

# Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 11, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Dan Hurley**

**Tyrese Martin**

**R.J. Cole**

Postgame Media Conference



UConn - 62, Seton Hall - 52

**COACH HURLEY:** Obviously thrilled with the quarterfinal, Thursday was pretty cool. But semifinal Friday is even better. So excited about that.

Credit Seton Hall. What Kevin has done with those guys this year through, just through losing guys and the type of season he's had in the Big East this year, and just want to wish those guys good luck next week in the tournament.

Thrilled to win. These two guys were huge in the game. And obviously we won it with our defense and our rebounding, which is our identity.

**Q. Was defense, getting back to the defensive identity, kind of stressed all week. Are you pretty happy with the way you did that tonight?**

**R.J. COLE:** We can't stray from our defensive identity. That's who we are as a team, that's who we are as a group. And continuing to harp on that every day, we have to continue to do that. And that's how we got these wins.

**Q. Tyrese, just talk about your rebounding. How were you guys able to control the boards and how important was that?**

**TYRESE MARTIN:** That's just our identity and what we go into the game plan, that's the first thing on the board in every game, just our defense and rebounding. That's the first game key. So, when we come in here, we make sure we handle that first and the rest will fall in place.

**Q. Tyrese, guarding the stretch players like Cale and Rhoden -- Cale was, at one point he had 17 of their 31**

**points and was trying to single-handedly pull them back into the game. They got down to about two possessions in the middle of the second half. What did you guys do to limit him the rest of the way and then pull away?**

**TYRESE MARTIN:** We just settled down and made sure we got back on defense. We were scrambling around, matchups were getting all over the place and things like that. But once we got back to the regular matchups that we wanted to have, we made sure we helped the helpers and things like that. We made sure we were in the right spots, and we were able to pull the game away at the end.

**Q. You reached this stage of the tournament last year. Obviously the building was pretty much empty. Could you share your thoughts on what the environment was like and how electric the building was, how you embraced that?**

**R.J. COLE:** We've got the best fans in the world here at UConn. So just them being here and hearing it, it was special to be out here. And the Garden is a special place. Just being in the moment out there, not (indiscernible) away from it, just staying in the moment. The fans were big time.

**Q. Tyrese, how important was it to limit Rhoden? He obviously didn't have his best game. Did you think if you could control him that's going really to take a lot of what they do away?**

**TYRESE MARTIN:** He was a big factor on us for their offense, to make sure that we stopped him. Me coming into this game, that was something I took personal tonight, and I went out there and did that.

**Q. Tyrese or R.J., Villanova a third time for this season, how big is that for you guys?**

**R.J. COLE:** It's going to be a good matchup. We're just ready to play tomorrow, get back and go out there, and prepare for Villanova and we'll play them tomorrow and see what happens.



**Q. What did you do particularly on defense? You talked earlier in the week about playing at an elite level. Did you reach that? What did you like about your defense?**

COACH HURLEY: I think we made just everything really hard on them. At the rim, we made everything really challenging on them. Obviously from the first game versus Kadary where we just weren't prepared for him to have a game like he did in game one. Just had a better plan. Made things harder on those guys.

And it's a tough thing to do because Rhoden, Cale, those are two big time wings. Kadary is a big-time player. But Tyrese, the last two matchups with Rhoden, he's really done a great job against him.

**Q. I wanted you to reflect on the win. Obviously when you took the UConn job, you hope to get into the Big East Tournament. You have fans here. What does it mean for you for this program to experience this, and the win is kind of a cherry on top?**

COACH HURLEY: This is our first Big East Tournament, like legitimate, authentic. With the crowd, I was a little worried today on how they would kind of handle it, to go from -- I think our last conference tournament in front of people, pre-COVID, in Texas -- or, no, in Memphis, there was nobody at the game. And that was pre-COVID in the AAC quarters.

So this was our first real, live conference tournament game in a couple of years in front of fans. So it was just electric.

These guys, that's why you come to a place like UConn to play, the big dogs play in the quarters and the semis. We're just excited. The place was rocking with so many UConn fans. Tomorrow it's going to be insanity in here.

**Q. You guys win 12 of 14 from the free-throw line tonight. How important is that facet of the game for you guys to have success moving forward in this tournament and then later in March as well?**

COACH HURLEY: We put so much physical pressure on our opponent, on the backboard, with a relentless approach to the glass, to the offensive glass with our defense. The way that we try to pound the ball inside with the drive, with obviously the big fella today.

It's just our identity is paint pressure at both ends of the court. I just thought the greatest barometer for us, free-throw line, obviously you've got to make free throws, especially this time of year.

The barometer for us is when we outrebound somebody we're pretty hard to beat. And we're pretty relentless on the glass. So plus 13 and hold them to 35% for the field, we just wear on teams. And eventually we can break a team's will.

**Q. Andre seemed to be everywhere on the floor tonight. What he was able to bring and how much that affected --**

COACH HURLEY: The stat sheet lies a lot sometimes with game impact. That guy's impact today was six, he had six, four, six, couple of steals. That guy just -- can't take your eyes off Andre when he's playing. He has such huge impact all over the court.

He's enhanced the games of R.J. and Adama and Tyrese -- all the guys that kind of get the scoring and production on the offensive end. Guys like Andre and Isaiah make things so easy for those guys because he's so unselfish.

**Q. Was Jordan close to playing? And is Akok OK, or was this not a good matchup for him?**

COACH HURLEY: Akok is working his way back. We'll need him to give us something before it's all said and done this year. Jordan, it's going to be tough for him to play in this tournament.

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