

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

American Eagles

Coach Duane Simpkins

Matt Rogers

Geoff Sprouse

Media Conference

Mount St. Mary's 83, American 72

DUANE SIMPKINS: Really proud of the young men in our program. A number of these guys, a vast majority of them, I did not recruit. I inherited these guys. For them to buy in and trust our staff, was it easy? No, but I had their hearts and their spirits until the very end. That's invaluable as a coach.

You want to have guys that buy in, hear your message, carry your message out. And the biggest thing -- I was proud of a number of things, but I was proud of how these guys became a player-led team and not a coach-led team this last month, month and a half or so. Proud of my guys.

Q. Matt, last time that you and I spoke, right after the championship win, you told me that you wanted to give your everything to the fans and to the AU community. Can you reflect a little bit over the last five years?

MATT ROGERS: Yeah. As you can see, I tried to give it my all tonight. I feel like I still had a lot left in my heart for these guys because y'all don't know what goes into this process of being a college basketball player. It's really hard. Every day you've got to go to class, practice, and then repeat, repeat, and there's so much hours that go into this.

For me to go out like that, unfortunately, I wish I could have done more for us for the AU community because they deserved an NCAA win. But I fell short today.

But I was proud of the guys and how they responded and how they adapted with me not being out there. They played their hearts out, and I'm just super proud of this



team.

Q. Matt, can you walk us through what happened with the injury and stuff like that?

MATT ROGERS: It was a weird box-out, felt weird on my knee the first time. Tried to play through it, had a sleeve on, planted it weird a second time. No results right now. Still figuring it out. That's all I can say for right now.

Q. What are the emotions of the season ending like this for you individually?

MATT ROGERS: I wouldn't say disappointment. It's just a little upset. It's just hard because I gave a lot to this sport, so it's just -- you hate to see your body go out like that.

But I'm not done by any means, but it's just a little roadblock. But we'll fight through it. That's it.

Q. Geoff, when you see someone you're so close to in Matt go down, what's the message amongst the guys? And you've got a basketball game to still play, so how do you lock in and keep battling?

GEOFF SPROUSE: Yeah, he does a lot for us offensively. I think the main focus was just sticking together, do what we do every day, trust our work. The coaches believe so much, they have so much trust in us, in our work, in our shooting abilities. So that was really just the main message.

Q. Matt, when you came back, how did the knee feel? Was it the same issue that ended up happening, or was it different?

MATT ROGERS: Yeah, it was just the same issue. Just didn't feel completely right. But I wasn't going to stop -- I only got this chance once in my life, so I'm not going to quit by any means. I'm going to give it my all. Unfortunately one more cut and then just didn't feel right.

Q. Geoff, you're a junior now, and already for your junior season you've been shattering American University three-point field goal records. Can you just talk about stepping up as a leader on this team, both in your character but also in your offensive abilities?



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GEOFF SPROUSE: Yeah, the seniors, they laid the foundation basically for this entire year. I've been with this group for the past three years. We've been so close on and off the court. They've basically paved the way for me myself and guys on the team and the freshmen coming in next year.

It's all credit to them, really.

Q. What were your emotions seeing an all-conference player suffering a tough injury like that on this stage?

DUANE SIMPKINS: You know, I was, I guess, disappointed at the time, but I kind of had to put that aside really quick and figure out what's next and how do we play without him. That was the only thing that I was focused on.

Now after the fact, it sucks. It sucks. This kid has worked really, really hard. We've coached him hard. He's come a long way. You've seen Matt play enough, you know he's very feisty. He's very emotional. Sometimes it needs to be redirected.

This year he has really grown in that area. It's going to make him a better player moving forward. It's going to make him a better person, learning how to deal with adversity.

Look, it was disappointing to see him go down like that, though, for sure.

Q. A couple of times throughout the season we kind of talked about free throw disparities and sometimes some gripes with the officiating. Tonight there was a big free throw disparity. How did you feel about that? Was there any frustration out there?

DUANE SIMPKINS: There was a couple down the stretch, but other than that -- they drove the ball hard. They put us in position where -- they put the referees in position to make some calls.

We were without Matt, and we had to manufacture some baskets, and we shot a lot of threes. Our intention was coming out in the second half we had to get the ball into the paint, and I thought Eric Michaels did a really good job of posting, sealing deep.

I thought we had a couple missed calls, but for the most part they were aggressive and they deserved to touch the line as often as they did. I just wish we had done it a little bit more early, a little bit more consistently. But when a guy like Geoff is shooting the basketball like he was and Colin was making some threes, we'll take those at the

same time, though.

Q. Coach, The Mount relies a lot on its big guys. How concerned going into the game were you about Cordilia and Adebayo?

DUANE SIMPKINS: A lot, a lot, especially offensive rebounding-wise, they've got good size, and the point of emphasis from a rebounding perspective on those guys is when they do catch the ball and go up for shots, they're hitting the floor, they're going right back to go get them, and that was the case a few times.

They were well prepared. They did a really good job in terms of our ball screen defense. They got the ball out of the hands really quickly and got the ball to the nail at their bigs, and they made solid decisions. Man, they made some shots. Deep down inside I was like, they're going to miss a couple of those chippies, but they made them. So credit to them for that.

Q. When they shoot -- they're making shots they don't typically make, does that change anything in terms of game plan?

DUANE SIMPKINS: No, just obviously as the clock goes down, you've got to start doing some things that you normally don't do. We don't press, trapping the first pass, but we did that down the stretch. It helped us get a couple of possessions.

But other than that, you don't change a whole lot. I thought that our defense was pretty good overall. They made some shots. Our rotations were not good to start the game. They steadily improved. But by that time, basketball is a rhythm game, they were in rhythm by that time; they made some good shots.

Q. You guys shot pretty efficiently from the field tonight. Were you pleased with the shot selections and what you guys were making tonight?

DUANE SIMPKINS: Yeah, I was pleased with it. Those are the shots that we value, the shots that we work on. What we normally have to accompany that is this guy with his interior presence and then getting to the free-throw line. It's tough to do. We shot eight of them tonight. The possession battle was pretty much even. I think they had one more possession than we did, but they made 14 out of 17 free throws, and we made five out of eight. They made nine threes, we made 13.

At the end of the day, those points in the paint, they hurt. 40-22 helps you get to the free-throw line. That's where we missed this big guy right here.

Q. What do you take from the experience of being a head coach in an NCAA Tournament game?

DUANE SIMPKINS: It's a bad feeling. I want to win. I'll take that.

In all seriousness, it's hard. I realize that. As a player, I went to the NCAA Tournament three times, and it's almost like you expect to do it. Man, there's some really good coaches who have never done it before. So I don't take it for granted.

This is going to hurt for a while, but I'm going to flip the page, and we've got six very good freshmen coming in, and we're going to start to develop a game plan of how to get better, better than this team, and take the next step and get those guys incorporated into how we do things, what we do.

But this is a dream. This is really a dream, and to do it with these guys, man, I get choked up every single time I think about these guys and what they've done for me personally as a coach. They've made me a better coach. We'll be back. We'll be back.

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