

# Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 11, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

**Creighton Bluejays**

**Coach Greg McDermott**

**Alex O'Connell**

**Arthur Kaluma**

Postgame Media Conference



Creighton - 85, Providence - 58

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Creighton.

COACH MCDERMOTT: Wow. We beat a really good team. Championship team. And we did it our way. We did it with defense. They really hurt us from the 3-point line at their place. We knew we had to clean that up. And we're blessed with the ability -- not a lot of teams in our conference, let alone in the country can play Nate Watson one-on-one. Because we have Ryan Kalkbrenner we can. That allows us to take some other stuff away.

But our young team doesn't play like a young team anymore. They've really grown up. I told Arthur this a couple of weeks ago, he's made the most progress of anybody in our program from the first practice until today.

His everyday work ethic in practice, outside of practice, and then gradually learning how we play and how he can be effective and efficient within that system, he's really slowed down. And the fruits of his labor are paying off now for him and for us.

And then Alex has been kind of mired in a shooting slump, but he hasn't wavered in his confidence, and he hasn't wavered in getting extra shots up after practice. And when the lights were the brightest tonight, he came out of it. So really proud of this team.

Obviously Providence has had a heck of a year and they're going to be a tough out for anybody in the NCAA Tournament. I wish them all the best. But this is a really good win for our program, and this is our fourth time in the championship game in the eight or nine years we've been in the league. And we haven't been able to quite kick that

door down. Hopefully tomorrow that's the time to do that.

**Q. You guys were without a very good player, obviously. But you've managed to beat three tournament teams without him, 3-2. Was there anything that happened when he went down? I remember the night at St. John's you were talking about how proud you were of the win. But since then is there anything you guys have done to mitigate his absence?**

COACH MCDERMOTT: That particular night we didn't have time to think about the magnitude of what happened. Like, we had to play the game. We found a way to grit it out and gut it out and get a win against a St. John's team that doesn't lose much at home.

And then I think it really hit us those next few days leading up to the Providence game. We went right to Providence. We were there three nights. And I think it hit our team, like, this is a big deal, and how are we going to get ourselves out of it?

And then we played Providence on a night, like I said, that nobody was probably going to beat them. We've gradually grown and improved since then. I think Trey has settled into that role. The pace isn't quite the same. But he's got great vision for a young player.

And fortunately we moved him to the backup point guard in the middle of January. He probably played 5 or 10 percent of his minutes there. At least he was familiar with it.

But the leadership from Alex and Hawk and Keyshawn has been terrific. And these young guys just haven't wavered. Maybe it's because they don't know any better. They don't know the stage that they're on. But they don't really care. This is a connected group.

They don't really care who gets the credit. They get along extremely well. They have each other's back. And I'll go to battle with a team like that any day.

**Q. And you referenced that quote you had yesterday**



**about when you went to Providence a couple of weeks ago, you said not even the Golden State Warriors could have gone in there and beat them that night. With the way your team played tonight, can you say the same about the two guys sitting next to you and the rest of your squad?**

COACH MCDERMOTT: We made some shots tonight. Let's face it, it's a make-shot, miss-shot game. We had some go in. And our defense is pretty good. We lead the league in defense.

We're comfortable with teams taking certain shots against us. And I think we forced Providence into a lot of mid-range stuff. And I think that frustrated them.

But we were pretty special tonight on both ends of the floor. Those possessions early in the second half, when you knew Providence was going to try to make a run, we made them take some tough shots, forced back-to-back shot clock violations against a really, really good team.

We've grown leaps and bounds defensively from the start of the season, and it's what you have to have if you're going to win in a tournament like this to win in the NCAA Tournament.

**Q. Arthur, the last six minutes of the first half you had ten points in that stretch. The ball just kind of found its way to you, or are you just looking to be more aggressive during that period?**

ARTHUR KALUMA: I just felt throughout the game I was telling myself, let it come to you, don't try to force anything, because I just didn't want to give up bad shots. I wanted us to get possessions. The last six minutes the ball was finding me and I was hitting my shots. So it was working out.

**Q. Alex, 18 points, did you anticipate this outcome tonight?**

ALEX O'CONNELL: I don't know if you can really anticipate scoring or whether your shot goes in. But kind of like Coach said, I haven't been shooting the ball too well in the last few games, but I stayed confident.

And credit to my teammates for finding me in the open spots. And my shot fell, and it feels good when your shot falls and builds confidence for the rest of the game for the rest of the guys.

**Q. Alex, you're one of the few guys, I guess, that's actually played in the NCAA Tournament with fans. And how much -- I'm sure it was nice to play at Hinkle**

**last year, and that was a great experience, but how much were you going to appreciate environments like tonight going into next week?**

ALEX O'CONNELL: I think I'm really going to appreciate it. Especially with what we went through last year with limited fans and being in the bubble.

And also just how much I love this group of guys and just how much fun we've had. I'm really excited for us all to experience that together. That's what I'm looking forward to the most.

**Q. How much is it when you have a big guy in the middle that just opens up the shooting lanes for you guys?**

ARTHUR KALUMA: Kalkbrenner played amazing this game. Coming in, doing what he does, especially against Nate Watson, who is obviously a big, physical guy. It was everything for us. And then him taking up the middle and allowing us to get to our shooters, it was big.

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