

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Michigan State vs North Carolina

Saturday, March 23, 2024
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Spectrum Center

North Carolina Tar Heels Hubert Davis

Armando Bacot

Harrison Ingram

RJ Davis

Media Conference

North Carolina - 85, Michigan State - 69

THE MODERATOR: In lieu of an opening statement, we'll take two questions for Coach Davis.

Q. Hubert, Michigan State, they were able to get up 12 early on, looked like they were able to get some looks they wanted. What kind of changed for you guys that would allow you guys to storm back and maintain the lead the rest of the way?

HUBERT DAVIS: We started to compete. They punched first. Their physicality, their will, their want to, the first ten minutes of the game just overwhelmed us. They were catching the ball wherever they wanted to, close to the basket on the block. They were getting layups, second-chance opportunities. Defensively they were pushing us off our screens, our spots. They were just playing better than us.

We came into the huddle and said, look, we can't talk about any basketball stuff until we join the fight. Once that started, the level of play in terms of the energy and effort, the attention to detail rose. Then that's when things started to change.

We always talk about how do you react and how do you respond? And these guys, the whole team reacted and responded the right way after going down 14 in the first half.



Q. Coach, the bad start was sort of similar to the Clemson game in the Smith Center when they went up early, used an early timeout. What was the difference in you guys being able to complete the comeback this time versus the Clemson game?

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't really relate this game to the Clemson game. Just for me personally, I just quickly haven't thought any similarities between those two games. I just know that Michigan State came out really aggressive on both ends of the floor, and from a physical standpoint, we didn't match or surpass it.

Once that changed, everything else changed. I felt like defensively we were getting over screens, we were talking on defense, we're fighting and fronting the post, we're boxing out, we're rebounding, we're defending without fouling.

I think the change came on both ends, not just offensively, but defensively as well.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes now.

Q. Mando, how much did the early foul kind of knock you back a little bit defensively? And not just you, but by extension, the entire team? And what was the trigger that kind of got the defensive intensity back up?

ARMANDO BACOT: I thought early on getting that one foul was definitely tough. Even still with that I thought I could have done a better job of making the big man catch it out farther. At the college level, once you let a big man get it right in the circle, it's going in six times out of ten. So that was tough.

What really changed for us defensively was Paxson coming in. I thought he really made a huge impact on us, and he really got us going. For him to come in like that and step up when his number's called speaks volumes about guys being ready to play on our team.

Q. Harrison, you had some really critical shots out



there tonight. How do you think that just helped energize the pace of the offense?

HARRISON INGRAM: For me, it's all about team basketball, and today I was open, and they found me and Mando, RJ, and Elliot, they found me and I was open. Luckily, I was able to open the shots.

For us at UNC, we're all about the team, and we played together today.

Q. Armando and RJ, kind of a big picture question. Can you talk about, A, how your coach successfully replaced a legend? B, bounced back this year after a tough season, used the transfer portal well, and just has established himself in his three years as a coach here.

RJ DAVIS: I think Coach Davis has done a tremendous job in the three years that I've been here. His first year, the way he came in and brought us all the way to the National Championship.

I think the big picture for Coach Davis is what he brings out of the guys, and what that is is the passion and fire and competitive spirit to go out there each game and each practice to play to the best of our abilities. When you have a coach like that, I think you can go a long way.

We rely on him just because we know he's seen the things that we want to experience, and he always tells us that. But that leads onto the second one of how him and the rest of the coaches do a tremendous job of going out and grabbing guys like Harrison, Cormac, Jae Whit, Paxson, Elliot, Zayden. They have made a tremendous impact in terms of bringing different types of personalities to the team.

Everyone, just as soon as they stepped on the campus, they felt like they belonged and felt like they were there for four years already. I love this team, and I just love everybody on it.

ARMANDO BACOT: Yeah, everything RJ said. It's just so special for us when we got a coach that just has so much belief in us, even sometimes when we may not even believe in ourselves. I think just all year, just how he's pushed us, but also nurtured us and made sure we were okay and instilled that confidence in us.

When it comes to times like this and we go down 12, just knowing that our coaches believe in us, but also are hard on us, it just makes a huge difference.

Q. RJ, I just want to ask you about Seth Trimble's

defense. Quite a few big blocks, first and second half of this game. Talk about what he brings coming off the bench.

RJ DAVIS: Seth is the best defender in the ACC and one of the best defenders in the country. Just his impact on the defensive end has been huge for us all year, especially today's game. I know there was a couple times where, because we have Tyson Walker out there, and Seth had played -- had the challenge to go out there and guard him. I think he did a great of making it hard for him, being physical on the catch, getting over screens.

I don't know how many blocks he had, two blocks? Those blocks he had got us going and kind of saved us in the second half.

He's definitely one of the best defenders in the country, and I'm super proud of him.

Q. Question for Armando and RJ, I think it took Harrison maybe 12, 13 minutes to get his first basket to go, but it seemed like he flipped some sort of a switch there in the first half that helped you guys find that run you went on. What did you see from Harrison in particular? It kind of looked like a Harrison Ingram game there when he got going.

ARMANDO BACOT: Harrison actually told me yesterday that he was going to put on a big-time performance today. In games like this when it gets real rowdy and physical and it's in the trenches, we know it's a Harry type of game. There was no doubt in our mind he would show up big time for us and hit big-time shots.

The way he defended was amazing for us, and we don't win that without him.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue to take questions for Coach Davis.

Q. Given the emptiness you felt at the end of the season last year, can you just appreciate this? I know you've been down this road a lot, but appreciate this tourney and this journey?

HUBERT DAVIS: I appreciate every moment. I appreciate the sunny days and the cloudy days. I've said this a number of times, there's a reason for all seasons, and He's the reason for all seasons, and I mean Jesus, and those reasons are good. Irregardless if it's a sunny or a cloudy day.

All those reasons develop my character, refine my faith, and make me the person and the husband and the dad



and the coach that I want to be.

So I enjoy all the moments.

Q. Elliot Cadeau finished with a game high plus 20, game high 4 assists, and had zero turnovers. What can you say about his performance tonight?

HUBERT DAVIS: I thought his performance, being able to handle the basketball, get us into our sets, his ability offensively to push the pace, it gives RJ a break to get off the ball. I thought in the second half he responded defensively really well. I thought he did a really nice job of keeping the guards out of the paint, defending without fouling, and this is all new to him and understanding the importance of every possession on both ends of the floor.

I could just see his confidence continuing to grow, and then he was able to step up. I think he had a couple free throws towards the end. I don't know if he made both of them towards the end or one of them, but he stepped up and made at least one, and I thought that was really good for him.

Q. You've obviously got some veteran guys that you know what to expect week in and week out from them, but when you play a game like this against a team like Michigan State, do you learn something like this from this type of performance that gives you extra confidence as you head into week 2?

HUBERT DAVIS: Michigan State is always Michigan State. It's extremely well coached. I can't have any more respect for a coach than I have for Coach Izzo. His program, the way he runs his program, the type of teams, the way that they play. So we knew what we were getting today.

But in terms of moving forward, I wouldn't say just today, but for the whole year. I mean, if you look at our nonconference schedule, it was real. Then you get into conference, and we were able to win the regular season ACC title.

So we've been in tough physical matchups, highly competitive competitions like today. So it just continues to build confidence for us moving forward, but not just particularly for this game, but for what we had to do the entire season.

Q. How important is Harrison's energy in kind of keeping the team's energy as a whole up, especially when going down early like today?

HUBERT DAVIS: His personality lights up the room. As

soon as it comes in and his personality and his energy lights up the locker room and the huddle and the court. He brings, his personality brings something that nobody on the team can bring.

It brings confidence. It brings joy. It brings happiness, seriousness, competitiveness. His game and his personality is exactly what this team and this program needed this year.

Q. As somebody who's played the position at a high level as you have, what's your appreciation for the way RJ steps up in big moments from the time you've been with him?

HUBERT DAVIS: We ask a lot out of him. We ask him to handle the basketball, distribute, score, defend, rebound, lead our team. There's a lot on his plate, and he never complains, never whines, shows up every day, practices hard. He's an example how to prepare, and he goes out every day, and he plays his tail off.

What a great example for the younger players, for like Elliot and Seth and Zayden and J Wash to be able to see someone at the highest level but to see what goes into it. All the hard work, all the preparation, to put himself in position to be successful. We're going to ride his back the remainder of the season. But I wouldn't want to ride anybody's back other than RJ. He's been absolutely fantastic.

Q. Coach, this is kind of uncharted water in the off-season, you're rebuilding your roster. Could you talk about when you felt good about the pieces coming together.

HUBERT DAVIS: I felt good about the pieces when we got the pieces. You never really know until they step foot on campus, but as soon as they got on campus from the start -- and I told this, and I tell this to everybody. From the start this team has wanted and has enjoyed being a team. They just enjoy genuinely being together.

It's never been a situation where there's four guys here or four guys there. They're always going out to dinner. They're always doing everything together. Even in the meal rooms on the road, like there will be two sets of tables, because we've got 14 players. Everywhere we've gotten from the start, they have taken the two tables, and they have moved them together because they don't want to sit separately. They want all 14 to sit together.

I don't know if that, how that translates to wins and losses, but I think it helps. I think we have really good chemistry. We'll see how much further we can go.



