

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arkansas vs Texas Tech

Thursday, March 27, 2025

San Francisco, California, USA

Chase Center

Texas Tech Red Raiders Coach Grant McCasland Christian Anderson Darrion Williams

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Texas Tech - 85, Arkansas - 83 (OT)

GRANT MCCASLAND: Obviously what an unbelievable college basketball game. We're watching Arkansas play on film, it seemed every game they were in, there were these pretty dramatic runs of teams finding ways to either catch up or lose the lead.

They're such a dynamic team. Coach Cal is doing an unbelievable job with their belief. They got basically their full roster back, even though it was limited. So we knew going into the game that, man, it was going to be difficult to defend them.

And the way they started the game and the shots they were making, we made some decisions to go under ball screens and felt like we were too passive.

But that's to their credit. They came out and punched us good. I kept telling these guys in timeouts that we're going to win the game. D5, I don't know what he started the game out 0-for quite a few from 3. And Christian was 0-for.

And I told them we're going to make it when it matters. I believe it with all my heart. That's Red Raider basketball. It doesn't matter what the score is, what's stacked against us -- I think we got down to 16 at one point in the first half -- and telling JT we've got to get stops and rebounds.

I thought one possession was huge it was Federiko in there getting I don't know how many offensive rebounds they got on that one possession. And I thought it showed



the grit of Red Raider basketball.

And Chris making a 3 at the end of it. That started I thought the real belief that we would win the game.

What a tremendous atmosphere it's an awesome opportunity to be on this team with these guys because nobody believes more in each other than this group. It's really a blessing to be part of.

Q. Darren, the last few minutes of the second half and in overtime, you really took over. What's going through your mind at that point in the game?

DARRION WILLIAMS: Stay aggressive and stop settling for 3s. Obviously they weren't going in, but I was shooting open ones. They'll fall. Just trying to get to the rim. They're long and lengthy but not very built, so Coach said keep going through their chest, and like he said, I'll make them when it matters.

Q. Christian, got going late in the game. How did that happen, just making shots? Just break it down.

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: The past couple of games I haven't been shooting it very well. At the start of this game I started out 0-for, like Coach said, but I think defensive at the end, when we started to get stops as a team, and when momentum kind of shifted in our favor, I think that's when I started to knock down shots. And then the rest is how it played out.

But at the defensive end is how I started making shots. The momentum shifted our way. And it worked in our favor.

Q. Darrion, how does it feel to represent and come through clutch like that just 90 minutes away where you grew up in Sacramento?

DARRION WILLIAMS: It was great. I got about 30 to 40 family and friends here. It was just great to see their faces. Being so far away from home they don't get to come to a lot of games. Just having everybody there felt good. But these guys are my family, my extended family. It just felt good.



Q. Christian, your coach kind of talked about the offensive rebounds. Could you feel on the sideline maybe the belief, not only how it got you guys closer on the scoreboard, but maybe momentum-wise, how big were the offensive rebounds in the second half?

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: They were huge. Like Coach said Fede had I don't know how many offensive rebounds in that one possession. I think we got four shots and ended it with a layup. So I think that's what kind of started the party.

And then shots weren't falling. So we knew we had to make a point to go rebound our misses because it was such a big lead we had to overcome.

We had to get offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds. And that's kind of what kept us in the game. And it proved big for us at the end.

Q. I know this game is still fresh, but what do you think about Saturday against Florida? And how much does the way you won tonight maybe fuel you for Saturday?

DARRION WILLIAMS: Obviously it's a really good team and they're a 1 seed for a reason. You never know how the game's going to go. So can't really compare games. See how it goes. We've got to go out and be the more aggressive team, be the toughest team.

Q. Darrion, how much did early in the season St. Joe's, the opportunity, the shot rimmed out. But then Houston, made that big shot. How much did those kind of opportunities play a role in you being able to step up tonight?

DARRION WILLIAMS: I played a lot, honestly, because obviously I was mad I was missing them. But my teammates and coach just kept telling me we're going to make them down the line. And he's going to rock with me whether I make or miss them. And just seeing it come to fruition and be good in this big moment, it's really cool.

Q. You are down by 16 points about almost halfway through the second half. How did you know you would be overcome an almost insurmountable lead like that?

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: In the huddle, Coach said we're going to find a way to win this no matter how much we're down. I think it was 16 with 10 minutes left or something.

As a team we had that look, we're not losing this game no matter what, no matter if it's defensive, offensive rebounds, we've got to get defensive rebounds, steals. We had to

find a way to make it happen. And at the end we did, so that was it.

DARRION WILLIAMS: We just wanted to play our hardest. If we would have just rolled over and let them beat by 30 the season would be over. None of us wanted that. We'll give our best shot and what happened happened.

Q. After starting 0-for-5 from 3, three shots, three 3s in a three-minute stretch, Christian, what's coach's and the team's belief in you to make those key shots mean to you?

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: It means everything because you can't hit those three 3s that I hit at the end of the game if you don't have the belief in everybody, if it's your teammates or your coaches. So they tell me, keep shooting, keep shooting those open shots, keep making the right plays. And if I miss 0-for-10 and that next 3 is going to come up and it's a good shot, then I'm going to take it.

That belief fuels me to go and make plays.

Q. Johnell Davis, felt like the whole game up until late in the second half was really getting to the -- he was getting to the line, hitting 3s, but he didn't have a made basket or made point after the 4:43 mark in the second half. What was the game plan to kind of stop him late?

GRANT MCCASLAND: I played against him several times. I remember playing against him as a sophomore when he was at FAU. We called Dusty May after the game, and they had great players on their team. We felt, man, this dude was the best player when we were watching him.

He's so dynamic, because when he's making 3s and he's such a good shot fake and such good change of pace that when he gets you off balance by making a few of them he can start driving it.

Biggest thing we were fouling him. Felt like there were some unnecessary ones. And it was, let's make him earn difficult ones. They came out at half and they wrapped him and made a 15-footer. I was, okay, let's just keep making him make those over the course of the half.

The biggest difference I thought was we didn't foul him and we presented a lot of help. JT Toppin, Federiko and Darrion Williams providing a lot of gap was what I think help slow him down in the second half and limited his opportunities to get clean looks.

Q. I wouldn't describe you as an elite offensive rebounding team. How much did St. John's grabbing



28, was that an extra emphasis knowing that you maybe had some advantages against Arkansas specifically on the offensive glass?

GRANT MCCASLAND: If you look at our league, and I think we play in the best league in the last 10 years it's the best league. And this year obviously the SEC had a lot of talent. But you don't play against Houston unless you know how to rebound. Go back watch that film, we beat them because we offensive rebounded. That's against one of the best rebounding teams in the country.

We feel our only opportunity, when you shoot it this good and you spread people out you've got to go get it.

I remember, how about the rebound Darrion Williams missed and then he got the jump ball underneath. His urgency to win this game.

I'll tell you what it boils down to. These guys just want to win. If we tell them we're not making and we've got to go get offensive rebounds and we have to do it, I thought that Kevin Overton's offensive rebound was huge. That was the one that got pitched out, that got Christian going.

But, man, it's just the way, I'll tell you, it's the belief that we've got to find a way. That's the biggest part of this team. They'll do whatever it takes -- shoot a bunch of 3s, go into the post, offensive rebounds. Whatever it takes, this team does it.

Q. You said you told the guys they could win. You're down 16. Can you just talk about your belief in all of these guys and the belief that they have to get this done?

GRANT MCCASLAND: When you can score like we can -- JT was good in stretches, but wasn't playing his best basketball. And you look up and he's got 20 and nine.

Those baskets he made at the end, we knew we could get him going. If we could ever just find a way to get it close enough and get enough stops, we just have so much offensive talent. And we played so bad to start the game offensively.

But they played great. You know, they made 3s. They were scoring. They were getting us on back cuts. They were driving to the basket. They got a million free throws. They doubled us up at the free-throw line. They made more free throws than we shot.

I believe in our team and I believe -- I've seen it enough and we've practiced hard enough and these guys do love each other enough. It's just trying to keep them in the fight

together. And every timeout, I'd seen Arkansas play enough to know that they were pretty volatile in the way the game goes. Get up big in the Kansas game, for example.

They got up big and Kansas came back and got the lead. They went up big again. So it's like I've seen this team let people in and I'm telling them this is what we want, we want them to get out to a big lead. We'll find a way.

Darrion Williams, you'll make the biggest 3. I told E in the next timeout, step into the next one; quit finding the 26-foot mark; go put your foot on the 3-point line; you're making the next one.

We're not turning down 3s if we're open. I thought E's 3 was huge at the end of the game.

Give them credit, though. They're a resilient group, too, they're in the Sweet 16 for a reason. They had such a great finish to the season. But I had a great amount of belief we would win this game no matter what the score was as the game went on.

Q. Yesterday you had a great answer when I asked you about sort of what makes this tournament so cool and unique. You talked about how the one-and-done component. How did you feel about that midway through the second half? How much urgency and anxiety did that add? Separately what's it going to take Saturday against Florida?

GRANT MCCASLAND: I'll tell you, it shows a lot about Christian Anderson's calmness as a freshman, because we put the ball in his hands in the middle of the floor several times. He just delivered. He really did -- 22 points.

But what he talks about up here, when you hear him, he had no turnovers, but what he talks about up here is what he needed to do defensively. It's such a cool experience as a coach to know that when the game's on the line, such an offensive talent, but he thinks, how do we get stops defensively. That's the core belief of what we do.

But the heart of the team is Darrion Williams. He just is a resilient guy. I mean, I can't even explain it. And that's what -- I put faith in him because I do believe that he'll find a way in one-game scenarios to do whatever it takes to win. I honestly do. Whatever it takes.

Looking at him, he got so many huge plays that he could have tapped out and been embarrassed playing with all his family here and it wasn't going good. Like, it's just not my night. And he just does not think that way.

In these one-game scenarios you better have somebody,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

no matter what the score is, they believe you can find a way to win and that's D-5.

The biggest thing for me in watching them play, I watched him play Arizona State, and they smacked Arizona State. Arizona State was playing really good basketball early in the season. And, man, can they score.

And do they have a plan that I think they execute as good as anybody in the country. I watched a little bit of SEC championship and watched them basically just play their best basketball of the year and heard consistently from coaches that they're playing the best of anybody in the country.

This is what you sign up for when you play in the NCAA Tournament. You want the opportunity to play the best. But we've got a tremendous amount of respect because I think they play the right way and they can beat you in a ton of different ways. But they've got grit and fight and a great plan and they execute it.

Q. Yesterday you said that Chance's ability to play tonight was going to be a game time decision. When was that decision made? And not even quite 48 hours, but 40 hours, whatever it is, before Saturday's game, what do you think will be the odds of Chance being able to play against Florida?

GRANT MCCASLAND: You know I'm not answering it that way. I'll tell you this. He shot around today. I fully anticipated him suiting up. I anticipated him being available. I didn't know how much.

Then we got to the arena, and we had had him planned to dress out and be ready. You don't know in these games. Like what it was tonight, you may be somewhat limited but I thought there was a chance he could play, like legit. We were planning on dressing him out.

He got to the arena, and he just came to me and said he couldn't do it.

So the truth is, he shot around today and moved really well and looked good. And then maybe just what happened in shoot-around set him back a little bit.

I trust him with everything because he's the other guy to me that has the greatest belief on our team that we're going to win.

He'll do anything it takes to win, but it felt like he wasn't quite confident enough that he could help the team. So he decided not to dress.

We're not tricking anybody, honestly. We're just trying to give him confidence that he can do it and trying to support him as best we can. He just didn't feel like he would be his best. So he decided when we got to the arena he wasn't going to warm up.

Q. We talked yesterday about your experiences in the NIT junior college. How did you pull from those today? And did any of those games compare to, like you said, the atmosphere and what it was like in the arena today?

GRANT MCCASLAND: Oh, yeah. We've been dead in the water in so many games in tournament play and found a way to win on a tipped dunk at the buzzer. And we've lost on a tipped dunk at the buzzer in a matter of two years. The team that lost on the tipped dunk could have won it. And in junior college, we were losing and won it on a tipped dunk at the buzzer. And that team went on and won a national championship by the largest margin in junior college. It was like 19 points a game.

You never know what the game's going to be that turns you into a different level of belief. I coached a guy by the name of Mike Miller one time when we were in the CBI against a guy named Matt Mooney playing at South Dakota at the time. And we had never won -- that team we inherited at North Texas, we went into the game and they had only lost two games in three years or something. It was a bunch of seniors.

They didn't win their tournament and we got them in the CBI, and we had a guy named Mike Miller who was a lefty. We're at shoot-around the day of the game and I told him, he shot free throws sometimes right-handed. He was square and he hadn't been making anything. He made three all year long.

I told him I was going to start him and I wanted him to shoot 3s right-handed. And he made four that night. And we won at South Dakota and went on to win the CBI. It's crazy.

I just think belief is really way more important than what people think. And your belief in your team and your team's belief in each other, no matter what is stacked against you, that you can find a way to win and you can look at these guys in the eye and know, like, Christian just wants to hoop, and D-5 wants to win. And these guys really do look at each other with a lot of confidence that we can do it.

Q. The bench is shorter with Chance out, of course, but can you break down the impact Overton and Federiko had off the bench for you?

GRANT MCCASLAND: I thought Overton changed the game. His ability to guard Davis and to make it difficult -- he's got length and athleticism. We recruited him thinking he could be like our stopper. And just with the logjam, if you will, at the guard spot, and now he's got the opportunity to play into these roles.

And his effort defensively, but I love Federiko because we're in a timeout and we had a hard time being level. And Johnell Davis made that 3 right at the top of the key and Fede wasn't level and he came into the timeout and you would think he's the coach.

He's, like, put me on him. I'll be level. He ain't scoring anymore. And I'm like, yeah, Fede. If you're around him every day he smiles, he's happy-go-lucky, so much fun to be around.

In that huddle he was Bob Knight. He was live and in charge, and that was a huge opportunity for us to, I think, to get some stops and grit. And Fede really changed the momentum of our team defensively tonight.

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