

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 14, 2026
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Spectrum Center

Virginia Cavaliers Coach Ryan Odom Ugonna Onyenso Dallin Hall

Postgame Press Conference



Duke 74, Virginia 70

RYAN ODOM: Really proud of the guys today in a big-time environment, to be able to play for a championship was really special. These guys chose Virginia for all the right reasons and wanted an opportunity to make the most of their time here with us.

What they've done is remarkable. The five seniors that made that choice, that had one year to play, have led the charge. These two right here, obviously the other three, they've been there every day.

Tried to learn as much as they could about UVA and do their best for the school, but more importantly do their best for one another.

I think anytime you see our team play out there, we're by no means perfect, but they just take up for one another. They really do. Whether they're down in games or have big leads, there's an excitement and a joy that these guys play with. And certainly as their coach and our coaching staff, that really makes us really proud.

Ugo was a beast today. He was absolutely incredible. He shattered a record, ironically, by Tim Duncan. Did you know that?

UGONNA ONYENSO: No.

RYAN ODOM: He had 14 in three games, you had 21. That's pretty impressive, and one of the best shot blockers ever, and you were doing it against big time players in our conference.

Just really impressed with that.

Happy for you in particular.

Dallin has just led this team with all his heart every single day. In big moments, he says the right thing. In big moments, he's not afraid to make the play, whether it's on defense or offense.

I know this program is better for him having made the choice to come here.

As it relates to the game, our guys stood tall. We obviously didn't win. Duke made the plays that they needed to make down the stretch to finish it out. I thought we had a good opportunity there when it was tied, but it just didn't go our way today.

We certainly are excited about what's to come. We're very disappointed right now, but looking forward to what's next.

Q. For both student-athletes, despite the loss tonight, to hang with Duke the way that you did and with them being regarded as one of the top teams in the country, what does it say about what we can expect from Virginia in the NCAA Tournament?

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think we've grown a lot as a team this year. Tonight was a testament to that. They're obviously a great team, well-coached. But our coaching staff did a great job preparing us, and we feel like we have some unfinished business now going into March Madness. So we're excited to go out there and just win the first game in front of us.

UGONNA ONYENSO: I'm really proud of our team, coaching staff. Coming to Virginia in the summer, I didn't think it was kind of the right fit for me because of the stops that I've made and the ups and downs that I've had in college. So coming to Virginia, I was like, okay, it's probably going to be one of the other schools I'm going to, still going to have my little ups and downs. But I'm really thankful for the coaching staff, the players, and how

connected we are and how well we played for one another.

This was a really big test for us today. We have shown ourselves that we can play with the top teams. We're a top team, and we played like one today, but it didn't go our way.

Like Dallin said, we're going to live to fight another day. This was a really good test for us, and we've shown that we can fight.

Q. What was different in this game than the first matchup, and what can you take from that in terms of the improvement?

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think we did a better job of matching their physicality this time around. We obviously hit some more shots; that always helps. I thought we just executed the game plan a lot better. There was things on the offensive and defensive end that we really wanted to hone in on, and we did a good job of doing that throughout the game.

We're going to look at it, learn from it, and utilize that going forward.

Q. Dallin, you went to the Sweet 16 last year. None of your teammates has ever had that kind of success in the NCAA Tournament. What do you tell them about what the next week is going to entail?

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, we've had a couple guys who have played in it, have been fortunate enough to win in it. Coach has done a lot of winning in it. We're excited. I just tell the guys to embrace the moment, be present. These guys all come from tremendous programs, basketball history and played in some huge environments.

At the end of the day, it's just basketball, but you do got to go out. And it's the physicality we saw, the intensity we saw today reminds me heavily what it's going to be like in that tournament, so it's good preparation for us.

Q. Dallin, in the last game against Duke they were able to take you and the other guards out of the game. What was different for the guards specifically in this game?

DALLIN HALL: I thought we did a good job of finding mismatches, getting into the paint, and then guys did a really good job of getting to windows. That's something we talk a lot about, moving off ball.

Sam, Malik, Jacari, they're deadly shooters and we were able to find them for some shots. They were really

aggressive in taking those shots and hit some big ones for us.

That's kind of the thing I saw out there today.

Q. Ugo, Coach just referenced your shot block record. Even in the loss, do you take any satisfaction or consolation out of that that you completely destroyed a record that has stood for over 20 years?

UGONNA ONYENSO: Yeah, a little bit, but at the end of the day, we didn't come up with the win. Blocking shots is what I do, and I'm really good at it. Opportunities like this helps me showcase the fact that I'm still good at it if I'm playing against the top players in the league.

I didn't know about the record. I just came into today's game ready to play. Whatever it takes to help the team win.

I'm proud to say that I'm a master in my role, that I play for the team. I'm glad that I'm doing it well. We've won games because of that, and I feel like we're going to make a run in the NCAA Tournament because of that.

Q. Ugo, Cam Boozar goes 3 for 17 from the floor tonight in large measure because of you. What was your approach to him defensively and how difficult was it to keep your feet when he was pump faking?

UGONNA ONYENSO: One thing with me is I'm really good with my timing, so when we played them at Duke, I was a little bit off. So coming into today's game, I was like, okay, this is what I've got to do, steel my feet, don't jump. That really helped me with my timing.

Cam, he does a lot of shot faking. That's his thing. So being able to stay on my feet when he shot faked really helped me with my timing.

Q. I think he had seven missed lay-ups and obviously was 3 of 17 from the field. Could you sense any frustration from him that he just couldn't get on a roll?

UGONNA ONYENSO: I mean --

DALLIN HALL: Yes.

UGONNA ONYENSO: I mean, a little bit, yes.

DALLIN HALL: It's frustrating. I played against him all summer. He was blocking shots. You could sense some frustration. This guy is the best rim protector, I think, in the country.

He's a really great player. He made some big plays down the stretch. But you could tell Ugo was definitely getting him frustrated. I don't know if you have anything you want to add to it.

UGONNA ONYENSO: He didn't show it from what I saw. He had good composure. Most players would have been mad and showed it, but he did a really good job composing himself and stayed locked into the game. Because most players, that would have been the reason they lose a game, like being frustrated that they're not getting their shots.

But he made plays for his other teammates. He did a good job with not showing it.

Q. Dallin, the offense runs primarily through those high screens that come up, and Duke did a great job running those double-teams on those guys to force the offense to stutter for a second. What did you guys see from the Duke defense that made them so stifling today?

DALLIN HALL: Yeah, I think they did a lot of switching early on, and then we found some matchups we really liked, so they went to that show.

A lot of that's on me just finding ways to counter that. I'll take some responsibility for that. We obviously got to look at it, learn from it. But they're a tremendous defensive team. Obviously everyone knows that. They play super hard, super physical. They're able to throw different things at you.

We wish we would have countered that a little better as guards, faster. But we'll learn from it and use that going forward.

Q. Ryan, I'm curious, this team played so well here in the tournament. Obviously played well during the season, too. Did you see them find another gear, and is that what you need this time of year?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, no question. The balance of stellar defense and timely offense, I thought the guys did a nice job overall. This is a tough tournament. It's hard to play three days in a row and play really well three days in a row.

I think both teams weren't at necessarily their best, but they were competing against one another at a really high level. That's hard to do. Especially they're down a couple of guys and they're tough to play against anyway.

I thought Cayden did an awesome job. He was tremendous in the game.

Proud of our guys and excited for what's next.

Q. How would you describe the challenge of preparing for Cam?

RYAN ODOM: It's brutal. Yeah. He's just a special player. He has the ability to beat you in a multitude of ways, whether it's driving against a bigger guy, using his physicality as he gets closer to the rim, banging the shot from behind the arc, getting to the free-throw line or making the pass. He made several key passes where they got lay-ups that were key to the game.

When they play him at the 5, it's a totally different look. He really didn't do that. We didn't face that as much in Cameron Indoor. We knew we were going to face it a lot more given the circumstances tonight, and both are equally difficult to deal with.

Obviously Ugo is a tremendous talent.

Q. Yesterday you played Miami, today Duke, two of the most physical teams if not the most physical teams in the ACC. How did that turnaround look for you guys in terms of recovery and what are you taking forward into the NCAA Tournament?

RYAN ODOM: I thought the guys did a great job in preparation. It's a lot of film. We probably do way too much film. They sit there and sometimes I'm like, oh, we've got to end this.

I thought they did a great job. We have the best trainer and strength coach in the country, and we have managers and GAs, and it's all hands on deck to get the team ready. The coaching staff is working countless hours.

I thought our guys did a nice job. They had the energy they needed. We're a deep team. We subbed in and out. I thought they had the energy they needed to be able to come out with a win, it just didn't happen.

Q. Seeing this team elevate itself from the last time you played Duke, even though you don't get the victory here tonight, as you continue to climb the ladder, what are some of those things we haven't seen from this Cavaliers squad?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think our guys shoot the ball pretty well. We didn't shoot it great tonight. We had some open looks that didn't go down. Ultimately when you get in the tournament, you've got to make shots.

The defense has got to be tight. You've got to put pressure

on the offense. But I do like where our guys are at. I feel like we can compete with the top teams in the country.

Q. Last time your team played against Duke, they lost by 26. What do you think was the biggest change for your team, both in mindset and then how they performed on the court?

RYAN ODOM: We didn't read too much into that game, honestly. I thought our guys did an admirable job for the first time going in there. We were in it for a little bit at the beginning. We just tried to take bits and pieces from that game where we did some positive things. And then we showed them, okay, had you done this a little bit better -- he mentioned it. At the end of drives, we were jumpy. Our guys were off their feet.

Well, Boozer is going to make you pay when you're off your feet like that. He's going to get fouled, he's going to get to the line. You just hope it's not an and-1. We talked a lot about being determined in this game and being disciplined in this game.

We did for probably 30-some minutes of the game, but we had some undisciplined plays at times that probably bit us.

Q. Coach, Duke had 20 offensive rebounds, including a couple back breakers there towards the end. How do you fix that problem, or is it just unique to playing this Duke team?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, I think it is unique to when Boozer is at the 5, it gets a little bit harder because there's so much attention there. Our big is away from the basket, and it's not guards running in there trying to shoot over Ugo. It's a totally different animal, which we haven't really seen a lot.

I thought our guys did a really good job. Had we come up with some of those maybe the game with a little bit different story, but we didn't, and we've just got to be better in that regard.

Q. Ryan, Sam went through a little funk late in the regular season, but he's been on a pretty serious heater here lately. Did you guys work with him on anything mechanics-wise or was it just, hey, stay in the gym, shoot and you'll be fine?

RYAN ODOM: Yeah, a lot of it this time of year you're going to have ups and downs. A lot of it is mental. They're all in the gym all the time in terms of working on their game and trying to improve. That's what our jobs are as coaches to help them grow and to help them fight through adversity and fight through moments where they're not at their best and realize that we can get you back to your best.

Devin Tillis, I told him in the locker room in there, I subbed him in to throw that pass. Don't you for one second think that you did anything wrong. I will sub you in there again to throw that pass because you're the best baseball pass or football pass guy we have. And he's done it in games so far and practice in particular.

But you're not always going to be perfect. You're going to have to weather storms, and certainly Sam had the maturity and the support he needed to get himself out of that.

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