

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Wagner vs North Carolina

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

North Carolina Tar Heels

Hubert Davis

Jae'Lyn Withers

Armando Bacot

RJ Davis

Media Conference

North Carolina - 90, Wagner - 62

THE MODERATOR: In lieu of an opening statement, we'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Coach, you said about a month ago, it's very important to you how Armando finishes his career. To see what he did tonight, just how special is it watching from your viewpoint?

HUBERT DAVIS: It is. It's been on my mind all season, especially a lot more towards the end that what Armando has meant to me personally, but what he's meant to this program and this university and this community.

I just told them in the locker room, where all my comments come from, there's a desperation because I want Armando and everyone, I want them to see and experience the things that us as coaches have seen and experienced. That's where it comes from. Just really proud of Armando.

Somebody just made a stat, what was it, 15 rebounds, six straight NCAA Tournament games. That's unreal. Can't think of a better person to be able to do that than Armando.

Q. Hubert, obviously Jae went with the double-double off the bench, particularly in the first half, getting to the free-throw line a lot, things like that. How did you see his activity really start to set the tone a little bit early on in that game?

HUBERT DAVIS: I agree with you. I think he did set the



tone. I felt like in the first half at times we were out of character from the standpoint we weren't finishing the defensive possession with a rebound. When we did, we always talk about making the easy play, limiting turnovers. I think we had six in the first half, and they were all unforced.

But Jae Whit, his energy and effort on both ends of the floor really ignited us and got us the lead going into halftime. He came off the bench, and his production was real.

Q. Jae'Lyn, I'm sure there's a ton of risks involved any time you transfer. But to have your best game as a Tarheel in the NCAA Tournament in your hometown, how rewarding is that?

JAE'LYN WITHERS: It's extremely rewarding. Obviously having a double-double in front of all those fans and my family, and contributing to the win is great. It's obviously first time in the tournament, so to do that in my first game is surreal.

Q. Just going off of that, Jae'Lyn, you're from Charlotte. What does it mean to you to have the game you did today and just having the opportunity to play in your hometown?

JAE'LYN WITHERS: It means a lot. The last outing that I had, or we had here when we played Oklahoma, kind of got into foul trouble and ended up not really having the best playing time, I guess. So I think I kind of wanted to make a statement this game.

Q. Armando, one part of your game that sticks out to me is your patience and your constant movement. You go to the elbow, that's not there. You go to the post-up, you switch sides. Can you talk about your progression as a player and how it allows you to have stat lines like this consistently.

ARMANDO BACOT: It's something we worked on every day in practice. At the beginning of practice, we always work on our post feeds. Early on in the year, I felt like at times I was a little impatient and not being able to find my

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spots. Ever since we started working on that, I've been a little more comfortable and figuring out my spots and not feeling like I need to rush anything.

Q. Jae'Lyn, sort of piggy-backing off the other questions, Hubert was saying you set the tone. There was a lot of energy and activity you brought in the paint. What was sort of your mindset about being aggressive, getting on the glass, getting to the rim, running the court the way you did in the first half in particular?

JAE'LYN WITHERS: H.D. typically challenges us before the game and sometimes at half, saying that it doesn't need to be only an Armando Bacot rebounding game or a Harrison Ingram rebounding game. He challenges everybody else to help out and clean up on the glass.

Q. RJ Davis, for you. You spoke earlier this week about the tempo of the game, how Wagner slows the game down a little bit. Did you guys feel you were able to play at the pace that you wanted to play tonight?

RJ DAVIS: I think in the first half we didn't do a good job of getting out to primary break. We had zero fast break points going into halftime. The emphasis in the second half was to try to get out and run because that's a big advantage for us, especially when we are playing in primary and getting easy layups.

We did a good job of turning the ball over and getting finishes and easy layups. I know there was a play where I threw the ball to Elliott and Jae Wit finished with a dunk. Those were the kinds of plays we needed.

Q. Armando, as Steve was talking about, you've got 15 rebounds in six straight NCAA Tournament games. You've got the Turbo Tax ads and all. Just how much -- after last year missing out on this, just how much do you enjoy March?

ARMANDO BACOT: It's a great feeling. I've enjoyed this whole year just being back with so many great teammates and a great coaching staff. We've had a lot of fun, and we don't plan on going home soon. That's really it.

Q. RJ, in the NCAA Tournament, you always want to get a little bit better every round you go. What areas do you think between now and Saturday or the areas that you guys want to get a little bit better at?

RJ DAVIS: Attention to detail is definitely number one. I feel like after the game today we slacked off in that area a little bit. On the defensive end, a couple of times in the first half there was miscommunication or no communication

that kind of led to open threes or getting the 50-50 loose balls. We're usually on top of that.

We've got to do a better job going into Saturday because Michigan State is a really good ball club. We've got to come ready to play.

Q. Armando, what is it about the NCAA Tournament that brings out the best in you? And did you feel like you wanted to come in and make a statement today after what happened last year?

ARMANDO BACOT: It's win or go home. If you lose, you go home. It's just one of those things that's an even more sense of urgency to just go out there and play my best. All years we've worked to get to this point. So just super locked in and trying to win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Davis.

Q. What areas do you feel are most important to make that little improvement between this round and the next?

HUBERT DAVIS: When I talked about that, I felt like at times we were out of character in the first half. We've just got to be better defensively. We talk about finishing each possession defensively. One, without fouling, and two, getting the rebound. Just got to do a better job at that.

It hasn't been any secret. We've identified what allows us to have success, and that's get after it defensively, rebound, and take care of the basketball. I felt like in the first half we had moments where we weren't checking any of those boxes, and that's something, as you continue to move forward and specifically against Michigan State, you just can't do that. You've got to be sound in all three of those areas.

Q. Coach, second round matchups rarely have traditional heavyweights like Michigan State and North Carolina. As a basketball fan and a guy who's been in the game, can you appreciate this spot?

HUBERT DAVIS: Well, being a part of the NCAA Tournament for four years as a player and as an assistant for nine years and a head coach for three years, but two years in NCAA Tournament, the second round has always been real. So I can't remember a time -- my junior year we played Villanova. That's two heavyweights. The year in 2017 we won the championship, it was us against Arkansas, two heavyweights.

When it gets down to the round of 32, there's only 32 teams left. So that round is normally going to be two

extremely good programs. We're excited about the challenge of playing against a great Michigan State team.

Q. Just wondering, we see Jae'Lyn Withers, he started to show signs of improvement as this season has come down the stretch. Is there really a moment from him that you started to see things sort of click this year?

HUBERT DAVIS: I always tell the guys that when -- and I specify when -- your opportunity comes. I can't tell you when, where, how, and which, but when it does come, you've got to be ready. Jae Wit, when his number is called, has always been ready.

Also, it is a big transition to go from one program or one team to another team. I've experienced that in the NBA personally, and these kids it's even more. They're doing it at 18, 19 years old, and they're changing not only programs and teams, but they're changing institutions, where they -- from an academic standpoint. It's a big deal.

So it takes time for guys to get acclimated on and off the court to allow for on the court to be your best. I just feel like for Jae Wit, it's just continue to get more comfortable every day, to get him to a point where he had a game like this today.

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