

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: NC State vs Purdue

Saturday, April 6, 2024

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

State Farm Stadium

NC State Wolfpack Coach Kevin Keatts DJ Burns Jr. DJ Horne

Semifinals Postgame Media Conference

Purdue 63, NC State 50

THE MODERATOR: We're joined at this time NC State.

We're going to ask Coach to provide an opening statement.

Coach.

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, first of all, congratulations to Purdue. Obviously I thought they played a really good game. It's a really good basketball team. They do a good job. Can score the ball inside and out. I thought we had a great game plan coming in. I thought they made some shots.

I think one of our biggest differences is some of the shots we normally make, we didn't make in the game. Certainly kind of got away from us a little bit.

I don't know that I could be more prouder of a group of men that I've ever coached in my life. Adversity, you name it, situations, you name it, hard times, you name it. They found a way to win the ACC, they found a way to make it to the Final Four.

We're going to leave out of here because Purdue won the game, but we'll walk out of here with our heads up as champions because of what we've been able to provide.

The memories that these guys have created for NC State basketball, but more importantly for themselves, for the rest of their lives. These guys are champions, ACC champions. So I'm proud of 'em.



Starting with the older guys, DJ Burns, DJ Horne, Casey Morsell. Just so proud of what they have poured into this university and also into our basketball program.

Grateful for them. Excited what we've done and what they've been able to do. Like I said, we're going to leave out of here with our heads up.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. DJ Horne, was it just one of those nights where the ball wasn't going in or something that Purdue did defensively?

DJ HORNE: I think it was just one of those days where the ball wasn't bouncing our way. Looking back at it, I can't really remember everything that went on in the game. Off the top of my head, I know we didn't make shots at a high clip.

Q. DJ Horne, reflect on your college career. Obviously changing schools, working your way up to this point. What are some of the key takeaways you take away?

DJ HORNE: Yeah, this season was definitely a great one. Whole career, looking after it, it's been a long journey. I'm grateful for everything that has been thrown my way.

To end it with this magical run that I went on with me and my teammates, to have an ACC championship. Didn't get the big one, but it's definitely a big accomplishment in my career.

Q. DJ Horne, obviously you played the last two years at ASU. What did it feel like tonight playing back here in the valley?

DJ HORNE: Yeah, it felt good being able to play basketball anywhere, anytime always feels good to know I was back in Arizona, felt a little bit of love and everything just from all the fans and everything like that.

It's pretty cool.

Q. DJ Burns, what was it like going up against Edey?

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After watching on film, was it different than you expected? Any surprises?

DJ BURNS JR.: No, sir. I think I didn't do as good of a job in the first half keeping him getting to that right hand. He's a tall guy, if you let him get to his spots, he's going to make his shots. We cleaned it up, but it was a little too late.

Q. The impact that you guys have made on NC State with this run, speak to that. How much fun has this journey been for you?

DJ HORNE: Yeah, it's been fun every step of the way. Every win we've gotten, it's felt like a championship. To see all the joy and the happiness that it's brought our university, our city and everything, how many people got behind us, not just from NC State, but the whole country, it just shows when you come together, stick together, what you can do as a team.

I'm just grateful that I was a part of it all.

DJ BURNS JR.: Man, just to be a part of this has been everything I could have asked for. Didn't go the way we wanted to go out. But, man, this has been an experience like no other. It's something that I wanted my whole life. To be able to do it with the group of people that we have is just amazing, man.

The city, we just glad we could bring the coaches back to Raleigh and State fans. They've been waiting a long time. We hope we gave them something they can build on next year.

Q. DJ Horne, how meaningful was that final year at NC State for you, to represent your hometown, get them to this point in the Final Four?

DJ HORNE: It meant everything. To come home for, for Coach Keatts to give me this opportunity to go out there and make all my memories with my brothers the way we do. I don't think we could have drew it up any better. If we won the whole thing, it would have been a story.

I'm grateful for this experience. Not everybody gets to say they went to the Final Four. NC State did.

Q. DJ Horne, talk about the first half, Braden Smith was a little bit off, looked maybe not quite on his game. Did you sense that you could take advantage there from a matchup perspective?

DJ HORNE: I mean, going into the game, we knew that Zach Edey was going to be the emphasis of our game plan. We just wanted to try to take the guards out as much

as we could to not have it be a two-force punch. I think we did that. The whole team did a good job on that.

He's a great player. To see him kind of struggle tonight, it has to be a credit to what we did.

THE MODERATOR: We want to thank the student-athletes. We'll continue with questions for Coach Keatts.

Q. With Michael's hamstring issue, felt like you played a certain way, balanced, did things just get out of sorts there in that regard of rotations, all the confidence?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, when Michael's injury occurred, it definitely changed us. It made under the circumstances go back to Horne handling the ball a little bit more than we wanted to. I thought Breon came in and did a good job for us.

That being said, we've been playing seven or eight guys, one of your key guys go down, it changes a lot.

He's our leading assist guy, so we didn't really have anyone that could create for someone else.

Q. You laid out in the beginning of the conference just how special this team is and how unique what it's done is. Do you think in this era of college basketball, you're going to start seeing more teams like this where a lot of guys come into the program? What struck me watching this team, it wasn't a Cinderella team, it was a talented team that figured out how to play together. Do you think that's the start of a movement in college basketball? What does it say about these guys that they learned how to use each other's talents so well?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, I don't know if it's a movement. I think if you can get five new guys, or in my case eight new guys, to blend in with the guys who are returning, I think you got something there. It takes a little longer.

It's so much work to the chemistry both on and off the court to get here. They have to trust. They've got to believe. They've got to believe in the staff. Most time when you get a lot of transfers, they come in as independent contractors. If you can get them to work for the company, being NC State, playing for NC State, then it usually works out in your favor.

We were able to do this. There are some teams that have just as many transfers as we have, but were not able to connect the way we did.

The way we connected is unbelievable. Like, if you had a

chance to hang around with these guys all day, you'd be like, Man, these guys are fantastic. I mean, we went about our business, but we had fun. They genuinely liked each other and wanted to see each other be successful.

Q. Talk about what a run like this does for your program moving forward.

KEVIN KEATTS: It's great. I mean, we have a story. When you're in any sports, you want to have a story. Look at our story. I mean, the way this story was written was unbelievable because in order to win any championships, you have to have highs and lows. We started the season with great highs, in the middle there were some lows, but equally then some highs. At the end of the regular season there were lows.

Look what this team was able to accomplish. I sit back, I just don't know how you can win nine elimination games. I think all of those nine games, we only had one of them that was not a double-digit win, in the NCAA tournament.

These guys always believed. They trusted. Even when we wasn't having success, they believed in me and they believed in the staff. They stuck together. They shut out all the outside noise with Internet and everything else, came out as champions.

Q. How much does the exposure, the run, how does that change the trajectory of your program moving forward? Recruiting, all those other dynamics...

KEVIN KEATTS: I hope people understand that we have a heck of a basketball program. We play a unique style. We've got a great culture.

What's not talked about enough is we had five teams in the last couple of years get in the tournament. We're one that's been two years in a row. It's almost forgotten because we didn't make a run last year. This is back-to-back NCAA tournaments where our league is so good and we're not getting the respect that we deserve. In two years, we've got five, we've been one of the five a couple years.

I think the run will help. People understanding this. But it's also special for graduates, the current student body, folks that remember the great one with '83. When you sit back and look at what we've done, man, you're going to be amazed at it.

This doesn't happen every day. How many people do you know finish their run at 9-1, winning nine games, then obviously losing the last one? I think before this, the only other team that had won more games than us was UConn.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'd like to thank you for coming down.

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