

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Xavier Musketeers

Coach Sean Miller

Quincy Olivari

Desmond Claude

Postgame Media Conference



an incredible team. I personally think they're better this year than last year. That doesn't mean they will win the National Championship, but their offensive efficiency and their scoring punch and their balance is just at another level this year than it was last year.

Maybe they hid that in the NCAA Tournament a year ago, but throughout the Big East season, they're really dominant on both ends. It's hard to score on 'em when they're on defense and it's really difficult to defend them when they have the ball. So, we lost to a terrific team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Quincy, you got emotional when you checked out for the final time. What went through your head there when you were checked out kind of as you reflect on your year at Xavier?

QUINCY OLIVARI: I mean, it's just been a long five years. Just been a long five years. Every year I learned something new. And then to be able to put everything that I learned at Rice and be able to showcase that on the biggest stage in my final year, it was a lot.

I came here and I had a goal that I wanted to achieve and I've been beating myself up a lot lately since Sunday. Because once the news came out that I didn't make all-conference team, I kind of looked at myself as a failure, this season as a failure personally. And just the way I worked and the way I competed and the respect I earned, it kind of just felt like a stab in the back for the whole Sunday.

Just talking with Coach Miller that Sunday, and then everybody just congratulating me, and I just kept telling 'em to stop congratulating me because I didn't do anything. I hadn't earned anything. I just had a mission to come out here and prove everyone wrong. Whoever voted for the awards, to just prove them -- like I led its league in scoring, I can score with the best of 'em.

My team is a very well-coached and very well-connected team, and just because we're a nine seed doesn't mean

UConn - 80, Xavier - 67

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

SEAN MILLER: I'll make a statement. Really very, very proud of our team. We've overcome a lot from the month of July or August this past summer until now. I don't think I've ever coached a team that's gone through more adversity when it comes to season-ending injuries and different players not being available than we've had.

These two guys, Des and Q, and put Dayvion McKnight in their group, I said it yesterday and I really, I'll stand by it. I don't think three players have meant more to their respective team and program anywhere in the country than these three guys have meant to us.

We rode 'em from the very beginning all the way through today. I think my comment about the game itself is, we did the best we could. In the first half, to be down one at the half, I thought we played a lot of energy on defense, got back in transition. Had three turnovers. Did a lot of great things.

But we weren't able to sustain it. We simply ran out of gas. Our lack of depth, lack of size, and just the fact that we played last night against that team, we just -- we weren't able to sustain all the very good things that we did in the first half in the second half.

And, in addition to that, any team that's going to beat UConn for the remainder of the year, they're going to have to be really, really good and they're going to have to play a great game. I think Danny and his staff have put together



anything. We were competing in that first half, and I told everybody last night, like to unpack your bags because we staying. Just to maintain confidence. As I walked out on that floor, I told myself that you're back at Texas. If you remember when we played Texas last year in Austin, at Rice, and I said this is your second chance on the biggest stage to make some noise.

And just to fall short and all the emotions, just to come out of what could have been, what happened, finally being able to release the hurt that I had been holding in since Sunday, it was tough. Then to go through the line and have the respectful words that the coaching staff from UConn said, it was a lot, it was definitely a lot.

Q. You were a guy on this team last year that played a little bit here and there, had some moments. I think you averaged four points a game. Obviously you win most improved player this year in the conference. What do you think went into that from your perspective? Why were you able to make this jump that you made this year?

DESMOND CLAUDE: Just working out hard. Looking at the system. Looking at opportunities. Just trying to be better. Follow Colby and watch how he played last year, the opportunities that he got, the same with Conklin. Just being able to recognize that in the game and notice how other teams were guarding me.

So it was like a positive adjustment. And after that it was just a confidence thing. During the summer I had like my daily affirmations in the mornings where I would tell myself certain things to start off the morning and just attack the day. Eventually, when you work hard every day, you keep putting in the work, you don't take shortcuts, you keep going, you keep going even when you're tired, that it's eventually going to pay off. I think that's what happened this season.

Q. Can you talk about what Quincy meant to you both on and off the court?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah. Quincy had arguably what I think is one of the great seasons in Xavier history, really. If you just stack up the numbers, they don't lie. I think the one difference between Quincy and a lot of others that you compare him to is the schedule he played against, both this year's Big East, 20 games, 10 at home, 10 on the road. We played a No. 1 seed, I think, six times.

Look, the one thing I've learned, that's not a good thing. There's no trophy given, there's nothing you can brag about to say you've played a 1 seed six or seven times, whatever we have. But these guys, that's the schedule

they performed against, and so that's No. 1.

I think the second thing is, Quincy has a charisma about him, a leadership and a smile about him that's very contagious. Sometimes when you have a personality like his, it works both ways. You catch him on a good day, he's this. Catch him on a bad day, uh-oh, he's that. That's not him. He's the same every day, and that's to his credit.

When you recruit people like him to your program, there's a lot that you know, there's a lot that you hope is right. And I don't think any of us, any of us -- look at Quincy coming to Xavier, performing at Xavier, who he was, both on the court, in the games, in practice, every single day leading up to this tournament, as anything other than A plus and exceptional.

We had a transfer a year ago who Quincy knows, obviously Des was his teammate, Souley Boum. Souley had a very good year as well. But those two guys, when I look at them coming here, they really impacted our program in a very significant manner.

In terms of Des as well, you have to understand the difference between being a good freshman on a very veteran-laden team, and being forced to be one of the top guys right away. That's a huge discrepancy. It's very different. I think the way that Des has improved as the year's gone on, just the performance that he has had, the season that he's had, that also speaks not only to him, but his bright, bright future as well.

I wish Dayvion was up here as well, because statistically, and being our heart and soul, I can make the case that him sandwiched between Quincy and Des, those three guys, man, they had great individual seasons. They showed up every single day in practice. Talk about building a culture, building a program. You want people and players like all three of them.

That's a long-winded answer to your question about Quincy, but the belief that I have in these three, the meaning they have had to this year's team, I wish I could have helped them a little bit more. Because, look, in the Big East right now the difference between finishing in ninth place this season and fourth is six to eight plays. It really is. It's six to eight plays. We have nothing but I think a lot of pride in how hard we went about it. We aren't perfect, but I think to some degree we fought all the way to the end.

Q. You talked about all this throughout this press conference, but just to reiterate, you had all the injuries. I believe you played the toughest schedule in the country. Have you ever, as a player or a coach, experienced a season like this and my other question

would be is, how do you move forward?

SEAN MILLER: Yeah, no doubt, we overcame a lot. I think at the end of the day we've had, first of all, a lot of change from last year. So when you think about our team last year, we knew that a lot of those guys would be moving on. Then Colby Jones joined them, because he made a great decision. He became a NBA player. But when Zach Freemantle and Jerome Hunter went down in the summer, that was after our recruiting window had closed. So we really didn't have much to turn to.

We ended up being able to get Sasa Ciani and Lazar Djokovic, Gytis Nemeikša in the summer, and thank goodness we did. That helped us practice and then each of those guys contributed depth to our team. But, so these guys lived it. I think the role that they would have had, if we would have had maybe better health having those guys, I think they would have had a little bit more room for error. I think, no doubt about it, I think we could have been a tournament team, and those six to eight plays that I described clearly could have gone to our favor. Down the home stretch, too, Dailyn Swain, who was on the all-freshmen team, Dailyn at home right now recovering from getting his appendix removed. Losing him at the time we did didn't help matters either, we were already short handed. I think the rest that we were trying to give these guys toward the end of the year made it even more difficult.

That's why last night's win was so satisfying. That we were able to do it, to me, in so many ways, short handed. But you learn a lot in sports when adversity strikes and obstacles. I think these guys, lessons that they have learned this year, they will have forever. In so many ways I think what we've gone through will strengthen our future. Look, I don't know if the NIT will come calling. If it does, I do think we have more basketball left in us and we'll embrace that if it does. If it doesn't, we'll reconvene. I think these guys especially should have their head held very, very high on what they have done for our program and really to their own respective individual years.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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