

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 11, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Villanova Wildcats

Coach Jay Wright

Collin Gillespie

Brandon Slater

Postgame Media Conference



Villanova - 63, UConn - 60

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Villanova.

Q. Collin, you came back to Villanova to play in the tournament like this. And for that to be that atmosphere tonight to come through with the win after all you've been through what does that mean for you?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: It means a lot. That's part of the reason why I came back, not being able to experience it the last two years. And it's just so much fun to be out there with my teammates and my coaches. And we really just enjoy it, and enjoy the time together.

Q. Brandon, how were you guys able to kind of make their strength almost a weakness? They're so good inside; it felt like with your four or five out it almost hurt them, their strength?

BRANDON SLATER: I just gotta say that our teammates we've got so much confidence in each other. I think we try to play Villanova basketball. We don't try to focus on, like, honestly what their strength is, more what we can do. So I think that's more of what we focused on.

Q. Brandon, do you mind walking me through the sequence where obviously it's Helter Skelter, Martin is going up for the dunk and you meet him at the rim and deny him?

BRANDON SLATER: Honestly, it was just a play, try to go make a play for my teammates and my coaches. And I saw him go up, and I felt like I could contest it. When I got up, it just so happened that I got lucky and I got the block.

Q. Jay, what do you think you guys were able to do to kind of neutralize their interior and their strength and size?

COACH WRIGHT: It was one of those games where I kind of felt like who had the ball last. We never felt like we had them under control, you know. Sanogo was so tough inside, but if you put too much pressure on him, Martin is hitting 3 and Cole's making plays.

I think we had a good balance, put it that way, a good balance of playing them tough inside. Did it as a team. Couldn't just put one guy on them. We tried to do that before with Dixon, just put Dixon on him. And he's just too young right now.

But I thought we just had a good balance of keeping our inside under control and their perimeter guys.

Q. The atmosphere, the electricity in the building, it almost kind of felt like -- not to disparage the current league, but felt like the old league tonight, a little bit with the level of play. What did you just think overall what it was like?

COACH WRIGHT: I'm sure I'm biased, but I'm just going to be honest. Friday night, Madison Square Garden, semifinals, Billy Joel is playing. Villanova/Connecticut. If you grew up in the Northeast it's a basketball junkie's dream. This rivals the NCAA Tournament. We talk about it as coaches in our league, what's better, Sweet 16 or playing in the Garden on Friday night or winning a Big East championship.

There's no atmosphere like this anywhere in the world for basketball. The juice in there, man, you can feel it when you come out there. And the electricity, it's incredible. We're so blessed to be a part of it. And I'll never forget the games that you play in here. This is an awesome atmosphere.

Q. Just talk about the second half. Guys really starting to get in the flow, the balance. Your half-court offense. And Collin really settled down. Could you



talk about the maturity and calmness you played with in the second half?

COACH WRIGHT: They're an outstanding team, extremely well-coached. They can beat anybody in the country. They're going to make a run in the NCAA Tournament.

They took away Justin and Collin. So they forced Justin and Collin, if they have egos and just want to get their points, they're going to beat us. But Justin, Collin gets 10 assists. They start doubling him. He just found people.

And then you've got to have other players, great players make plays. And Slate and Jermaine Samuels -- but what Collin did was just read what they were doing, find his teammates, make plays for everybody else. And that's what makes us a good team. That's what makes him a great player.

Q. It sure looked like Jermaine wasn't really dealing with his back spasms tonight with his performance. What did you make of his performance tonight?

COACH WRIGHT: It's unbelievable. These guys will tell you, he couldn't -- we got a chiropractor up here from Philly came up, got here like 4 o'clock. We have a masseuse with us. He couldn't go through walk-through, couldn't stand long enough to go through walk-through.

I'm amazed at him. But once he gets going -- he's done this in his career with injuries. He played with a broken finger last year. Had surgery. Missed the whole summer, had surgery. But he played with a broken finger. But he's a tough kid and a great competitor.

Q. You brought up Tyrese Martin briefly. At 6'6", what matchup difficulties does he bring for you guys?

COACH WRIGHT: He's a great shooter. So you've got to play him on the perimeter. You play him on the perimeter, he puts it on the floor. He drives. And if he gets a mismatch, the offensive rebound -- we had a couple of stops and then he just went off and got offensive rebounds.

He does everything. He can beat you every way. He's just a complete player. That's why -- I really think, I said to Danny when we shook hands, all I can say is you're going to make a great run in this tournament. Because they're a great team.

Q. You were a little short in your rotation. In the last couple of weeks Jordan Longino has stepped in and given you multiple minutes.

COACH WRIGHT: Jordan has been outstanding, getting better. I thought it was a huge play, besides Slate's block, I thought we got stuck at the end of a shot clock. They denied everybody. Jordan went and drove it. He got stuck. And pivoted and shot, hit a fade away at the end of the shot clock that was huge. He's a gutsy kid for freshman. We need his depth. We really do. He's been great.

Q. Even when Jermaine shoots a fair amount like he did tonight, looks like he hesitates before shooting a lot. How much do you guys, either Jay or his teammates, impress upon him it's okay to put the ball up?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: I think he's trying to make the right decision, mix it up take shots when they're there but also know when they're flying at him he can get in the lane and he's good at making decisions as well. He's got a great assist-to-turnover.

I think he's just trying to mix it up. He knows if he needs to take a shot, everybody has confidence in him to go make plays for us.

Q. Jermaine Samuels had 21 points and 12 rebounds. Does he still have that back problem, because he's not playing like it?

COACH WRIGHT: He does. I just spoke about that. He literally couldn't go through walk-through. So we have a chiropractor here and a masseuse. We'll try to get him ready for tomorrow. We'll prop him up, throw him out there. He's a tough kid.

Q. Brandon, could you describe what it takes besides talent and skill to get on the court and play at Villanova?

BRANDON SLATER: Just honestly, like you said, talent, skill and confidence. Every time you step on the court here at Villanova you've got to take pride in that you belong and that you are part of a team. And this is a team, they depend on you. It's all those things combined, and every single day you are working with your teammates and coaches and you build that confidence and you build that trust within yourself and everybody else.

Q. Collin, you and your teammates have accomplished so much at Villanova. But you missed this tournament last year. Obviously worked hard in rehab to get back. I imagine this is what you had in mind coming back. How bad do you want to finish this off?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: It's a lot of fun to be in an

environment like this, be back with my teammates and coaches. I wasn't able to be here last year. But we're just taking it one day at a time. We'll go back, rest up, watch a little film on tonight's game, learn from it and get better.

And our coaches do a great job of preparing us. So they'll have us prepared for Creighton tomorrow.

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