

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Creighton vs Tennessee

Friday, March 29, 2024

Detroit, Michigan, USA

Little Caesars Arena

Creighton Bluejays
Greg McDermott
Steven Ashworth
Ryan Kalkbrenner
Baylor Scheierman
Francisco Farabello

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Tennessee - 82, Creighton - 75

GREG McDERMOTT: Congrats to Tennessee. They've got a heck of a team. They played really well tonight, really shot the basketball well. I've known Coach Barnes a long time. There's a lot of good people in this business, but you'd have a hard time finding one better than him.

While I'm disappointed that this journey has come to an end, I'm excited for him and his program. He's a first-class person and coach. He's what's right about this business.

I'm really proud of what we've accomplished this year to get back on this stage. These guys have been selfless every step of the way. They've been absolutely a joy to coach.

You hate for that to be over, and I hope, once the hurt subsides, they can look in the mirror and understand what they've accomplished. Sometimes in sport the hardest thing to do is what you're supposed to do.

Baylor, Trey, Bello, and Kalk have been here two years, Steven this year. We've been preseason top 10 two years. We've had to carry the weight of that expectation on our shoulders for two straight years, and they've handled it like champions. That's leadership. That's focus and understanding who we are and staying connected.



These guys, from a leadership standpoint, the four up here and Trey, they've been incredible, and they've been a great example to the young guys in our program. I've learned a lot from them, having the opportunity to be around them every day. It's sad that it's over, but, man, was it fun while it happened.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Francisco Farabello.

Q. Steven, can you talk about their defense from logo to rim, just how relentless it is.

STEVEN ASHWORTH: Yeah, they're a very talented defensive team. In the first half, I felt like we struggled to get in the paint and then kick it out for three-point shots and find other ways to facilitate. I think, as the game went on, Kalk did a great job of setting high ball screens. We were also able to release the pressure by throwing it in to him and let him go to work.

Throughout the game, I felt like we got it more and more figured out, but they're a very talented defensive team.

Q. Either Ryan or Baylor, please, I guess the rub with this event is that 67 teams are kind of going to experience what you experienced. What's going through your minds right now as you try to encapsulate all you've done?

RYAN KALKBRENNER: Yeah, you go into this tournament with high expectations, and you want to make it as far as you can. After a loss like this, the loss hurts. You wanted to go further, but you take a step back and look at the journey you've been able to go on with the team and people you've had on your team. It's hard to do that right now. The further we get away from this game, the more and more I'll appreciate it because it's a very, very special group, players, staff, everyone involved. It's just a special, special group to be a part of.

Even though it didn't end the way we wanted it to, we're going to look back on this year, team, group, and for me personally, I'm just grateful to be a part of it.

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BAYLOR SCHEIERMAN: Kind of going off what Kalk said, obviously disappointed that we lost. We had big goals going into the year, and we didn't necessarily accomplish everything we set out to do. I think obviously, like I said, disappointed in the loss, but more sad about the fact that I'll never be able to put on this Creighton uniform again. I'll never be able to play with this group of guys, and I'll never be able to play for Coach Mac again.

Really what's going through my mind right now is the reality that it's over for me. It's just been an absolute blessing to be able put on this uniform and play for Coach Mac and play for these guys.

Q. Baylor or Steven, could you kind of reflect on what happened during that 18-0 run that they had early in the second half. And what does it say about you guys that you were able to cut it to three but you had to work so hard to kind of get back?

STEVEN ASHWORTH: They came out in the second half, a lot of energy. We also ignited that fire, I think, with a few mistakes to add on top of that, that allowed them to get out in transition and get their rhythm going. It's always hard to come back from a run like that, but basketball is a game of runs.

I think the biggest thing about this team that I've just learned the whole year being a part of this group is that it's a team with a lot of grit and a team with a lot of experience.

So to be able to answer that run possession by possession, we understand there's no 16-point play, so you have to approach it that way. It was obviously exciting and proud of this group to fight back the way that we did. We were very close to turning that on them, but they made some plays down the stretch to answer our run as well.

Q. For Bello, Mac and the guys have talked over these last two years about how hard your job has been to come in from a different school and take on a role that isn't necessarily star studded. How hard was that to do in terms of the challenge of doing it every day, and what has it meant to you to embrace that and accomplish what you guys have accomplished?

FRANCISCO FARABELLO: I guess it's hard from the confidence standpoint because it's just the nature of the role I had, but coaching staff and players made it way easier than what it should be, especially because we're such a close group of guys that all we want to do is win and win at the highest level. Just being able to contribute to that with the things I could bring to the table made it a lot easier.

Q. Steven, obviously basketball is a five-on-five game, but you and Zeigler are real emotional guys and like to lead the line a little bit and go back and forth. How much did you enjoy that matchup tonight?

STEVEN ASHWORTH: He's a very talented player. Honestly watching his film, it was fun to learn a few things from him and see how he defends and how he just does his role for his team. It was a fun experience and atmosphere tonight.

Just so grateful to my family, my friends, and Bluejay Nation for coming out the way they did. It's what makes college basketball so special because you don't get crowds like that anywhere else.

So it was definitely fun. Obviously when you're put in position to be the point guard, there's a vocal leadership that needs to come through, and he does a great job leading his team. Obviously I take pride in the ability to hopefully communicate what Coach Mac is wanting for the team to do as well.

Q. You played, I think it was triangle and two for quite a while. What did you see there that was effective and allowed you to make that comeback?

GREG McDERMOTT: It's called desperation, I think. We went to zone for one possession when Knecht was out, and we got a stop. Then he came back in, and obviously I didn't feel comfortable with the potential of letting him stand.

We practiced triangle and two a fair amount in practice, we hadn't used it all year. We didn't have anything to lose at that point. And I thought our guys executed to perfection. It gave ourselves a chance to come back and win the game.

Obviously that 18-0 run was -- we really haven't had anybody do that to us this year. I think it was less than five minutes. It seemed like a long time. But we haven't had to overcome something like that. We had to pull something out of our hat that we hadn't used.

Q. Mac, you've talked all season about how much of a joy this group has been to coach. What's going through your mind right now that it's over?

GREG McDERMOTT: Yeah, just glancing at the stat sheet and looking at the names, a lot of these guys aren't going to be back. It's tough, yet it's been such an honor to coach them.

Francisco Farabello, when I hugged him after the game coming off the floor, he apologized to me. I was like, really? But that's what he's about. He's about giving everything he can to this team and doing everything he can to try to help us win. In that moment, he's blaming himself. Obviously there's no place for that.

Baylor Scheierman comes here. He guarded 4 man once in a while in the Summit League. A lot of times he didn't guard anybody. And tonight he guards Dalton Knecht. Talk about progress and talk about understanding, after going through the Big East last year one time, like I've got to get better at some stuff, and then going to work and doing it. He's just been a pleasure to coach.

Trey's gotten better every single year. It's been fun to watch. He's hurting right now, but we're not here without him. Or where we were last year without him or the year before that without him.

And Kalk's just been the gentle giant. He doesn't like the spotlight. He just goes to work, and he does things that impact the game in so many ways.

They've been an absolute pleasure to coach. Like I said, I've learned a lot, and I've become better because I've had the opportunity to be around him.

Q. You're certainly known for being able to get guys shots, get them open with schemes and all the things you do. How hard was that tonight?

GREG McDERMOTT: It was more difficult because Tennessee does a good job of upsetting your rhythm. Zeigler is such an elite on-ball defender that it upsets your timing of what you're trying to do. As you saw, we tried to have some other guys initiate offense at times. While they had a guy not play, that put Mashack in the game more, and he disrupts things much like Zeigler does.

So he ended up on Trey to start the game, Zeigler on Steven, and it was hard to really initiate any offense.

I thought, once we settled in, we got some decent shots. We got it to Kalk 12 times down there. He missed a few he normally makes. It's a make shot, miss shot game. Tennessee late in the year against Mississippi State in the conference tournament didn't shoot it well. They didn't shoot it well against Texas. They made shots tonight. That's what it comes down to.

We were going to have to make more three-point shots than Tennessee to win this game, and the fact that we still had a chance when those numbers were even is a credit to our guys.

Q. You touched on it, but how tough is it to deal with Jahmai Mashack doing the dirty work for Tennessee?

GREG McDERMOTT: He's talented. He impacts the game so much by not really scoring that much. He doesn't have to shoot. He rebounds it. He was at the receiving end of some of those offensive rebounds during that stretch. I think we're up 39-37. We got our first shot defense was pretty good, and he goes and knocks out a couple rebounds, kicks it out, they hit threes. He forced a few turnovers.

He's really talented. Rick does a great job of using him and putting him in spots where he can be successful.

Q. Just on Baylor, it seemed like he was the head of the snake on both ends of the floor, guarding a first team All-American, dropping 25, giving you guys a chance. What went into that performance, and how special do you think it was, even in a loss?

GREG McDERMOTT: To exert the energy he had to exert to guard Knecht, it's incredible. Dalton wasn't guarding him. So Baylor had to -- he had double duty because we needed him to be a presence offensively for us, and we needed him to try to slow him down, and he did a great job.

He hit one three in transition where he got loose. He hit one on the triangle and two cutting left. And the other I think he hit it on Trey along the baseline. Baylor didn't give up a three to a first team All-American. It was clear there were two All-Americans tonight on the floor.

Q. You finished second in the Big East, Sweet 16. You had three or four guys playing almost all the minutes all year. Jasen Green was not available for a lot of it. Did this group get as much out of the season as they could?

GREG McDERMOTT: Yes and no. You know, it's hard to get to this point. It's hard to play in the Sweet 16. A lot of things have to happen during the year. The Big East absolutely prepares you for everything you're going to see.

Like down 16 to one of the best defensive teams in the country, you don't come back and give yourself a chance unless you've been battle tested. There's such good coaching and such elite programs in the Big East that we have the belief that we've played against UConn, we've played against Marquette, we've played against Providence and Villanova and Seton Hall, a lot of really good basketball teams, and we can do this one step at a time.

But our guys developed as the year's gone on. Mason's gotten better. Jasen's gotten better. We're excited about some of the guys in our program, and obviously we've got to hit the recruiting trail, and that's a little easier than it used to be with the transfer portal.

It's been an incredible four-year run that Kalk is the one guy that's been part of that all four years. Our program is in a position, and we're supported by the institution and our department in a way that we need to continue to be successful.

We tell our guys to move to the next play all the time. While we're going to be disappointed about this loss, my staff and I are going to get to work and try to put together a group that can get back to this point.

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