

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 12, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Villanova Wildcats

Coach Jay Wright

Collin Gillespie

Justin Moore

Postgame Media Conference



Villanova - 54, Creighton - 48

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Villanova.

COACH WRIGHT: First of all, I just want to say what a great job Creighton did all year. Losing a point guard, freshmen, first-year guy, Hawkins. Coach McDermott, if Ed Cooley didn't do such a good job he should be coach of the year. Unbelievable what he did with that team.

They're a good team. They can make a run. They can make a run in the tournament. I like where our league is going into this tournament.

And secondly, I want to say how blessed we all think we are to play here, be part of the Big East in Madison Square Garden. You guys were here, you watched it. There's nothing like this. Playing the game is awesome, but doing it in here, with these fans, and at this storied arena, it's just off the charts.

Sorry for the soliloquy, but a great college basketball game and two really good defensive teams. Creighton has been known as a great offensive team, but this team is a very good defensive team. You saw what they did to Providence.

We just couldn't score. And we just had to grind it out and tough it out defensively and then make some big plays at the end, which Collin did. And Justin Moore had a great one to finish it off. I think that was the key to the game.

Q. You brought it up, playing here in the Garden. In all the years that Villanova has been successful, just what you can say how this stacks up with some of these recent years, and just what it means to you to be here

in this place?

COACH WRIGHT: This year -- maybe because for two years we didn't get to do it -- it's always a thrill. We gotta get ourselves settled down and get ready for the NCAA Tournament -- not tonight, but tomorrow, because this is a thrill, man.

You go to the first round of the NCAA Tournament, it's not like this. And you're not in this arena. And you're not in New York City. This is a big jolt. This is big time. And we all know it and we feel it.

We've got to work tomorrow on getting this out of our system, because it's such a big deal. And it's a thrill in your lifetime to be part of this.

Q. Nine years now since this new league was formed. You've either won the postseason tournament or the regular-season title every time. If someone would have told you that nine years ago, what would you have thought?

COACH WRIGHT: First, if someone told me nine years ago that this league would be this good and I was all-time Big East guy -- I was scared when it first broke up, I was.

When you look at what Val Ackerman and her staff has done, you look at what Fox Sports has done, you look at the production of this tournament, where this league is, I would have never thought we could be here.

And the addition of Connecticut is great. And this league, I've said it, you guys are sick of hearing me, but it is the best basketball league in the country. There's no doubt. You watch. There's no tournament like this in the country.

So for us to have had success in that group is something I think we're all going to look back on and really be proud of. But right now it's just, like, this one we're going to enjoy it and tomorrow we've got to get on to the next game.

Q. You've done it before, obviously. You've been there on celebrations. Could you just describe what



being up the ladder, you have Sinatra in the Garden, feels like?

COACH WRIGHT: It is. You just -- it's an out-of-body experience. Last night, when they were playing the National Anthem, the trumpet player, and I'm looking up and the place is packed and listening to that music. And the lights.

I've always come here as a kid, as an assistant coach to watch the Knicks, to watch the Holiday Festival and now you're down here on the court.

You take a second to think about that every now and then, and it is a surreal experience. You can't believe you're a part of it.

Q. You guys have plenty of guys hitting clutch shots in the end. What was it like to see Collin -- do you just kind of expect it at this point? Also could you expand on his journey from sitting out, missing it last year to today?

COACH WRIGHT: I can't ever say I expect it, because I'm probably a pessimist in my mind; I'm always preparing for the next play if we don't score. So I'm still kind of surprised when he makes those plays. It's incredible.

But we put it in his hands to make those plays. And then he was exhausted. So we put it in Justin's hands to make the right play and he finished the game off that way.

So to have these two be able to do that at the end of the game is huge. That's why you win championships, when you've got two guards like this.

In terms of Collin's journey, you guys, you don't know -- you don't need any drama, but what he had to go through in the offseason, he was still going to rehab all summer.

So he didn't really get to start playing until late August. So it took him time to get it going. I could tell early in the season he wasn't 100 percent yet. I think he is. Now he's got the ankle injury. He's as mentally tough as anybody we've had. And we've had some great ones.

Q. You've obviously had this program at a high level for a long time now. What's been the biggest challenge in maintaining this level of consistent success? And then how has the quality of this league over the last eight, nine years helped you, if at all?

COACH WRIGHT: The league has definitely helped us. I feel like in '16 -- did we loose to Seton Hall in the championship game? I felt like that game, if not for that

game Kevin Willard played us in a way defensively that no one had ever played us.

It forced us, going into the tournament, to prepare for that if someone did that again. And a couple of teams did, and we were ready. And I've always felt like there's so many great coaches in this league and they don't rely on just talent. They're all great X and O guys.

You get to see everything that you're going to see in the NCAA Tournament. So that's about the league.

And the challenge of keeping it at this level, it changes every year. And one of the things, this year challenges like Collin and Jermaine, they came in and won the national championship in their first year. They think this just happens.

And it's not their fault because it did happen. That's all they know. So you've got to keep them hungry. You've got to keep them humble. And they've got to be really smart and have high character to do that. And we've had intelligent and high character guys like these guys.

Q. Do you believe that there is a quality called, it's clutch? Is clutch a quality that people have? Are there certain characteristics about how Collin is in the game that he makes those plays at the end?

COACH WRIGHT: Do you want him to answer that?

Q. That's for you.

COACH WRIGHT: Whatever you want to call that word, but I know what you're saying. I look at it as no fear of failure. He has no fear that if he misses those shots and we lose it's not going to affect how he thinks of himself.

So he's just playing with absolutely no fear because he knows he's put the work in. He knows he's got a great family that loves him. He knows his teammates love him. That's what he cares about. Did I work hard? Did I prepare? Win or lose I'll take the result. It's a unique mindset. That's what the great ones have.

Q. Collin, what is it about you and this particular group of players that in these really tight, uncomfortable situations, you guys sort of make the plays and keep your cool?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: We lean on each other. We trust in each other and have confidence in each other to make plays. Like Coach said, I was tired on the one last possession. We gave it to Justin, and we were going to let Justin make a play.

And we've worked on these situations so many times in practices. And we've been in close games where we've been in situations like that where Justin's had to take a shot. Jermaine's had to go make a play. Or I had to go make a play.

So I think it's just playing together, trusting each other and having confidence in each other.

Q. You mentioned in 2016, when you played Seton Hall and how their defensive effort prepared you for the NCAA Tournament. You can probably see some shades of that tonight with Creighton. What did they do so well to limit you guys from getting out to a larger lead than you did?

COACH WRIGHT: I don't want to tell you because we've still got to play some games. And I'll tell you, and Connecticut did some things that they -- I think that this league has the best coaches in the country because they don't just get one-and-done guys and rely on talent.

They get great players but they know they've got to coach, too. And they have great schemes.

And Connecticut did -- St. John's did some good things. Connecticut picked up on that and did some things. And then Creighton looked at some of the things Connecticut did and did it.

And I don't want to talk about it, but you could see it. It worked. But we found a way and we've got to go back and we have work to do to prepare for those situations.

Q. Throughout the years that you've been successful, not only in the conference but outside the conference, you've been doing it with different types of teams and employed different types of systems because of the players that you have. What is the common denominator for you that would be able to take those teams and really turn them into success?

COACH WRIGHT: Great question. I'm glad I get a chance to answer that. You're right because we had different kinds of players and we played differently.

But the things that are consistent are high character, intelligence and willingness to be coached. And more desire to be coached. And so they're all different kind of players. But they all are intelligent. They have high character, and they want you to coach them and make them better. That's rare. And we're blessed to have those guys.

Q. Collin, this tournament especially you and your team have been able to collect yourselves and take control of the second half of all of the games. How does this speak to your ability to deal with and perform under pressure?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: I think it's just -- we talk about it every day -- keeping a good attitude and just grinding out, knowing that 40 minutes is a long game. And we have complete confidence in all our guys. We're going to go out there and battle and try to play Villanova basketball for 40 minutes.

If we're doing that, we can come back in the locker room after a game and look each other in the eye and know that we gave it up for each other, then we'll live with the result.

Q. Justin, you've been here for a while now. And to the younger athletes, anyone that's coming, looking up at you guys and all of you guys, winning year after year, what do you have to say to the younger athletes that have to deal with persevering and overcoming things to get to the top where they want to be?

JUSTIN MOORE: I think like Coach and Collin talked about. It's character. Having a great attitude. Having no fear of what can happen. We always put the work in. And if you put the work in, no matter what happens, you come back and get better the next day. That's something we do all year long, whether we lose or come back and get better.

I think that -- praise to our coaches who teach us a lot, and the players who come from great families and stuff like that, having a great attitude.

Q. Tonight was not the best shooting performance from both teams, but Justin and Collin, you guys both hit three apiece. What was Coach White telling you guys in the huddles and timeouts about making your shots at the end of games. And, again, a game that was, for both teams, not a very good shooting performance overall?

JUSTIN MOORE: Just mixing it up. We know that shot was going to be there. And take it when it's open, but also try to get in the lane and make plays for others, or get to the rim or get to a mid-range pullup. And know you can always get the 3 ball when it comes back to us. Coach always talks about mixing it up.

Q. Justin, your freshman year you had the tournament taken away from you guys for obvious reasons. And last year you didn't quite finish the way you wanted to. To win tonight and for you to win the Big East Tournament, what's it mean to you?

JUSTIN MOORE: It's special. Being able to play in this was amazing with my brothers and the coaches and the staff. Freshmen year, not being able to play, that really hurt. And last year, me being hurt, trying to play, that really hurt me a lot, too.

Our guys being healthy, thank God we were able to push through and be able to play in this. And it was a great opportunity for us, and we took advantage of it. And I'm proud of our guys.

Q. Collin, you've become the first player to win Scholar-Athlete, Big East Player and Tournament Most Outstanding Player in the same year. How does it feel? Did you ever expect to accomplish something like this when you came here to Villanova?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: I mean, for me I think it's a lot of credit to my teammates and my coaches. They push me every day in practice and games to just be the best version of myself. And a lot of that credit goes to those guys because they put me in position to be successful.

And then if you told me this five years ago, I would question you; but I've worked hard, and I don't know if I would have believed you if you told me five years ago, but that's just a credit to the staff and how hard they've pushed me and my teammates for having confidence in me.

Q. Besides watching the selection with your team tomorrow, have you settled into a routine? Do you have a routine for tomorrow?

COACH WRIGHT: We kind of do. We have an event at Villanova, a lot of our alums, former players and donors come, and we all -- and the families -- family's most important. And we eat dinner together, and we all sit in front and we watch. We do our media.

And then we meet as a team and then make our plan, once we know who we're playing, we make our plan for the week. But before that I go home and rest, I hope. I'm looking forward to resting.

Q. Collin, did you watch -- I obviously know you guys got knocked out in the quarters, but did you watch the whole Big East Tournament? And what does it mean after missing the postseason season last year to come back to win it this year?

COLLIN GILLESPIE: I did watch it. I think it was the day after my surgery. So I was a little in and out of it. But I watched it through the end, I watched Georgetown win. And what was your second?

Q. To come back and to win it after missing it last year.

COACH WRIGHT: Yeah, it means a lot. Obviously it hurt not to be out there with those guys in the Big East Tournament, NCAA Tournament, and to have to watch on TV and then and go and sit in the stands and watch was definitely difficult and different for me.

But I'm grateful to be back on the floor with my teammates and coaches. And that's really all I can think about, is just how grateful I am to be with these guys again.

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