

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday March 14, 2019

Kevin Keatts Markell Johnson NC State

Virginia - 76, NC State - 56

KEVIN KEATTS: Guys, obviously we played a very good team today in Virginia. I can see obviously why they're going to be a No. 1 seed. I thought Kyle Guy was tremendous. You know, the shots that he made were back-breakers. He played extremely well. I thought everybody kind of fed off of him, and he just made shots. When you look at his numbers, that's incredible the way he played. He's 10 for 13 from the field and 7 for 9 from three. A lot of those we were right there. He just raised up and made some shots.

Proud of my team that we have fought. Good win for us yesterday to get into this game, and I thought we played very well up until halftime, and then obviously they made some plays, and it kind of got away from us.

Questions?

Q. Coach, ideally you guys will be going to the NCAA Tournament. How do you get your guys in April mode? We're going for April now. How do you switch to that mindset?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I think what we talked about in the locker room is at this time of year, players make plays. As coaches, we give you a game plan, we put you in the right situation, the right spots. Example, Tony is a hell of a coach and he does a tremendous job, but Kyle Guy was special today, and he made everybody look good.

You know, we talked about that. Markell was the same way yesterday, where we needed a play, he did a tremendous job of making plays for us, and so when you get to this time of year, it's more of a mentality. You don't care who does it, just as long as one of your teammates do it, and you start more concentrating on playing for the name on the front of the jersey.

Q. I know you would have preferred the game ended at halftime today, but you guys did put in a lot of scrap and effort. What was your strategy in deploying the back court pressure for most of the



game?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, obviously I think it's no secret that Virginia does a tremendous job of controlling tempo. You know, probably the best in the country. Any time we had a chance to be able to get into some pressure we wanted to, we wanted to get those guys to play a little faster. At our place in the second half, we were able to speed them up. They took some shots that were a little questionable for Tony's system. Tonight they didn't. They stayed the course. They ran their stuff, and obviously they came away with a good win.

Q. Funderburk really carried the fair share of the offense in the first half, didn't get many touches in the second half. Was that an adjustment Virginia made in the second half?

KEVIN KEATTS: I think it was a little bit of both. Not so much of oversight. I thought they made adjustments because he hurt them. I thought D.J. floated around a little more in the second half on the perimeter than he did inside. But it's just -- we tried to get the ball to guys that when it's in their situation and they have a favorable -- but I thought they made some adjustments and kind of took him away.

Q. Coach, you were leading in the second half, and then all of a sudden a three-point play by Salt, another three-point play by Salt, a four-point play by Guy, you missed a bunch of free throws and D.J. got poked in the eye. How difficult was all that adversity to deal with?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I don't know if you stared at me, but it was tough. It's a lot of things that happened in a short amount of time that kind of blew the game open. When you look at the game, we were right there, and then I remember getting to 10, then I thought it got to 12 and then we cut it again. We made some unfortunate plays. You know, they got some and-ones that obviously they converted, and then I didn't think we made our free throws. When you look at it, it was a pivotal stretch that I thought we missed five free throws in a row where the score was about 11, should have been a six-point game.

Q. As well as you played defense against them in the first half, did you think maybe you wasted an opportunity by not being up more at halftime, and then how much in the second half maybe did legs

kind of start to come into play?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, I don't think we wasted an opportunity because I don't think we played that much greater than them in the first half. You know, we talked about trying to win the game at whatever pace we had to. You know, it's hard. I thought both teams played equal in the first half. They just played better than us. They made plays. They got and-ones. They made their free throws, and for us in the second half, we didn't get those breaks.

MARKELL JOHNSON: We conditioned ourselves in practice to go full go every day.

Q. Kevin, obviously Kyle Guy can shoot like that. You guys were able to force them into some bad shots in the first half and kind of showed up with Jerome and Hunter's numbers, but how do you prepare for Jack Salt to have a game like that?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, I mean, Jack was really good, and I thought we did a really good job on him in the first half. He did a great job. He's so big, and Jack screens and rolls and rolled to the hole, and our guys did a poor job -- the thing that made Jack special tonight was he made his free throws, and that was tough on us because obviously any time you foul him, he hasn't been a great free-throw shooter, but I thought he played great. I thought Kyle Guy's performance was as good as I've seen this year as far as a guy playing well against us. When you look at his percentages, I don't care who they play today, if he would have shot 7 for 9, 10 for 13, it was going to be hard to beat them today.

Q. Markell, second half they used Hunter on you for long stretches, and it seemed to get you guys out of sync offensively. How much harder is it dealing with a guy who's that much bigger and still quick?

MARKELL JOHNSON: It was just really trying to get my guys the ball. When he was like defending me and things like that, it was tough. You know, trying to get the ball inside with the length and things like that.

Q. You guys won the game that a lot of people were saying would have you guys in the tournament, and you fought hard with Virginia. What do you guys see that the selection crew should put you guys in for, your credentials?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I kind of look at it like this: If the selection crew, if they value what they've said all year long, then there shouldn't be any issues with us. We've always talked about quad 1 and quad 2 wins, where we just played the No. 1 NET team in the country, and we're 9 and 9 in quad 1 and quad 2 games after today when you look at it. We went into this game with a NET of 32. More than likely probably will go up because we played Virginia even and lost. So I like our

guys' chances. If they value what they have talked about, it shouldn't be an issue at all.

Q. Kevin, looking at the way you've played here in the tournament, some positive plays, a lot of good things happening. What aspects of this can you take with you into postseason play that will benefit you?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, that's a great question. We talked about mentality. You know, what's your mentality. I thought in the two games that we played, we played two good halves. When you look at Clemson game, I didn't think we played well in the first half, and then you take this game, we didn't play well in the second half, and so what I'm asking these guys is our mentality has to be to put back to back halves. That doesn't necessarily mean it has to be 40 minutes, but we've got to be able to play 30 to 35 minutes of good basketball.

Yesterday we didn't play great in the first half, but Markell Johnson, he put us on his back, and we won the game. Today we had a great first half and then we didn't have a good second.

Q. Kevin, I'm curious how much you'll pay attention to the discussion over who gets in, who gets left out over the next 72 hours and how much you'll be paying attention to that and how much you'll be paying attention to your own team.

KEVIN KEATTS: I will not pay attention to it at all because this is -- and I say this, and here's why I mean it. This is the first year that the selection committee has put value on the NET. I don't think anybody in this room, I don't think anybody in the country knows what that means. And so I'm not going to -- if you take half of the people they're going to say certain teams should be in, and others, certain teams shouldn't be in. But I feel good about us.