

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

St. John's Red Storm

Coach Mike Anderson

Julian Champagnie

Stef Smith

Postgame Media Conference



want wouldn't say we're a new team. I think we're just sticking to our identity and getting back to what Coach always preached to us in practice and staying the course and trusting each other.

Q. Mike, what did you say during the timeout? 12-2, looked like a completely different team after that?

COACH ANDERSON: We gotta play defense. Gotta guard the yard. They're getting layups. We're not contesting at the rim. I thought we were playing soft.

And I thought our intensity picked up. That's what, as a team, you've got to find somebody to help ignite that. I thought those guys come out -- Dylan, Stef, you look at the guys that were out there, it was Dylan and Stef and I think Esahia. And all of a sudden the energy level -- Montez is one of those guys out there and everybody else started following suit.

We've got to hang our hats on our defense this time of year. And with this team here, the depth -- and these guys are playing quality minutes. And so you call upon them. You call upon that experience that they've got. And I just want to put it together at the right time.

It's one game. But it allows us to move on to the next round.

Q. Julian had an amazing first half. What's it like watching when he's got all the different parts of his game going?

STEF SMITH: It's unbelievable to watch and you've got to make sure, as his teammate, to get him the ball. And we did a really good job doing that. And we understand that he's going to have those nights. And sometimes he might not have those nights because teams are going to focus their defense on him. We've just got to step up and make sure we make plays as well.

Q. Julian, last time you guys played DePaul, you had four turnovers in that game. And tonight you didn't have any at all. How did you learn from those

St. John's - 92, DePaul - 73

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by St. John's.

COACH ANDERSON: First, we're very proud of the effort of our guys coming out. Some of the things they did tonight, even coming out to slow start. In the first game you never know how your guys are going to come out of the tournament and play. I thought the nerves were going. I thought we settled early on.

Then we went to our bench. And let's talk about our bench. They were very productive tonight. I thought Esahia, Stef, Dylan, anybody we brought off the bench, I thought they brought a certain swag, an energy and attack mode. I thought that got us going.

When you play a game and you play this many guys you're in the game with two turnovers. I'm looking at the turnover points, 24-0. That told me we played really efficient basketball.

But I go back to my statement previewing this game. I said we've got to play defense. We've got to guard the yard. I thought we did that. First the tournament, and to survive and advance you've got to win.

Proud of our guys and they get to enjoy it for a couple of hours and get ready for next appointment which is outstanding Villanova team.

Q. Julian, Coach talked about this is a new season. Did this feel like a new team tonight?

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: I think we've had a glimpse over the course of the season, we've had games like this. I



mistakes and translate it into tonight's win?

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: Coach always preaches about taking care of the basketball. That's what we pride ourselves on, taking care of the basketball and transition. So it wasn't really a thought process. You gotta take care of the basketball if you want to win games. And that's the way to win games. So that's what we have to do. That was kind of the thought process today.

Q. Julian, when it was 12-2 what's going through your mind?

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: I was a little frustrated, obviously we're all frustrated. (Indiscernible) the timeline, we have to play defense. Gotta get the ball moving, getting it in transition. On the offensive end of the court it wasn't really our focus. We preached all week defense, defense, defense. That was kind of the theme coming out of that timeout. And we started playing defense.

Q. And tomorrow now you get a chance to play again. You get to play Villanova. Obviously swept you, premier program in this conference. How exciting, just your thoughts on getting the shot to knock off the big dog?

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: It's exciting. Every game is exciting. We were excited to play today. Having that extra day to play is what we want. But like Coach always said, every game is a big game. So tonight was a big game. We came out victorious. And tomorrow's a big game. And we'll see how that goes.

Q. Stef, this is a team that involves all its players. The whole year you guys made sure everybody gets minutes. How does that contribute tonight when the bench outscores the other bench 40-19?

STEF SMITH: It shows the depth we've got on this team. And especially in March that's really important because certain guys might go off, might not. Someone might get hurt or something like that. So it's important that we have all hands on deck and when the number is called we play in the most efficient manner possible.

Q. Your team will be moving on to play Villanova. Definitely a heavy hitter in the Big East. What would you say your team needs to do to improve on their areas to maintain the success throughout the rest of the tournament?

COACH ANDERSON: I think we continually have to hang our hats on defense and continue to play efficient on the offensive end; making Villanova not only just pay attention

to one guy, they've got to pay attention to all our guys.

It's got to be about our defense and taking care of the basketball. Getting to the free-throw line. I thought the reaction about when the score's 12-2, I thought we were settling for a lot of junk shots early on.

But I think after that timeout, you could see us intentionally attacking the basket. His first couple of buckets were right there in the post area.

And there's something about confidence. You see that ball go in, and all of a sudden everything starts falling in. But I still say it's about our defense.

Obviously Villanova is a tremendous shooting basketball team. They space the floor. We'll have to play with some insane energy and really cover and rotate and (indiscernible) and rebound the basketball. We played them earlier in the year here. They were up 20, I think, and we made a run at them.

But again there's a reason why they're one of the top ten teams in the country. So it's a great challenge, great opportunity. And you're playing for an opportunity to play in postseason. Our attention is next team up, we've got to be ready.

Q. In that second meeting against DePaul last week, Freeman-Liberty and Jones combined for nearly 64 points. Tonight only 28. What was the difference between these two matchups in containing DePaul's two best players?

COACH ANDERSON: We made sure we paid attention to those guys wherever they are. We did a good job forcing their offense way out on the floor, making other guys have to make plays. That was the biggest thing, not letting them guys just get wide-open shots.

And, again, a lot of their offense comes from attacking the basket and getting to the free-throw line. I thought we did a good job of really protecting the rim. Esahia, Joel, all our guys.

And all the loose balls we were able to come up with. It told my, our guys, we built the line. But our intentions were not to let those guys just dominate.

Q. Mike, Alexander seemed like he hurt his ankle close to the end of the first half, but then like was back in there pretty soon and played a pretty good game. Was he playing through something?

COACH ANDERSON: He must have. He didn't even want

to come out as a matter of fact. I had to force him to sit out. That tells you his will to win and maybe tolerate the nicks and injuries he's had all year long. He's got a toughness a lot of people don't have. And I think he was there for his team. And you can see the results -- seven assists, zero turnovers, made his free throws. We made our free throws tonight. He showed to me the mindset of a true leader.

Q. Julian, dovetailing with what he just said, you talked about wanting to play with a sense of urgency when we talked to you yesterday. What do you think of the way you guys played for each other, the sense of urgency, the passion.

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: I think we came out, we played hard, minus the first five minutes of the game. Minus the first five minutes of the game I thought we played hard.

COACH ANDERSON: Nerves. I call it nerves.

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: That's what Coach calls it.

COACH ANDERSON: The nerves were going.

JULIAN CHAMPAGNIE: But, no, we came out, played hard. I think we understand what's on the line right now. And we have a goal that we want to attain and we know we have to attain that goal. Coming out and playing hard was really the only option. We'll have lapse in the first five minutes, but it's what you do after that. So that was our thing today and we just stuck with it, rode with it, really.

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