

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 12, 2021

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Creighton Bluejays

Coach Greg McDermott

Postgame Media Conference



Creighton - 59, UConn - 56

COACH MCDERMOTT: Just a gritty win by our team. People talk about our offense and how good our offense is. And it's just really hard to play offense against a team coached by Danny Hurley. They do such a good job of taking away your initial action. It's very hard to get things in transition because they're so disciplined.

And then they meet you at the rim on any penetration. So we had to win the game in other ways tonight. And that was on the defensive end and then on the backboards. So for us to rebound a UConn team by 17 I think speaks to the grit and toughness that I have in that locker room as well.

Q. I know Bouknight got 40 on you in the first match-up, but seemed like Denzel started to figure out maybe how to guard him a little bit at the end of that first game. What did you see tonight in terms of how that carried over because it didn't seem like Bouknight was able to get into a rhythm at all?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Obviously we had never seen him to that point. They hadn't played a lot of games if you remember. They were just coming out of a shut-down at that time. So there wasn't a ton of film.

And you're right, Denzel did a great job the last four minutes of regulation and in overtime. Even though he had a huge game, he the a good job at that stage of the game. We made sure we showed him a few more bodies tonight, that he was seeing a numbers as he was turning the corner.

And when Denzel got in foul trouble, you've got to tip your hat to Damien Jefferson. He hasn't practice one rep guarding him and we flipped him over there because we wanted that size and length. And D.J. did a good job, especially the last possession. I think they were trying to

get a quick two. D.J. cut off the driving lane, made them take a tough three, then we were fortunate they missed a couple of 3s on those tip-outs.

Q. You laid it out that you knew what kind of game it would be against UConn. But I wonder when you're in the middle of it especially when they jump out to a big lead, do you have to get after your guys a little bit to remind them how tough it's going to be in an atmosphere like that or do they know?

COACH MCDERMOTT: It was one of the first TV timeouts, I remember D.J. saying, everybody just calm down, everybody just calm down. And it's exactly what I was about to say. But obviously the meaning it has coming out of one of your leaders and captain's mouths, has a impact.

They were forcing us to speed up because of their pressure, and we weren't creating any open driving lanes. We were standing on top of each other. Once we settled into their physicality and pressure we got back to playing a little more like we could play.

We didn't shoot it great and obviously UConn has a lot to do with that. But this is a hard team to play against. And all three games scoring is tough to come by, so you have to figure out other ways to win.

Q. We've talked about D.J. a lot throughout the year. But this is kind of the first time he's ever really played on a stage like this with kind of this much at stake. What impressed you so much about what he was able to do tonight and in that moment where he's the voice that the guys are listening to as opposed to (indiscernible)?

COACH MCDERMOTT: I think what impressed me the most is he stuck with himself. He got us to a great start. But then he had some turnovers to start the second half, missed some threes, missed some shots at the rim, missed a couple of free throws. But he stuck with himself and he hits a big three at 53-50 to tie the game. And that's the sign of a guy who gets it and understands who he is. You ask me what I like about him. Everything. He's developed



into such a complete player and what he does on the floor is just -- I mean, it's only a small part of what he brings to our program. What he does in that locker room and what he means to his teammates, it's high level. So he's a warrior. I think I've said it before, I don't think we're going to realize exactly what he brings to us until he's not here anymore, because he does all the little stuff so well that you sometimes take it for granted. But when you watch it on film again, see what he does, how he goes about it, you realize he's a heck of a special player.

Q. You were down by five with five minutes left, Greg. I think maybe went to a 9-0 run, was there anything in particular you saw during that stretch that allowed you guys to flip the momentum there?

COACH MCDERMOTT: D.J. hit the big 3, and then we tried to get a slip with Christian. And they defended it. But we were still able to get it to them on the post. We like the matchup with Whaley there. Christian had had some success at UConn in that second half inside as well.

So Christian was patient. They weren't going to leave the shooters. He just made a nice shot. Faked and ducked under it and got a big basket. But it was the defensive end that got us back in it. And a guy like Alex O'Connell plays ten minutes, gets eight rebounds. Was flying around. Shereef getting hit in the head, having to sit out. We needed to have people step up with the foul trouble we were in and Ryan Kalkbrenner gave us good minutes.

And just really proud of our team. This is a high quality team we beat tonight. And we're excited to play for a Big East championship tomorrow.

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