

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

Stanford Cardinal

Kyle Smith

Jaylen Blakes

Maxime Raynaud

Postgame Press Conference



played the four overtimes and the two overtimes. Were you surprised how much they had left in the tank and did that bring another gear out of you guys?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: We always talk about how starting off a tournament with a win is going to give you a lot of energy. I'm sure they did a lot of, like, recovery stuff like eating bananas, oranges, whatever gives you back energy.

But really what it's about is coming in with the right mindset and trying to have like a killer mentality. Obviously they stuck around for too long, which is not okay for us. But they're a good team. Andrej got 37. He's a good player, as well. He led them.

So no, not surprised there, but really happy on how the guys reacted and how we won that game.

JAYLEN BLAKES: Yeah, as he said, every game in the tournament is going to be competitive. Nobody wants to go home, especially with that long travel back to California. Nobody wants to go on that flight back home.

We knew going in that obviously we beat them twice before, but there was a lot of pride on the line. Obviously when you're playing a Cal-Stanford game it's a rivalry game and it means a lot more -- just the 10 people that are playing on the court, it means a lot to the alumni, and that's a more watched game by the Stanford and Cal fans. We knew they were going to come out with extreme fire and passion. I'm glad that we weathered the storm for sure.

Q. Maxime, where did you get the shades?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: They just stuck with us the whole tournament. I went bowling with a couple teammates on Sunday, we picked those up, and they've been traveling with us ever since. I think it's a little good luck charm, if I can say, so I'm just bringing them everywhere. Man, we got the win, so...

Q. We'll see them tomorrow.

MAXIME RAYNAUD: Absolutely.

Stanford 78, California 73

KYLE SMITH: That was a rivalry game, obviously, very emotional I think for both teams. Hat tip to them; they were really quick to the ball, loose balls and rebounds, which really they excel at, but we shot the ball really well. We played with good poise, especially down the stretch, getting down the last five minutes there, and what you have to do in postseason, be able to make some big shots. Oziyah hit a big three. Benny hit a big three at the end of the clock. And then Chisom hit a drive late that kind of put us up and made the free throw to put us up four.

And our two senior leaders just kind of had what you need in postseason is for them to step up big time. We couldn't be more thrilled.

Q. Maxime, Jaylen, I remember talking to you at media days and you were stoked about the young program coming in, first-year head coach, and it's been a great story so far. I know the job is not done, but how do you feel about how this year has gone for you so far?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: Think we surpassed expectations. Coach Smith talked to us before that we were projected 17th out of 18th. We weren't expected to be here right now. For us to be here with the talent we have, I think we're doing a great job. We have great talent, young talent that you guys haven't even seen yet, and I think there's more to come. Next year a lot of the freshmen, sophomores, juniors that are coming back, they're ready to build on what we're doing right now.

Q. I don't know how aware you were that they had



Q. How would you describe your battles with Andrej, him going for the performance he did and then you had the block at the end? How would you characterize that and what that one-on-one battle means to you?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: Well, first of all, I don't think it's a one-on-one battle. I do think it's a team against a team. He mentioned the rivalry game earlier. It's the first time in 64 years that we go 3-0 against them. Yeah, he was obviously their best performer, and when that happened, you want to give him as much attention as possible.

So if that means bringing back on defense, blocking his shot, trying to help the guards and like being as high as possible on the ball screens, that's what we do.

But I think overall you need to give more credit to J.B., Benny, Oziyah, pretty much all the guards that were guarding him for 40 minutes. I think these are the guys that did most of the work.

Now, from a more personal standpoint, off the court, he's obviously a good friend, obviously someone I respect a lot. But between those lines, he's just the opponent. It's just a rivalry game once again. I'm glad we got the win, and proud of him, hope he can get good rest and recovery for next season.

Q. You come off an emotional win today against a rival, but then you turn your attention to tomorrow and you're facing a team that you just fell to by 22 just a few days ago. How do you shift that mentality and what does that look like for you guys as you take on a U of L team that has been hot going into this tournament?

JAYLEN BLAKES: Yeah, they're really good. Obviously you know that, but for us, we're not just focused on what we did today. We have a goal in mind, and it's not just to get one win, and for us, I think we have to respect the opponent, respect what they did. But obviously we didn't have our best outing against them at their place, and we're just going to try to improve and get recovered, as Max said, and focus on tomorrow.

Q. For both players, you guys have come together very well at the end of a lot of close games this year. In this game when you're playing with two guys off the bench in the closing minutes, Chisom and Benny, talk about how you come together as a group of five?

MAXIME RAYNAUD: I mean, that guy is a closer for sure, if you talk about UNC especially, two buzzer beaters this year. That's awesome. That's what you need from your leaders, right? And on top of that, I think he really showed

the way for the other guys coming off the bench to play with toughness and make the right decision. I mean, Chis came off the bench, but at the end, we got two fast break. He got an extra pass even though he could have gone for a lay-up we get a wide-open three for Oziyah, which is one of the best shooters in the ACC.

And then later, he got a fast break dunk and a two-plus-one when we were up with just 20 seconds to go.

Once again, he mentioned it earlier, all the guys on the bench, whether they're freshmen, sophomores or juniors are extremely talented and we're really excited for the future, and today was the opportunity for them to step up, and they really did.

JAYLEN BLAKES: Yeah, I think a lot of times when it comes to close games towards the end of the games, the more together team usually wins. That's something that Coach Smith talks about. Obviously, he talks about faith, family, team, and big emphasis is on team and being together, being the closest knit team. I think for us when it comes to the end of games, a lot of teams scurry away and think they have to be a hero, but obviously in those games where you hit big shots, everybody is taking that shot with you, and for us, it doesn't matter who comes in the game. Obviously we won a close game against NC State without myself, so everybody who comes in the game is built for the moment. It doesn't just happen in that moment, it happened in practice. Whoever goes into the game, we've seen it multiple times in practice before.

Q. Coach Kyle, y'all didn't win the rebound battle tonight, but y'all clearly won the turnover battle today. How do you think winning that turnover battle was more substantial than getting the boards?

KYLE SMITH: Again, it created some offense for us, and we're not a team that normally turns people over a lot. They really concerned us on the offensive boards, and with Petraitis, Sissoko and Dort, they're just three elite offensive rebounders in this league, and we actually did a good job on those three. We shut out Petraitis, which I think probably hadn't happened all year on the offensive boards.

But their other guys got to us, and they're a very physical team. They put a lot of pressure at the rim defensively, so if you bring help and they got shots up there, it's hard to get it back. Credit to them, they had a great opportunity to get that done, and we were fortunate to make some shots there.

The ball went in -- the last two games we hadn't made many shots, so that was a comforting feeling at least that the ball went in tonight.

Q. I'm curious how aware were you obviously of how many minutes Cal had played in recent games? Do you think that impacted them, and what did you think about the way your guys responded when they were pushed?

KYLE SMITH: You know, I didn't know how to play it. Obviously very aware. I was watching the Notre Dame game on the flight and saying, more time-outs, more TOs. But I've been in that situation, and we told our guys, this time of year, just look at the tournament last year, NC State won five in a row on five nights. When you get in that -- I actually think there's a bit of an advantage often for the team just coming off a win. I think Maxime probably said, they've already been in the environment, we haven't played in the ACC Tournament, we haven't been in this building and there's some jitters, and I think we might have had those a little bit, but they're comfortable and they're in that flow and they were shorthanded and played really well.

So credit to them. I think Coach Madsen is a good coach. We know his DNA with Stanford, so it's an odd rivalry, but a ton of respect for them, and they had a great effort, and they've been playing -- they're really hard to get away from if we were down, and very fortunate to win.

Q. Coach, it's your first year as the coach at Stanford, and you for the first time in 64 years beat Cal three times in the same season going 3-0. How are you feeling after that?

KYLE SMITH: You know, I'm kind of focused on Louisville, to be quite honest. We just played them, and crazy as it sounds, we lost by 20, we didn't shoot the ball but we guarded pretty well for about 36 minutes, so that's where my head is at.

It's neat for us, we've got a lot of firsts this year, the things that happened in a while. We made big improvements defensively. That was our goal. It was never specific. We said we went into this year with -- we have a baseline now. We finished seventh. There's something to shoot for or whatever. But what they talked about is having the best culture, best team caring about each other. I think that works at Stanford, and we have to out-team people. And whether they were that tonight, I don't know if we were the better team, but we were a good team tonight. We were good to each other.

Q. Cal scored on a number of consecutive possessions to start the game but you were able to take the lead in the last 10 minutes of the first half by holding them to about nine points in that stretch. What did you do differently?

KYLE SMITH: Stojakovic wasn't shooting as much. He was a one-man band at the start, and I was like -- I ended up having to use a time-out but I was worried he got his first basket, it was a tough turnaround in the lane and he's a scorer and I think that hoop just looked big to him.

I was like, I think we'll contain him. At some point we might get back in this thing. But I was wrong. He kept it going. Like I say, we had to block his shot from behind was the best way to stop him.

Yeah, the end of the first half was big to us, and then we got some good shots to start the second half, but we couldn't put them in and couldn't separate and we couldn't get stops. Campbell was terrific, too. They made tough ones. Campbell made a lot of tough shots.

Q. You briefly touched on it already, but you go from securing this victory to making adjustments now as you turn your attention to Louisville. What are those adjustments going to look like, and does it kind of help that you just saw this team a few days ago?

KYLE SMITH: I think so, it helps. But what have they won, 19 out of 20? They're just playing really well. They've got if not the best point guard in the country, he's been phenomenal. You're going to have to play well to get them.

But I thought we did some good things defensively. They're just kind of relentless. It was senior night, and we have to -- they were really good defensively that night. I'd like to say we had open shots that we missed, but there just wasn't much breathing room there. So we're going to have to look at the film and see if we can find a way.

They switched a lot of stuff, they pressured us, so we've got to find ways to crack that code.

Q. Coach, not only did you win the turnover battle but you also won the stealing battle, as well. How did you like how your defense pick-pocketed the ball out?

KYLE SMITH: We can get pretty good. Jaylen Blakes is exceptional. I didn't know until after the game he took a little offense not getting any credit for all-defense or something. I said, oh, good, it's good motivation because he's really good at disrupting plays like that, and he's usually the key guy in that.

It turned into offense. The other guy, Chisom, I don't know if he had any steals, but the way he defends, he -- he's got quick feet and quick hands, he usually bothers some people in there. Get those two on the floor together, that can happen for us. We needed to because it was hard for us to grab a rebound.

Q. You guys won 20 games, you were both .500 in the league. In years past, that would have been an automatic NCAA berth. Now you're looking at teams that are 6-12 in another league going to the tournament. What does this league need to do -- I know it's your first year, but what does it need to do to get back to where they're putting seven, eight, nine teams in the tournament?

KYLE SMITH: Yeah, I think, you know, to be honest, we didn't win enough non-conference games, I think, as a whole. That's where our NET was down a little bit.

We had the same conversations in the Pac-12. I think we'll get better. I don't know. I can't really tell you. First year in the league, not worried about everyone else as much. But yeah, that's kind of our -- our thought process was -- you know, you don't know these days who's on your team. You know we're going to have 15 fresh faces for us. We have long travel, but if you would have told us we were going to go 11-9 in the ACC, you would think you're in. But we've got to get better, and some other teams -- we've got to be able to have Quad 1s.

I've talked to Jim about relegation, so this might be my moment, trying to go two divisions, so you'd have a top play top. They'll probably be mad I mentioned that, but I do think that would give you more opportunities if you played everyone twice in the top division. Champions and Premier League; I've been working on this.

Based on -- you would have two divisions and then at the end of the year, you'd relegate someone, but that top division would play each other twice so you'd get more Quad 1s, and it would be pretty neat.

Q. Both you and Kelsey, first-year head coaches, came into programs that needed some turning around, and you both have done that. He just won Coach of the Year. Your team is on the rise. Can you talk about the pressures and everything that goes into turning around a program and how have y'all done that within the year already on the rise?

KYLE SMITH: I don't know, I've got a lot of practice. This is my fourth one. It's funny because I always thought of Stanford being the right fit for me, and I couldn't agree more, so it was a little easier just the comfort of living in the Bay Area, which is a second home to me. I've coached at Columbia. I like to work with the smart guys and I'm not intimidated by them too much. They're all smarter than me.

But it's been good, and ironically, as I told Pat, he's doing a

heck of a job, and he deserved that. Louisville reached out to me during the last year and I was just like, seriously? I said, like, I love bourbon, I love thoroughbreds, I love basketball, not necessarily in that order. That was a text to them and I never heard back from them.

But I do. I thought I had a good -- Stanford wanted me, and I just didn't see it, but it's a great job, and he's doing -- he's a good fit there. I didn't realize he's from Cincinnati. He's got a lot of energy, and I think some guys would construe that as being, like, a schtick. It's not. You can tell he's genuine. That's who he is. You can't fake that. He's good for the league. Good to see Louisville good, but not that good. We've got to play them.

Q. You closed the game with Benny and Chisom on the court. Can you talk about the decision to roll with them and how they paid it off late in the game?

KYLE SMITH: Cal bothered -- they had full court pressure. They did it to Virginia Tech last night, they did it to us at our place and we had the game in control, so getting Jaylen and Benny out there is important. We also think Benny is a pretty good defender. Shots over he's not that big but he's hard to get around, and we're hard to get stopped, so that was part --

Chisom, he had it tonight. He was playing well. We were just better on the floor at plus minus. We looked at it, and I'll be honest, I can tell, let's see, he was plus 10 tonight in his 24 minutes. He was five for five from the field. But he's getting more confident, and he was confident in there tonight.

Donavin had been hurt for a while. He had been out and he was just back, but his job was just to block out Petraitis. I said, Donavin, mission accomplished. We did a good job there. We had so much respect for Petraitis, his ability to get offensive rebounds.

But good job for both those guys. Helped us.

Q. Tomorrow you'll be playing against the Defensive Player of the Year for the ACC in Chucky Hepburn. What will be the game plan in order to keep the scoring train rolling?

KYLE SMITH: You know, we've got to take care of the ball. He really will blow up some plays, which is unique. Like Jaylen does, too, deflections, long arms, but he's so quick and clever on those things, you can't -- that turns into offense for them.

Like I said, we've got to do a little more research because we didn't have the right game plan. We weren't getting the

shots that were desired.

They're going to be well-rested, but hopefully we have some of the mojo that Cal had after a win and we can play with some confidence out there tomorrow.

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