

# Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 12, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

## Creighton Bluejays

## Coach Greg McDermott

## Ryan Kalkbrenner

### Postgame Media Conference



Villanova - 54, Creighton - 48

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Creighton.

COACH MCDERMOTT: As I just told the team, obviously we're disappointed we lost.

I'm not sure I would be any more proud of them had we won. Some of the best shooters in the world and we've got Kyle Korver here tonight. He's one of the best shooters in NBA history. And he missed about 58 percent of his 3s.

And tonight I thought we had some pretty good looks at the basket. And we didn't make them. And obviously Villanova's defense needs to be credited. But once we started going inside/out, I thought we got some of what we wanted. And then at the end we got Gillespie.

We wanted to try to make him make shots off the dribble. He had a huge 3 off the dribble out of that timeout going to his left hand and that's an All-American play.

But a month ago or six weeks ago, my team would not have been able to have a shooting night like we had tonight and stay in the game against an elite team like Villanova.

That's how much we've grown. We've grown to the point that we understand there's going to be nights the ball doesn't go in the basket and you've got to find other ways.

And we held Villanova to 33 percent shooting. Most times that's going to be good enough. But tonight it wasn't. So really, really proud of my team. I congratulate Coach Wright and Villanova. They're the gold standard in this league.

We've won a lot of games during our time in the Big East.

Second-most to them. And I hope we've got to the point where the Big East just isn't a Northeastern league. There's some pretty good basketball played in the Midwest as well.

**Q. You just went off of that saying that hopefully it's not just in the East. What can you say about the evolution of Creighton basketball? And Ryan, your playing side, what you can say about that even though you lost today.**

COACH MCDERMOTT: Our evolution started the first year. We played the championship the first year. And then we had a little hiccup there that second year. But since then we've been pretty consistent.

And there's great programs, great coaches in this league, and we're honored to be part of it. And this is our fourth time sitting up here talking to you after one of these losses in the championship game, and that's tough to swallow.

But I'm so proud of this group for how much they've grown. First game of the season, November 9th, November 10th, we were down eight to ten points to Arkansas-Pine Bluff at halftime. And from November 10th to March 10th, we're sitting here and it's a tied game with Villanova in the Big East championship team with a two and a half minutes to go.

My message all season is about process, we had a bunch of young guys, new guys who didn't know each other. We've got to lose ourselves in the process and hopefully we'll grow in that process that the results will come. And they have.

And I know they're disappointed. You can see the disappointment all over the big fella's face. But this isn't the end. This is just the beginning. We have good stuff awaiting us next week. On November 10th at halftime in that locker room when we're talking about finding a way to get back into the game against Arkansas-Pine Bluff we probably weren't thinking that was possible.

RYAN KALKBRENNER: I thought in the first half they



were doubling me every time I touched the ball. I kicked out, we ended up getting good shots out of it, even though they weren't falling. If I had to play the game again, I'd make the exact same pass and take the exact same shot. They just weren't falling tonight.

Second half, they stopped doubling as much, I was able to get a couple of baskets. But missed a couple down the stretch I wish I would have made. But it happened.

**Q. Usually when you play a smaller team like Villanova where they can go outside, a guy like Dixon is able to play outside. You were still able to completely score inside at will. Almost had 20 tonight. What was working? You obviously got the size advantage, but from a versatility standpoint, what was working for you to beat them and score almost at will?**

RYAN KALKBRENNER: I think that's just Coach put me in a lot of good positions to get the ball, and my teammates trust me to go get the ball when they pass it, knowing that even if I'm kind of open they'll put it up there let me go get it. They just trust me to be able to make some space and go get the ball, I guess.

**Q. Obviously the 3-pointer is part of the game. Is there ever a point in any game where you would tell your guys to get away from the 3 and just try to focus everything on going inside?**

COACH MCDERMOTT: A lot of the 3s were as a result of going inside, first. Then the defense collapsed. To Ryan's point, that was their approach to the game tonight. But it's how we build our program. And I think you could argue Villanova has built their program much the same way. We want guys with skill, guys that can handle it, pass it, shoot it and understand how the play the game. And we both have those.

Most of theirs are seniors, and a lot of mine are freshmen. So it's different in that regard. But as a coach you don't ever take away a kid's confidence. As soon as they don't think you believe in them, then why would they believe in themselves?

O'Connell turned one down right before halftime. I grabbed him on the way to the locker room and I said, you need to shoot that 100 out of 100 times. This says "let it fly" on my sleeve for a reason.

And obviously he anchors it in there and we're going to get him touches and the defense is going to react to where he's at in his posting. And that's going to create opportunities for other guys.

And Kaluma shot it really good last night. Hawkins has shot it great all year. Trey Alexander has been playing great recently. O'Connell has been a 35 to 40 percent 3-point shooter his whole career. We just had a night where nobody could make one. And we still had a chance to win the game.

No, I would never tell my guys not to shoot it.

**Q. Can you just talk about the play of Trey Alexander? Obviously he didn't shoot the ball well, but no one really did tonight. But the fact that he still had eight, five and five and zero turnovers, how impressed were you with him going the distance and playing beneficially?**

COACH MCDERMOTT: I've been incredibly impressed with Trey. He's walked into a very unique and difficult situation to the injury to Nembhard, and he hasn't blinked.

He's played great basketball. His play last night in the second half was outstanding. Obviously he was big against Marquette as well. And he plays both ends of the floor.

I trust him to guard Collin Gillespie. And that says everything you need to know. I believe in his ability to do that. Collin is a heck of a player, and he forced him into some tough shots tonight.

But sometimes good offense beats good defense. And in a couple of those plays, that was the case. But Trey's been terrific and a big reason that we were able to overcome, really, what could be a season-ending for your team injury when you lose someone as good as Nembhard.

The fact is the next man up was Trey Alexander, and he was ready, is the reason that our name will be called tomorrow night.

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