

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Xavier Musketeers

Coach Sean Miller

Adam Kunkel

Colby Jones

Jack Nunge

Postgame Media Conference



COACH MILLER: I tried to encourage them in a lot of ways. Maybe even in some ways I was discouraging throughout the game. Just keeping them in the fight, trying to get the next four-minute segment and try to get towards the end of the game where we had a chance to win.

Very seldom do you look at a stat sheet and the team that you played shot 61 percent from the game, 50 percent from 36, 6-for-7 from the free-throw line and we win. That may say a lot about our offense. But when we needed key stops, we got them down the stretch. But we had to overcome our defense tonight in a big way to win.

Q. I know you won the NIT in this building last year but was there any part of you that wanted to exorcize any Big East demons given the heartbreak over the last couple years?

JACK NUNGE: I think coming into this tournament we're not coming here just to play one game; we're trying to win it all. And I think it's a fight no matter who we're going to play. It's March so records are out the window. We've got to be ready from the jump no matter who we're playing against.

ADAM KUNKEL: I would just say, like Jack said, it's survive and advance. We're all coming in ready. We know it's March. We know the regular season is over with and this is a new year. So we're just trying to get some wins.

Q. You were down nine at the half which was the largest deficit you guys came back from this season. But with that, what does it say for the team to fight through that and come away with the victory? And what were your emotions with the up and down and back and forth?

COACH MILLER: Look, I want to give DePaul credit, too. Sometimes when you say it's our defense, it's almost as if the other team is not good. We played DePaul three times. They haven't had a full cast.

When they've gotten No. 14, Nick, when he started to play

Xavier - 89, DePaul - 84

COACH MILLER: My opening statement is very clear. We're thrilled to still be alive. I thought that DePaul played a great game. Could have easily lost that game three, five, 10 times over.

But I think the resiliency of our group, the experience of these guys sticking with it and finishing the game that, quite frankly, wasn't going well for us throughout, it's a difficult task. And usually -- I don't want to say usually -- but many times you have to get through that entire game fix it and try to be better the next time.

A number of these guys in the game kept fighting and I thought Colby was really the difference on offense down the stretch. We really went to him and he delivered.

Q. At what point in the game did you decide to just start running the Colby offense there?

COACH MILLER: We did. We just kind of went straight set play, and we called his name and number quite a bit, not just because of his scoring but, number one, he can get fouled. Number two, he's a very good decision-maker. He can pass the ball.

And I thought the shots he was getting and we were getting going to him really set us apart. And in my mind that was the difference in the game down the stretch.

Q. In the closing moments of the game, what conversation did you have with your team when you were trailing?

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

with them, he's blocking five shots a game. When you started to look at their offense, they're going to him more. He gives them a different dimension.

But I will tell you in March so much, my experience is simply players making plays, not giving in, being resilient, staying in the fight, not letting the deficit at half become a part of our mindset in the second half. Just continuing to play, continuing to play.

And these three guys really did a great job. I talked about Colby. Obviously I thought A.K. hit some really big key shots and did a great job defensively down the stretch.

And then Jack, I mean, look, he had 23 points in 10 rebounds, four assists, no turnovers. So these three guys were a big reason we were able to stay in the game and win.

And a big stat for us is our turnovers. We played the entire second half with one turnover. We had eight for the game. Not easy in March to play with eight turnovers. And Colby had half of them -- at halftime, at halftime. (Laughter).

If he needs humbled, we'll give him a little bit of that right there. He had four of the eight at halftime. But he put it together in the second half.

Q. Jack, as the game was progressing and you guys were rallying that comeback towards the end, what did you think was the key to success to getting this win?

JACK NUNGE: I think just staying the course. It's a 40-minute game. So not one minute, not one more or one segment is going to determine the outcome. You had to play until the very end.

And I thought we had a really resilient group that just stayed with it, stuck together, and we were able to come out on top.

Q. You think back on what you said about tournaments, that was probably the key to the game, because I look at what DePaul did from the field -- 61 percent, 50 from 3, and 85 from the line. Can you explain how they shot so well and you came with the win?

COACH MILLER: No, I haven't seen the stat sheet. I told these guys at halftime they were 20-for-29 at the first half, 7-for-10 from 3, and 2-for-2 from the free-throw line. If we, this afternoon in our shoot-around, shot that percentage five on zero, just running through our plays, I would say we're executing it well. They did it 5-on-5.

I give them credit. Some of it is we have to look at what hurt us. We can do better. For whatever reason, we didn't come out swinging. We were tentative for a lot of the first half. And when the ball keeps going in, it can sometimes strip you of your confidence.

That's why I think this win is so important for us. We're able to overcome that and stay in the fight, stay in the moment, make plays down the stretch and really lead with a hard-fought victory.

In this tournament, I've been a player in this tournament a billion years ago. No one really looks back and says how you won, it's either you won or you lost. And right now, for us, we have to be the best team we can be tomorrow night but yet we're there. We're one of four teams.

And I told these guys one of the magical parts of playing in the Big East Conference is to be on this Friday night semifinal. There's nothing like it. It's something they'll carry with them forever.

I'm an example of that. And we have to be prepared and be more ready from the get-go than we were tonight. Our defense was not good and certainly DePaul had a lot to do with that.

Q. Colby, did coach say anything to you there in the second half, like were you aware that you were going to start getting those opportunities that you got?

COLBY JONES: No. I mean, he jumped me at halftime. I felt like that kind of got me going. That's just the relationship that we have. I trust him; he trusts me. So he called my number in the second half and I just tried to deliver for my team.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.