we don't come to play we're just a mediocre team. If we don't play hard and stick to our principles, and our defense is what we pride ourselves on. If we don't take care of our defense, we're just an average team, so we've got to play harder in the NCAA tournament.

JAMAAL TATUM: You've got to come to play every game. You might have games back to back in the NCAA tournament or how it ends up, but you got to come out every day, and today they just outfought us, period. They outfought us and outplayed us.

MEDIA: Hey, Bryan, could you talk about the stretch you had in the second half where scored your 10 points in like 4 minutes or less?

BRYAN MULLINS: You know, I just got some open looks and some open drives to the basket, so I was just trying to make plays.

MEDIA: Jamaal, you touched on it a little bit about why they came out and why you guys didn't seem to be getting into the game until late. Addressing that again, does it seem like you guys didn't get going until the final few minutes?

JAMAAL TATUM: Coach talked about the 50-50s in the final plays, whether this team or that team could get it. There's no way you can beat a good team like Creighton doing that, no way, not on your best day. You can't beat a good team like that when you have that kind of effort, you know, throughout the majority of the game.

MEDIA: J.T., the energy and effort it took to beat Bradley yesterday. Do you think there was a little hangover effect today?

JAMAAL TATUM: No, I don't. You can't make that excuse at all. We're in good enough condition to be able to play back to back games and play tough games and come out and play another tough game. You know, it might be a little physically fatigued but your mind will overcome that. We went through so much in conditioning in the fall that we can do anything physically, and we didn't step up to that challenge today, physically or mentally.

MEDIA: Matt, Coach mentioned the interior defense and you guys struggled there today. Is there anything that Creighton, especially Tolliver, was doing differently today or –

MATT SHAW: I don't think it was anything different. He caught the ball deep several times. Any time he catches it deep it's going to be a basket or a foul with him. He just got away with good looks. We didn't fight him for catches. We didn't pressure him like we should have. We just gave away too many looks close to the basket.

MEDIA: For Jamaal and Bryan again, can you account for why maybe the starter didn't kick in until later? Is there any way to know that?

BRYAN MULLINS: No. You know, they came out in the first 5 minutes and kind of set the tone, got some guys in foul trouble. They really played well offensively by, you know, their guards. They did a great job driving into us and getting great looks. By that time with us not coming out ready to play, we always talk about the first 5 minutes of the game, we want to set the tone to our style of play, and they were able to do that for them.

JAMAAL TATUM: I agree with Bryan on that. They set the tone today. The way we've beaten them in the past, we set the tone. At their place, they had the same look today. Tolliver goes up and we foul him. He might miss both free throws, but today no one got to him, no one fouled him. No one was in the area when he went for the easy two. They imposed their will on us. That's the way we win games.

MEDIA: Jamaal, do you think there was more pressure on you to provide the offense more punch with Randal struggling pretty much the entire game?

JAMAAL TATUM: I mean, who knows? That's not even an issue because that's not why we lost. It was all defense and all effort, so I mean, maybe so, maybe not. I don't know. I mean, that's not any of our concern. We just have to have a better effort on the defensive end, you know, throughout the whole game.

MEDIA: J.T., I'm asking you this question because you're a speech major and a senior leader and extremely eloquent. Randal's performance for Southern yesterday and today for fans had to be very disappointing. What are your thoughts on that?

JAMAAL TATUM: I have confidence in him, you know. He'll come out ready to play. We love our fans to death, but we went through everything together this summer. We as a team, you know, went through the mile times and throwing up and conditioning, and so it's not about what they think. Even though we love them and we're very glad they support us, but he has to do it for himself, his coach, and for the team. He's going to do that next game. I'm very confident in that.

MEDIA: For both Bryan and Jamaal, a lot of times after a loss the players want to get back on the floor immediately to do something to wash that out of their minds. You'll have almost two weeks off before you guys play again, how tough might that be for you guys?

BRYAN MULLINS: I can't really say. Probably the next couple days will be tough, we could have won the tournament and we didn't. Once we get back in practice, that will be good. We're looking forward to the tournament. I'm excited about that.

JAMAAL TATUM: I think obviously we'll have a little rest and let our bodies regroup. Today's over. We're going to eliminate this from our mind and not think about it any more and concentrate on what we need to do to get wins in the tournament and make a run.

MEDIA: Coach, if you would address Randal's situation. I talked to him in the locker room. He said he was having trouble breathing in the first half. Obviously you only played him 9 minutes. What was the problem, and has he had bad games like this before?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: When you ask a kid why he's playing bad, he's probably going to tell you something that's different than what the coaches feel. We can't worry about asking him for outs on questions and asking him why he didn't play well. We -- we have to find ways to motivate him to play well above all circumstances, and he's had bad games just like all the guys on our team. The fact that he's had three in a row doesn't help us. That's what we've got to find, find his mental approach and get it back to what it was because when he doesn't play and he doesn't draw fouls on other people and allow us to get in the bonus early, we're very average.

MEDIA: Chris, Jamaal was saying as he left that you want to get this taste out of your mouth and move on. I suppose you want to find something constructive to use out of this game. Do you already know what it might be? Any sense of how you'll use this game as you look ahead?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: The way you use it, it was another NCAA tournament atmosphere. That's where you use it, and you use it to gauge how you performed on the second day or the second round of the tournament if you're fortunate enough to get there and show that them hey, you have to play above things when you're a little bit fatigued and you're a little bit sick because it's one and done. There is no tomorrow. That was one of the deals we tried to focus on today. Some of them played like there was no tomorrow and some of them didn't. We have to get everybody on the same page. That's what we have to look forward to.

MEDIA: Chris, I know you probably haven't thought much about this, but looking in the future, do you feel this damaged your chances to get a very high seed?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I don't care about that. I mean, I'm more interested in trying to console our kids and be there for them. That's the most important thing. You know, I know we're not going to be a 7 which was the highest seed we've ever had in school history, so we have to think about that, and there are other people going to lose twice from here until then because there's some conference tournaments still yet to be played and some people who have to play today and tomorrow, so we can't focus on the seed right now. We've got to make sure that our psyche is in the right frame of mind, and we'll go and deal with Selection Sunday when it happens.

MEDIA: Coach, with the loss, what did you say to the guys when you got back into the locker room?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: The biggest thing I told them is I loved them and I appreciate their effort. The number one thing that happened today is the guys that never played were the most emotional. The guys that never played were those guys stepping up and swinging and trying to fight Randal to get him to play. That's important. So many times on other teams we see guys who are the locker room lawyers on the team. The coach is doing this wrong, the coach is doing that wrong, and we don't have that. That's good to see. I told those guys I appreciate them because I heard them. I heard them pulling Randal to the side and trying to get him to compete. Those are the type of things that make special teams stay special, when you do have guys that don't get a lot of credit, don't get a lot of publicity, don't get to play. It means a lot to them even though they don't get in the game to play.

MEDIA: Chris, we asked Jim Les yesterday after your victory what seed he thought might work for them. He said 13 was lucky last year, etc. If we asked you the same question, what range do you think you're looking at now if you had to pick 3 numbers?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I'm not picking any. That's bad karma. I'm just -- I'm going to enjoy my team. We won 13 in a row. That's what this is about. This is not about me picking a seed because then the national media gets it, they're going to bring it back on me and say hey, you said you're going to get this, and I'll get a response, probably negative, if it's lower or higher than I predicted. I have no prediction where we're going to be picked.

MEDIA: Coach, how pleased overall were you with the tournament that Tatum had? Was that his best performance?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: He's good player. I think at times he felt he had to do too much because we weren't getting enough out of Randal as we're used to and Tony Young as we're used to, and he did some things probably a little bit more than what he needed to, but he's very, very talented and you know, he made sure we were able to compete in all the games we've been here. We've got to get everybody else if we expect to get past the first weekend.

MEDIA: A couple things, if I could. Just to clarify, I know you don't want to make excuses for Randal, but was he, in fact, sick today going into the game? The other one is a larger question. The Salukis have been getting a lot of positive attention and a lot of hype which has been deserved. Do you think there was any -- do you think this was a possibility maybe you guys were a little too high on the horse, and this may have been kind of a wake-up call for you?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: You know, that's -- I told them there were people in our locker room the first two games that weren't in there today, and the glamour and glitz caught up with them because now it was back to only being the family in there, the guys who actually make this thing work and really see the day-to-day grind, see the blood, sweat, and tears. I said remember that. That's what we have to get back to. That's important. He wasn't sick. I mean, you know, he just didn't play, and we can't allow him to make excuses because he's too good. When you allow guys to make excuses when they're that talented, then they always have a crutch when they don't play well. He just didn't play well.

MEDIA: Chris, obviously with this being the third meeting between these two teams, it's always tough, they say, to beat a team three times in one season. Do you feel like with what was at stake, the tournament championship on the line as well as Creighton trying to avoid 0-3 against you guys you got even more intensity from the Bluejays this afternoon?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I think they wanted to win more than anything, and they have seniors, and Nate Funk -- their seniors, they made sure they won the game, and that's so important. We told them it was going to be so hard to beat them three times in a season. You try to motivate them. I took the blame. I apologized to them, and I couldn't get everybody motivated to play today, but you have to give credit to them because everybody who came in the game for them knew what was at stake, knew how to attack us, knew what to do to us, and they actually carried it out.

MEDIA: Coach, I also want to ask you, too, about Bryan's stretch where he scored 10 points in 3 minutes. Does that give you any more confidence in him when he plays a game in the NCAA tournament?

COACH CHRIS LOWERY: I have extreme confidence in him. He's a good player, a terrific kid. He's a floor guy, makes sure everybody is in the right spot. It's great to see him have confidence to make a play. We needed him to make plays, and he did. Unfortunately, he fouled out. Maybe it would have been different if he was in there. Maybe we could have stretched him out a little more, made it a longer game. He's got to learn not to foul. That's what he also did in that 3 minutes. If he doesn't foul and stays in the game, you never know what happens.