

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 10, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Villanova Wildcats

Coach Jay Wright

Collin Gillespie

Brandon Slater

Caleb Daniels

Postgame Media Conference

Villanova - 66, St. John's - 65

COACH WRIGHT: A lot of credit to St. John's. I mean, it's no surprise to us. We weren't disappointed in our play at all. If you watched them last night, watched them the last couple of games, they're playing great basketball. It's a credit to Mike to get his team playing the way they are.

I thought of all -- yesterday there were a lot of great games -- and we said this as a team, of all the games yesterday, and everybody played well, we thought St. John's played the best yesterday of anybody.

So we knew coming into this game it was going to be this kind of game. And they were really good. And we just toughed it out.

And upperclassmen down the stretch, Collin making some big plays. Slate was great. And Caleb hit some big shots. And just proud of these guys.

Q. How significant was it that Posh got in foul trouble? They had that big lead and once they got in foul trouble they started turning it over. Just how significant do you think that was in the game?

COACH WRIGHT: He's a big part of what they do. He's a really unique player. At another time, you could talk about how Mike uses him. It's brilliant.

He's not just a point guard. Plays like a point guard/power forward. Really does everything. He's a big part of their team. I thought that was really big.



However, when he came back with four fouls he played just as aggressive. I think he drew two charges. It's pretty amazing how physically he played with four fouls, and he made it tough on us.

Q. Brandon, how did you feel on that last shot, the last few moments of the game?

BRANDON SLATER: We work on free throws every day in practice. So when I step to the line my teammates and coaches, they were telling me, we do this every single day. They gave me that confidence and I was able to knock it down.

Q. Coming into this game, were you concerned about the fact that St. John's had many close losses this year and maybe they were playing like for their lives pretty much?

COACH WRIGHT: Yeah, yes, but mostly, honestly, we've watched them their last few games. And when we played them here we won by three or six and Posh didn't play. And Champagne was hurt in the game.

So this league, this year, you can tell it by all the games, we all know this isn't like there's one team that's dominant. I mean, Providence is the 1 seed. You saw that today.

None of us are surprised by this. That's what's great about this tournament this year. I think if you look at the tournaments across the country, you can see the crowds here. You can see the intensity here. It's on a whole other level. This conference is as good as it's ever been this year.

And we just knew that St. John's was really good. We weren't down. We weren't disappointed in how we played at halftime, down seven. We just said this is what it is. We know they're good.

Q. That first half was probably not what you wanted. What do you have to do tomorrow to not let that happen again?



COACH WRIGHT: Well, part of it was St. John's was really good defensively. The other part we didn't know Jermaine wasn't going to play until like ten minutes before the game. Came out of warmups his back locked up. We didn't know if Eric was going to be able to play because he was throwing up all day.

So we kind of got out of -- we just got out of sync a little bit. But you've got to give credit to St. John's. They got in us and we just didn't execute well in the first half.

So I think getting a game under our belt is going to help us a lot. And figuring out with Jermaine and Eric, at least going into the game knowing who you have, I think will help.

Q. (Question for Brandon off microphone)?

BRANDON SLATER: So I probably will say it again, though, we do it in practice, but we put pressure on ourselves to make it like a game rep every single time in practice. So that pressure that we have in practice in the summertime and then fall and then when we get into the season, we already have built those reps. And then we literally do it every single day in practice.

Q. How hard were you trying not to play Jermaine? What were you thinking, when did you decide, okay, let's do this?

COACH WRIGHT: I wasn't. They told me -- he said I can't play. The trainer said he can't move. He didn't even come out for the start of the game. He wasn't on the bench at the beginning of the game. We were just ready to go without him.

And then he just appeared on the bench. I don't know what the time was, but whenever he appeared I just put him in the game. And we just said let's just see what he looks like.

He didn't look great early. He was a little shaky early, but he said, I'm good, I'm good. I think by halftime I thought he looked normal. He was really good in the second half. Just one of those bizarre things. I wish I had a better answer than that. But that's what it was.

Q. [Inaudible]?

COACH WRIGHT: No, just happened when he appeared, when he got there. He wasn't -- as soon as I saw him on the bench, I put him in.

Q. Caleb, what allows this group to, when you're having a first half like tonight, to just be able to figure

it out?

CALEB DANIELS: We practice situations like this every day. And to be honest, we have a love for each other. So we know, like, we're going to fight for each other -- every possession, one possession at a time, one stop at a time. And we're just going to gut it out each and every game. So that's pretty much the answer to that.

Q. Is there a (indiscernible) thing, like communicating with each other, trying to identify, okay, what's going wrong here, what do we need to do better?

CALEB DANIELS: Of course throughout the game we figured out what we need to do better coming out of the second half. But mainly it's just us keeping a great attitude and just taking it possession by possession. We know we can't get it all back in one possession, so we just keep a great attitude. Keep it going one by one, one stop at a time.

Q. Collin, I don't know if you can ever feel comfortable playing in these kind of games. But because of the way you guys play, the number of times you've been in these kind of games, do you think you're as comfortable as any team in the country can be in these kind of games, in these kind of situations?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: I think that's the kind of stuff we work on every day in practice, game situations. And our white team in practice does a great job of preparing us each and every day for each game. They push us make us better in practices.

But I think it's just something that this group has dealt with all year. We've been in tough situations and I think we've learned from tougher situations and just stuck together through it all.

Q. Collin, you guys didn't have any points in the paint in the first half. Was that discussed at halftime and was it a point of emphasis to attack the rim in the second half?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: We talked about it a little bit, just staying under control when we got in there and pivoting and just making solid decisions, whether it was go to the rim or kick it out and make an extra pass. But, yeah, we talked about it a little bit.

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