

# CBS Sports Classic: Kentucky vs. North Carolina

Saturday, December 16, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

## North Carolina Tar Heels Cormac Ryan

## RJ Davis

### Press Conference

Kentucky 87, North Carolina 83

**Q. Coach Davis talked about having to win the battle in the trenches, the battle on the boards, the battle in the paint. What has to change for you guys to get over the hump?**

RJ DAVIS: I think it's just the little details. We were right there at the end of the game, and there was a couple of slip packages of not grabbing a rebound and kind of like just little details that we have to make up and look back on the drawing board and get better for the next upcoming game.

I have a lot of faith in this team. We have potential to be really good, and sometimes the basketball doesn't bounce our way. We'll definitely look back on this and kind of see where we could have been better.

But like Coach Davis said, this was a game of the trenches and battling it through. I'm proud of the team's effort and the way we fought. We've just got to fight harder next time.

**Q. RJ, the timeout when you were down three and you set up the play, it looked like you were coming off an Armando screen and Elliot's pass catches Cormac by surprise. What were you guys trying to get in that situation there, and why do you think it didn't work out?**

RJ DAVIS: We just didn't execute the play properly. There's been a lot of plays like that throughout the game that I could point out a lot of times. But we'll be better next time.



**Q. RJ, when talking about the turnovers, you were saying that you guys were almost too fast to kind of start the game. From your perspective what led to the heightened amount of turnovers?**

RJ DAVIS: Yeah, I've got to be better. I think I had five turnovers, and that's a lot. That's like one of our keys going into the game was to take care of the ball and limit our turnovers and we didn't do a really good job of that.

That's going to have to be a strength for us going forward, especially on my end. I can't have five turnovers as the point guard of this team, and I'll be better.

**Q. Going back to 11 seconds left, RJ, you were saying you didn't execute the play correctly. Could you break down what does that play executed look like?**

CORMAC RYAN: Yeah, the long and short of it is stuff happens in the game, and Elliot is a great passer, RJ is a great shooter, I'm a great shooter, we've got great players on the team.

Sometimes you come out of the huddle, things go differently. It is what it is. We pick each other up and we stay together.

We have a lot of faith that we're going to execute in late-game situations. Sometimes you've got to play a good team in a tough environment early in the season to find out that you've got work to do to finish out games.

I think there's nobody in the locker room that has more faith in us than Coach Davis to execute our plays, and we're not going to get into the specifics of the play because we're going to run it again and we're going to execute and we're going to win the ball game next time.

**Q. For either of you, when you're in these situations (indiscernible) what does the team do to ensure that you don't panic and let a couple of losses impact the entire season?**

CORMAC RYAN: I mean, one of the things Coach talks



about is how do you respond, and I think it's a good test for us. We've got a mature group. We've got guys who have been through a lot. Probably nobody more than RJ and Armando a duo. They've seen a lot. I've seen a lot. We've got a lot of older guys on this team.

We're no stranger to bouncing back. We're excited that we get to play another great opponent on Wednesday, and there's not an ounce of panic in our locker room.

We're confident in our group. We know how good we can be, especially when we clean up some of the stuff that is our own mistakes. That's stuff that is within our control, and that's a good sign.

Obviously you want to win the game. Obviously you want to execute. But because we have control of that, it's a positive thing because we're going to get better, and we're going to make those adjustments, and we're going to win these games when it really matters down the stretch.

**Q. Cormac, you mentioned both you guys have played a lot of basketball. How would you assess the level of physicality in this game and do you feel you matched the level of physicality of Kentucky?**

CORMAC RYAN: I mean, Kentucky is an athletic team. That's how they play. They've got long, athletic guys. I think we could have done a better job being physical, especially on the boards, and that starts with me. I'm playing a lot of 3. I've got to be more physical. I've got to get more involved rebounding the ball.

We can't just leave it all for Armando. We've got great rebounders on this team. Harrison Ingram is a terrific rebounder. RJ Davis is a terrific rebounder at the guard spot. I think he led the team in rebounds tonight. We've got guys who can really do it. Jae'Lyn Withers, Jalen Washington. We've got guys who can really rebound.

I think it's a matter of being more physical, being tough. We've got that in us. We've just got to go out and do it.

**Q. Cormac, tonight was it just a matter of the ball going through the basket for you or was it something else that was working? Also is the ankle still bothering you?**

CORMAC RYAN: Yeah, I was put in good positions based on the stuff we were running. I was receiving the ball on time, on target from my teammates. That makes it easy to hit shots.

When you see a couple go down, that helps. But nobody has had my back more than Coach and these guys to

continue to encourage me to keep shooting. I've played a lot of ball. I went through stretches where I shoot great, and I've went through stretches where I don't shoot great. It's part of the game.

That's something that I'm not new to and I'm unflustered by.

The ankle is getting there. It's tough to heal an ankle sprain mid-season playing a lot of games, but it's no worry.

**Q. RJ, I talked to Coach about Kentucky getting a seven-point lead (indiscernible).**

RJ DAVIS: Just to keep our composure and not get too radical. They kind of went on runs, but I think we were able to establish our presence on the offensive end and then was able to get some stops on the defensive end.

I think our mindset, especially my mindset, was just I've been in situations like this before where it's a tough and close game, and it's a lot of up and down, but it's just the kind of mix where my teammates are composed and not feeding into the energy of the crowd and sometimes the game feels out of hand. Just knowing what we've got on our side is good, kind of just chip away each possession.

I think that speaks for our experience, and we have veteran guys, and we fought. That was like our main message. I remember teach team how we was always like we'd get to the four-minute mark right before media break and we'll be right there. And we were.

That just speaks to the fight of this team that we have, and I think we're going to be more than fine.

**Q. Cormac, you sort of alluded to it with the early season test games, like these neutral site environments, and I understand you've got 19 more ACC games to play, but does the Oklahoma game next week take on a heightened significance with the loss to UConn and the loss today in terms of your non-conference resume?**

CORMAC RYAN: You know, we look at every game on the schedule. The most important game is the next game, and that will always be the case. It's been the case all year and will continue to be the case.

Oklahoma is a good team and we're excited that we get to play a good opponent because there's nothing better than trying to bounce back against a team that's got a ranking, got a good record, potential tournament team. So that's something that we're excited about.

But we take every game one game at a time, and the only game circled on the calendar is the next game. It was the same way tonight, and it will be the same way on Wednesday. We're going to bounce back, and we're looking forward to being able to kind of get back to playing winning basketball against a good team.

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