

State Farm Champions Classic: Kentucky vs. Duke

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

Duke Blue Devils

Mike Krzyzewski

Trevor Keels

Paolo Banchero

Press Conference



Duke - 79, Kentucky - 71

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, happy Wednesday and yeah it was just an amazing game tonight. I mean, it felt so good with the Garden crowd and playing against an outstanding team. I mean, they're tough and we're tough. It was a big-time game, really big-time, and our guys really fought through a lot of adversity.

Four of our guys got cramps in the second half. Two of them had IVs. Paolo you had an IV, right, and Wendell. And so our bench had to come through. And A.J. really gave us a big lift. And I think that was one of the keys to the game. And Theo. Thank goodness we have him with his physicality. And for awhile Paolo carried us offensively and then Trevor took over.

But we have a good team. It's a young team and it's their first big game. I mean, we have, for them to come through like that. I'm very proud of them. Wheeler's a problem for us and Tschiebwe. Holy mackerel. 19 rebounds. John's got a really good basketball team.

So we're proud of our win and we're 1-0 now. So let's see what we can do.

Q. Paolo, outside of your obvious physical skills your court presence and poise seemed advance for your years. How important was that to your success on the floor?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Just being under control and then I just have ultimate trust in my teammates, so I don't have to over-think. I don't have to try and do too much because I know I got a lot of trust in them, so it makes it easy for me, makes it easy on all of us. And I think we all kind of have that poise on the court. So I think it's a team thing and, yeah, we just stayed together and stayed poised as a team.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I think a big thing for Paolo is how strong and comfortable he is with the ball. To have his size and he's, it's just unique in that way, and he's got a good head. He's got good parents. They raised him hard.

Q. Trevor, college refs love to call charges and with your strength, how were you able tonight to use it to your advantage without using it to your disadvantage of getting it then blowing over guys?

TREVOR KEELS: I just say being under control. That's one thing they preach. I use my body a lot, so you get in the lane, you got to, you can't just go in there full steam ahead. You got to read the defense. I think that's what I do well.

Seeing my players at the corners, seeing if I got kicks. So I would say being under control is the key to not getting charges.

Q. Trevor, we've heard so much about Paolo. Everybody has, right? You haven't heard that much about you. Is this is, have you thought about that, kind of this being a coming out party for you a little bit?

TREVOR KEELS: No, that's not something I really get caught up in. I just want to win. So I knew when P went out somebody had to step up and that's what I did. I kept looking at the score and I just made sure we was up and we was winning. That's something that I look at all the time. I don't really care about my points or nothing like that. It's we come out with the victory.

Q. (No microphone.)

TREVOR KEELS: Yeah, that's definitely when I go kill mode right there. We went on 26-point run we just told our team, we got to put them away right here, stepping on their necks. Coach was telling us, like, keep fighting, keep fighting. They're going to fight back. They fought back. That's a great team. They got good players. They fought back, but we stayed under control in the game and we came out with the victory.



Q. What does it mean to you to get a win in your first game against such a big program as Kentucky?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah, seeing that clock hit zero with us with more points than them was a relief, man. Like, we wanted to get this win, especially for coach in this first game. It was a big game for us coming in. We felt like we had a chance to make a statement with this game and come out and play well. So that was what we was thinking about coming in and we are happy with how we played.

Q. Did Madison Square Garden and the crowds, the bright lights, and everything live up to the hype?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah. No, it definitely did. I don't know, it's almost like you get lost in it. Like, it don't even really affect you just because like you literally get lost in it. That's what it felt like. We was just out there playing and it was a great crowd, it was loud, energetic. There was, when they went on their run, their crowd started getting loud, and then we responded and then you could hear our fans getting loud. It was just a crazy environment, something I never experienced before, so it was fun.

Q. You mentioned you guys felt like you could make a statement in this game. What statement do you think you guys made?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Just that. We're a great team. We're going to play together. We're going to play hard all 40 minutes. And, yeah, I mean, we're going to play like Duke.

Q. (Question about cramping.)

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah, I've never cramped that early in a game. I have cramped before. It's not really a problem for me, but yeah, I never cramped that early. But I got to figure out why that was. I thought I was --

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: We have to figure that out.

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah, but it wasn't fun, but it is what it is. You got to adjust. And Trev, along with the rest of the team, stepped up and we was able to pull it out.

Q. Paolo, what did you think of Tschiebwe as a rebounder and Sahvir Wheeler getting to the rim?

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah. Tschiebwe, we knew he was going to be on the boards heavy coming in. And, I mean, we did what we could, but obviously that's what he does. So, I mean, he was on the boards heavy. He was challenging us, the bigs, and made it hard for us. A lot of respect to him.

And then Wheeler, he was, I really like his game just because he's always under control. He had control of the team. You could see it. I think he had 10 assists, yeah and, well, yeah, he had 10 assists and was hooping and was under control. He was a floor General.

Q. So much has been made about all the transfers in college basketball, fifth year guys. Kentucky's got a whole bunch of transfers. Do you feel like you made a little statement for the freshmen and young guys?

TREVOR KEELS: I mean, our team, we got four freshmen. We got a transfer. One thing coach did was bring us there early in the summer, and that's something, that's how we built our chemistry early. We all liked each other. We all hang out off the court. I think that was the big piece, just always being around each other, and we all trust each other.

I think that's what's put us different from other teams. Not a lot of people is doing that right there and that's why I love the guys. They got trust in me. I got trust in them. Everybody just trusts each other.

PAOLO BANCHERO: Yeah, we got two grad transfers. Theo stepped up big. I was in the locker room watching on TV. He was playing well. And like Trevor said like we came in here beginning of June and we got straight to work. We knew what the goal was right away. We locked in. Once the other guys came and joined like it was just, it just molded like literally perfect, like there was no hiccups really. Like, it just flowed real nicely and we're a real together team so I think that's what's showing.

Q. How much do you think it helped that coach really didn't have to be out recruiting this summer and could spend more time with his players and you guys during the summer?

PAOLO BANCHERO: That was a big help. We spent a lot of time with coach coming in. He told us that's how it's going to be. He wasn't going to be on the road recruiting and everything. He was at his house. He was at every practice. There was no practices that he wasn't at. So like you said, it just helped us build our relationship with coach and, yeah.

Q. You've had a lot of teams in the past that shoot from three. This is a really big team --

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: We hope we could shoot better from three.

Q. -- 1-13. How do you see that part evolving?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, I think you have to give credit to Kentucky. They really played good defense and they have depth, and they have old depth, so I thought they really did a great job of taking away threes and recovering. We did not do a good job of that in the first half and gave up six and then only gave up one in the second half.

But I think we are a very versatile team and we're going to still develop. I mean what A.J. did today was big because three and a half weeks ago we thought he might be out for two months with a knee injury. He came back. He's only been with us about a week and a half, and then when he came in in the first half, even Trevor, he didn't shoot well. He was nervous in the first part of the game. It's their first time.

A.J. in the second half, he gave us a lift. So if he comes around and then we got Theo and Mark. Joey did a good job, all of a sudden -- we don't know our team completely. We know our starting five and Theo, and we learned more about our team tonight.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I knew you wouldn't give me a compliment, but.

Q. No, but do you feel like you have a feel for this team a little differently than you might have otherwise?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: No, it's a good point, and I do. I feel closer to this team where I know them than I have really in the last decade and I have been really close with teams. Last year was an outlier.

But I learned from COVID the value of preparation and relationships and we didn't have them and we were not good. We were just very mediocre. So that's why we brought the guys in as early as we could and that's one of our succession plan things where John was going to take over and then he was going to recruit the kids that were going to play for him, and I told him, I said, You guys stay on the road. I'm staying in.

The other thing we did, we only have 10 scholarship players, so we didn't go to the transfer portal for other players. We specifically told our guys that we're not doing that and they're our guys. Just a bunch of different things to build that level of trust and camaraderie.

Q. Paolo was obviously sensational in the first half, but when he went out of the game in the second half, you guys really made a push and got separation. How big was it for you and for obviously everybody else to

have that run with him out of the game?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, really big and, look, this kid right here is going to be a great player. He's not a good player. Trevor is a great player. He weighs 230 pounds and if he was a running back he would know how to pick holes like, you intimidated charge -- he gets fouled. He doesn't charge very much because he's so low and has great body control. For three straight years he was probably the best player in the DC area. So he's been in a lot of those summer games where it's on him and he and Jeremy were teammates at Paul the VI.

But A.J. coming on today was one of the really good signs, really a very, very good sign, and how Theo played. Both he and Mark haven't had any knee problems. We've kind of monitored that really close with tendonitis. So we just got to stay healthy and recover from this and I've reminded them they're 1-0. It's a long season.

Q. With Paolo, you've had a lot of great players. How good do you think this kid can be?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, see, he's a lot better than he was a month ago because he's learned to play strong with the ball and not -- he over-dribbled a couple times, but usually he's been smart with it and he's becoming a better athlete. He's a special player and you can coach him hard. He's smart. I would like to see him talk more.

What I tell him, I said, Why don't you say what you're thinking? Because he's thinking good stuff and if he says it, that will help lead. Wendell does that. I think if those two guys will do that more we would be better. But he's going to keep getting better. He's the real deal. There's no question about it.

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