

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Dayton Flyers Coach Anthony Grant Nate Santos Enoch Cheeks

Postgame Press Conference

Dayton 85, UConn 67

THE MODERATOR: Welcome Dayton to the room. We have coach Anthony Grant.

ANTHONY GRANT: I'm so proud of our guys. Three really challenging games. Like we talked about before the tournament started, we knew this was one of the most challenging fields, a great tournament. We're always fortunate to be able to be invited to this, so we're grateful.

Our guys really battled. I think we really grew up here in the tournament. We had three very challenging games, games that we had opportunities to win on every single night.

We had to do some things better tonight. We understood that, against a UConn team that's extremely talented and well-coached. We knew we would have to play really well, especially on the defensive end.

Just proud of our guys, the resiliency, the toughness, the togetherness, the heart we showed throughout the whole tournament.

This didn't feel like a seventh-place game tonight. Our guys understood the opportunity. The things we've talked about all year in terms of our goals, what we're trying to do, they understood that. I'm really proud and grateful.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Nate, what does this mean to you guys?

NATE SANTOS: I think it means a lot. Obviously we had



really, really close games, the two games prior. I think, like Coach said, we really grew up, really put a full game together. I think we realized what we're really capable of.

It was good to see that we finished the game off strong.

Q. What propelled you to the big run?

ENOCH CHEEKS: Trying to put two halves together. The last two games, we couldn't close out. We were really locked, focused, trying to keep our composure. We knew if we did that, we was going to have the game. It meant a lot.

Q. Can you talk about the resiliency, what the last couple days has been like, keeping fighting.

NATE SANTOS: Yeah, I think every game that we've played, it's been a fight. I think we've just continued to grow and come together and get better, just build trust in each other and just continuing to fight and staying together.

I think obviously we saw what we can do in a full 40 by fighting together tonight. I think we really did a good job.

Q. The fans were loud. Talk about what it means that the fans traveled all the way from Dayton, Ohio, to Maui.

ENOCH CHEEKS: It means the world when we have our fans behind our backs, it gives us energy, it motivates us to do better. We're very grateful for them. They show out every game at home. When it's away, it means the world.

NATE SANTOS: I'm backpack off that. It means a lot. Gives us energy, especially close games. It's great that they're here and we appreciate them.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys.

Questions for Coach.

Q. Talk about the need for improved defense. How much did you see that tonight?

ANTHONY GRANT: Yeah, I mean, the guys said it. I think we needed to be able to put two halves together. I think



their resiliency is what propelled them. Just the desire to do whatever it took. We knew it would be hard. We talked about the need to do hard stuff.

You could hear on the bench in the second half them encouraging and pushing each other. This is three really, really challenging games in three straight days. I think every team will tell you that's really hard to do. That's really hard to do in three consecutive days.

Our guys found that resiliency, that toughness, that grit to be able to do that, and understand what it was going to take. It was going to take a 40-minute game. Obviously the score doesn't indicate how challenging that was at the end of the day. I'm just proud of the group.

Q. Throughout the three games, you got contributions from up and down the bench. Is that one of your biggest takeaways from this?

ANTHONY GRANT: That's what it takes. We talk a lot, you heard me say this prosecute, that the sum has to be greater than the individual parts. It's always going to be a team game. On different nights, it's going to be different guys.

Really proud of what Posh Alexander was able to do today. He was a big reason why we were able to win the way we were able to win today. It's just up and down the line, different guys. It's been different guys.

This experience of being here and playing in this tournament, the competition that we got a chance to play against, I think will help propel us as we move forward.

College basketball is a lot of really good teams. I think every team, every coach I think said it before the tournament started, that we would find out more about our group here, what we need to do better, what we're doing well, and then you try to build off of that, right?

That's kind of where it is. We had two heartbreaking losses in games we felt we had opportunities to win. Then to be able to show the level of resiliency and toughness to come out today and battle the way we did, I think that shows a lot of character for our group.

So now we'll take the lessons from this and we got to keep going, right? It kind of is what it is. I'm just really proud 'cause that was a hard thing to do today. I'm proud our guys are willing to do hard stuff.

Q. On Sunday I asked you about Enoch. You have a complete roster. What does he bring to this team?

ANTHONY GRANT: Yeah, I mean, he's a guy that makes winning plays. That's probably the best way I could put it. He's just a winning player on both sides of the ball. He impacts the game not just by scoring, not by what you see at the end of a box score, but his footprint. He's an intangible guy, great defender, a guy that understands how to impact winning.

I think he's an underrated guy on both sides of the ball. It's great that the stat sheet kind of indicates what he's capable of. I think he's one of those guys that you need to be able to win at any level.

Q. You shot 50, 47, 90, if I'm reading that correctly. When you think about performances, where does this stand?

ANTHONY GRANT: Big-time. I feel like offensively we play really well. I think our guys are understanding the pace we want to play at, how to play together, to support each other, to help each other have success.

What I love seeing is on the defensive end. Specifically in the second half, that's what probably cost us the first two games here. I'm proud of what we're doing on the offensive end, but I'm probably more proud from a defensive standpoint that worry able to put two halves together.

Q. Can you talk about the mental toughness of this team, some of the individuals, how did they show their mental toughness and what do you attribute that to?

ANTHONY GRANT: For me, my mind is all wrapped up in our team. To me it's always going to be about what the team does. Like I always say, the sum is going to be always greater than the individual parts.

I believe we have really talented guys, really good players. I think we have high-character guys that want to win, that understand how winning helps everybody, right?

As you build that, we're seven games in to a long season, there's ebbs and flows, always ups and downs of every season. You try to grow and get better. You learn from wins, you learn from losses.

At this stage, like I said, my focus is just on today 'cause this was a hard thing to do, right? Three games in three days against some of the best competition in the country. Our guys put themselves in position on each night to have a chance.

We felt like we didn't finish, like we should have been in position to finish some of those games. We knew tonight

that it was going to take us doing hard stuff to be able to win, right?

I feel like we grew up in terms of understanding what that feels like and how to go about doing that. Now we got to be able to do it again. Now we got to be able to repeat that.

It's all growth. There's no finality. I'll celebrate individuals and all the other stuff when we're done. We're not done. We're seven games into this thing. We got a long way to go.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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