

CBS Sports Classic: North Carolina vs Ohio State

Saturday, December 17, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Hubert Davis

Armando Bacot

Press Conference

North Carolina - 89, Ohio State - 84

Q. Coach, what did you see from your team defensively after it was 66-55? Leaky (Black) said he thought that was the best you guys have played, the most aggressive you guys have been defensively all season.

HUBERT DAVIS: We just specifically talk about that particular situation in a game, I just felt like in the second half their toughness, their will, their want to was exactly where it needed to be.

In the first half, they were outrebounding us, being more physical with us. They were getting more loose balls. They were beating us to everything.

At halftime we talked about there needed to be a response and for things to change. A level of toughness and physicality needed to be brought to play against such a great team in Ohio State, and they did that in the second half, not only in the defensive end, but I think on the offensive end as well in terms of getting to their spots and getting to the shots they wanted.

The discipline and detail of being able to execute in the crunch time, I thought they were fantastic. I'm very proud of them.

Q. Was there anything about your message at halftime that was maybe a little bit different? You've been in similar situations.

HUBERT DAVIS: I think Armando would like to speak to that. I was direct. I was straightforward. I didn't speak in



tongues or interpretation. They knew exactly where I was coming from.

That's the way I always communicate, but I did it with a higher volume at halftime, and Armando and Caleb (Love) have said they like the higher volume from me. So I'm going to continue to do that.

Q. Hubert, where did Coach (Jeff) Lebo get the play for Pete (Nance)? Did he have that deep in the bag?

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't -- yes, maybe. I don't know what bag he has.

ARMANDO BACOT: He said he was watching the game.

HUBERT DAVIS: We have a number of plays in late-clock, late-game situations that we can go to. We didn't have one in that situation.

The first thing is I thought their execution was fantastic to get the ball across half-court to get us into a position where we can run that play, and then Coach Lebo thought that we could get the ball to Pete because of his lift, just throw it up. They weren't going to foul him.

One of the things Pete loves to do is he loves that side of the block and he loves that turnaround jumper. Not that he was going to hit it, but that's a shot he likes to take and takes all the time.

At the end of the day, it's about executing. You can write up all the plays that you want. It's a make-or-miss game. Pete stepped up and made them and gave us an opportunity to go into overtime.

Q. (What may have been important was the play before the play to get the ball to halfcourt. What went into that particular play)?

HUBERT DAVIS: I just didn't think we could get a clean shot going full court. So I just drew up a play that gave us three options to catch the ball near half-court. I told them, once you catch it, it's a little bit over two seconds, you have one dribble, and you've got to get it over half-court to call



time-out. If you get it over half-court, then you can advance the basketball.

So they ran it perfectly. Leaky's pass to RJ (Davis) was fantastic. RJ got it over and called time-out. So you're exactly right, the execution of that play was probably just as or more important than the one to Pete.

Q. I guess now your guys played the Garden. I'm surprised RJ hasn't played it because it's local.

HUBERT DAVIS: They played their state championships at Fordham. Never played here before.

Q. What did you think of his performance? He had the tying shot and the go-ahead three. How much do you hope -- you said you hope to play games here in the future?

HUBERT DAVIS: No, we are. As soon as I took the job, I said that every year Carolina will have a presence here in the Garden. Every year Coach Smith brought us here. So it brings me back to Coach Smith and Coach Guthridge and the four years I started off my NBA career here as well.

One of the things I told them before the game is I said, This is a game you'll remember for the rest of your life, just the atmosphere, being in New York City. Our hotel is right across the street. We walked to the game.

There's just something different and something special here. So to have a game like this to come up big like Armando and everybody else, this is an experience they'll remember for the rest of their life, and that puts a huge smile on my face.

Q. How much did you guys need a win like this against a good team (indiscernible) the other four losses against other major conference teams?

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't think we needed to win this game. I think it was -- we approached this game as a game that we wanted to get better and we wanted to improve on. I wouldn't say we needed a win against a good team. The other seven games that we've played, they were really good teams too.

So it's just an opportunity for us to get better against a really good Ohio State team. We responded extremely well, and I'm very, very happy and very proud of all the players.

Q. Armando, can you talk about playing in the Garden for the first time and the comeback?

ARMANDO BACOT: It was great. The atmosphere out there, it's like something, as a kid, you look and see all the historical games at the Garden, and I think this game could go down as one of those too.

Shout-out to the fans. Probably 15,000 or 16,000 Carolina fans, and seeing all the white and Carolina Blue, that really gave us a bump. They were all into it. My hat's off to our fans.

Q. Armando, talk about the second half. It seemed like they created space for you in the second half. What were you doing in the first half different than the second half?

ARMANDO BACOT: Coach came in at halftime and gave us a moving speech. I think in the first half they did a good job of Ohio State getting the shots that they want and getting all our offensive rebounds. They really kind of -- in the first half, they punked us early. In the second half, I thought we did a good job coming out early.

In the middle, we kind of went down a little bit. Just the guts for us to win, it was huge for us and something for us to build on.

Q. (Did coach's halftime message resonate differently this time?

HUBERT DAVIS: I would say Coach, his message gets to us all the time. A lot of times we don't do a good job of staying fully locked in all the time. Coach is turned up every time. He wants to compete every time.

I wouldn't say it was anything different. Like he said, the volume was a lot different, and he was probably more and more and more blunt about it, but I would think the message is always the same.

Q. Talk about how (indiscernible), how do you feel about this?

ARMANDO BACOT: We were talking about it after the game, and we think it might be up there for number one just because how up and down it was and being down 14 and just the atmosphere. It was really crazy. It was packed. Like I said, it was 16,000, 17,000 Carolina fans. For me, I love it. It was a great atmosphere.

Q. A different game in the second half with that press. What did you like about that matchup, and why do you think it was successful?

HUBERT DAVIS: We did it for the first time against

Virginia Tech, and at that point we were down by 18 and cut it to three. So after the game, I felt like this is something that we could go to, and all the players to a person came up to me and go they really like that.

I would love to do that more, not just in the second half or late-game situations. It just felt like our starters were in there so much, so it's hard to do that for an entire game. Their ability to get deflections and steals, get turnovers, speed up the game, I thought it was huge. They've been fantastic with it all year.

And I really do, I want to do it more. I think it's something that they do really well, and I'm looking forward to trying to figure out a way to do that more consistently throughout the game.

Q. Coach, how big is the trust factor there, not just with the players, but with your staff? You ran a play that has never been run in practice.

HUBERT DAVIS: There's tremendous trust. Just because we run a play that we never run in practice, we're together in practice every day. We share time together. So the time spent together builds that trust to let everybody be involved.

And one of the things that I tell the guys all the time -- and this is a great example. Like nobody can do it by themselves. You always need help. You've got to do it together.

So for Armando to be as dominant as he is, he needs the other players on the floor to be really good. So in order for me to be the best coach that I can be, I need help from other coaches. We're all in this together, and we're a team. I wouldn't want to be a part of a different family or a different team than the one that I'm a part of right now.

Q. Armando, you came out of the game after about a minute in the first half. Was there any dialogue on the bench before you went back in and scored 16 points in the first half?

ARMANDO BACOT: It's crazy because Zed Key, I got that one early foul, and he does a good job of getting in position. Usually a lot of times, especially if you've got one foul, a guy in good position can get you low down in the paint. It was obviously an easy opportunity for me to get another quick foul if I was in the wrong area, and I couldn't play aggressive on top of that.

Really Coach was giving me some time, to let some time out and not get a foul. Then they subbed in a freshman, and I told Coach I thought that would be a good opportunity

for me to get my flow and get into the game a little bit and not have to be super aggressive because Zed Key is obviously a really good player.

Q. Coach, you talked about it from a team perspective, but personally, how did it feel when you showed up today and got that shout-out from John Starks? At the place where you started your NBA career.

THE MODERATOR: During time-out they put a message up from John Starks on the video board. You were busy in the huddle.

HUBERT DAVIS: What did John say? That's my dude. Last night I showed them a couple videos when I played with the Knicks. I showed them my rookie year when we played against the Phoenix Suns, and they set that screen on Doc Rivers and an all-out brawl. Then I showed them in the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Chicago Bulls with Derek Harper, and I think it was Jo Jo -- I can't remember who it was from the Bulls. It was all-out brawl in the stands.

I told them, I don't want you to get into a brawl, but I just wanted to let you know the experience that I had here at New York and the unbelievable teammates that I had that taught me so much about basketball and off the court, and one of those guys was John Starks. I couldn't have asked to be drafted and spend the first four years of my NBA career with anybody different than John and Patrick Ewing and Charles Oakley and be coached by guys like Pat Riley and Jeff Van Gundy. It's an unbelievable experience.

Walking back into the Garden, I feel -- it's not just feel it, it's home. I love New York. I love the Garden, and I wish I could play my entire career here. I just love this place.

Q. How much do you feel that maybe that four overtimes against Alabama may have helped, just the experience?

HUBERT DAVIS: I do think it helped. I do. I think it helped from a standpoint of making me not want to go four overtimes. I also think the experience of being in the position a number of times in that game for the outcome to be different and to let's learn from that. Let's grow from it.

Being in those situations earlier this year, for this year's team, I thought was really helpful. In the late-clock, late-game situations, understanding what we need to do in terms of our execution on both ends of the floor. It would be great if we could learn those type of lessons by winning everything. That didn't happen. I'm very proud of the way they responded to that.

Q. Are you playing here next year?

HUBERT DAVIS: We do. We're playing in the Jimmy V Classic. As long as I'm the head coach at North Carolina, we'll always have a presence here in the Garden. This is home for us.

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