

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

St. John's Red Storm

Coach Rick Pitino

Jordan Dingle

Daniss Jenkins

Postgame Media Conference



RICK PITINO: I thought that was something I was very impressed with. Because one thing about Connecticut, they do it all the time, you think you're in the game, you're up one or two at halftime, ten-minute mark, they're only down four or six and they win by 25. Happens all the time. But it hasn't happened against us. So I'm real proud of them.

Q. Rick, you mentioned the transition. Your defense as a whole, are you upset with it or is it just sometimes everything you put up goes in?

RICK PITINO: Look, I think they've gotten better. They played great defense last night. They did not play -- most important thing we tried to do in the last ten days was change our offense to play at a pace that really helps our team. I felt that we're never going to be a great defensive team. We're playing a 6"5' power forward who's really a small forward. These two guys are pretty good defensive players, but the rest of the guys are just okay.

So we try hard on defense, but we've gotta win with good offense. And, you know, you score 90 points against the defending national champions, I think you're doing a lot of things right. When we get in the half court we're okay. Not great, not bad. The transition defense really hurt us because that's a high percentage.

Q. Any nerves for Sunday or do you think you guys are --

RICK PITINO: Well, your paper said we're going to the Big Dance. (Laughter). So why would I have nerves? I mean, if the New York Post is not the Bible, who am I going to believe? (Laughter).

Absolutely not. When the Post comes out, I believe in the Post. I was dancing all night last night. (Laughter).

Q. But are you looking forward to Sunday?

RICK PITINO: Yeah, I think -- I want to see who we're going to play, obviously, and prepare and get ready.

UConn 95, St. John's 90.

RICK PITINO: So I want to congratulate Connecticut. They're very deserving of a defending champion. They're just a great, great offensive basketball team. Real proud of our guys. I saw some things in Jordan Dingle that I absolutely loved tonight, a competitive fire in him that was great to see. Daniss has always had it. Jordan keeps getting better and better and better. And, unfortunately, we just couldn't get a run, get over the top.

Biggest problem was our transition defense. They were eight for nine in the first half, and that put us in the box. Sometimes you can't always go to the offensive glass, you gotta get back. But these guys played their tails off, real proud of them. We were hoping for a Big East crown, but the other team was better than us. We've played them three times to the wire, and they find a way to win.

Cam Spencer does all the things that are terrific. Newton was great. They have a great basketball team. And somebody said to me, how does it feel to play on your home court where they say -- and you're a road team. I said, well, I coached quite a few years at Kentucky. We were always the home team wherever we went.

And they're the Kentucky of the east. They got the greatest fan base in basketball, and Kentucky had the greatest fan base in that part of the country. Kansas has the greatest fan base in their part of the country. So we'll get it. We lost a lot of fans in the last 20 years. We gotta get them back. And I think efforts like tonight will get them stimulated and get them back.

Q. What do you think about your team's ability to keep fighting back in this game for all 40 minutes?



Jordan came here to play in the tournament, going to get his wishes. And we'll see who we play. We'll see what's going to go on.

You know, we played a really tough schedule this year, guys. Really tough schedule. You know, we haven't had too many easy games, and we've played Marquette twice, tough. We beat Creighton. Should have beat them on the road. With the exception of Seton Hall at Seton Hall, we've played really well in the Big East. Big East is a hell of a conference, as you know.

Q. Coach, they had a five-point lead at halftime. You were even with them in the second half and they had six more free throws. Is that the game right there?

RICK PITINO: Pretty much. You get behind on them and they can burn you, certainly. But they're a great basketball team. You gotta give credit. They do a lot of things really, really well. You know, they're building a hell of a program, a hell of a program. They've built a hell of a program from Jim Calhoun on. Kevin Ollie won the championship.

St. John's can get there. It's going to take a lot of work by a lot of people. It's not just us. It's not just the players. It's going to take a lot of work to turn around St. John's, in so many areas.

Q. Jordan, can you sort of describe what Selection Sunday has mostly been like for you during your college career? And what you anticipate it will be like this time?

JORDAN DINGLE: So Selection Sunday for my career has been -- the first year, you know, sitting at home, COVID like everybody else. And then the last two years watching Yale and Princeton play in the Ivy League championship, knowing that my season was over.

But this year is different. So I'm really looking forward to it this time. Selection Sunday really hasn't meant anything to me because I, unfortunately, was never a part of it, never had the ability to be. And I'm really grateful to God that I'm here with this group of guys and I'm going to get that chance.

Q. For Jordan and Daniss, you guys are both having Selection Sunday on Sunday and you're looking forward to the tournament, but the entire season, what are you guys most proud of for your team? This is the first time in 24 years that you're here on a Friday. Are you guys proud of yourselves for how the season turned out?

DANISS JENKINS: You know, I mean, we fought today.

Like it wasn't our best game. We had the sole intentions on winning the Big East tournament, but at the same time I'm really proud of the team. Because what I've been saying the whole year is we could have easily went the other way. When you lose eight out of ten games, it was like it was all bad. Nothing was good from that. We thought postseason was over at that time.

But as I've been saying, we've showed our real character. I mean, we showed pride, and we fought. That's all you can ask for. We came in every day, practiced hard, tried to get better at the things we were bad at, and we came together as a team. I've never played with Jordan Dingle, the leading scorer last year in the country. And then he comes here and he's off the (indiscernible) playing off the ball and things like that. So everything was different.

But I was just really proud to see us bond together and really just try to be special. And, yes, tonight was a step forward for St. John's. But like Coach said, there's a lot more work to do, and we're looking forward to the tournament.

Q. Coach, reflecting on the incident where you and Dan drew technical fouls, how did things play out from your perspective?

RICK PITINO: I haven't had a technical in a really long time. I was really looking forward to that moment. (Laughter).

Q. Along those lines, you've been in some Big East kerfuffles before. It seemed a little chaotic whether it was you Dan or Tom. There was a lot going on.

RICK PITINO: And then I had to go against Bobby Hurley, he brings in another Hall-of-Famer going against me sitting at courtside.

Q. What happened?

RICK PITINO: No, I just was -- we were in serious foul trouble. I had to play without Soriano and without Ledlum the entire half basically at that point. And I felt that things weren't going our way. And I will say when I made those statements, they were contrived and they were statements I wanted to make, and they were technicals that I wanted to get.

Q. Rick, I mean, you can't be probably playing your best game of the season when you lose, but can you sort of describe how you're feeling about the way your team is playing going into whatever is next?

RICK PITINO: Yeah, I think they've worked, as D.J. said,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

they've worked very hard. And what I tried to point out to them was, guys, I've been in this situation where you have to win eight out of ten, you have to win six, seven in a row a lot in my life. That's what happens when you're old and you've coached a lot.

I've been in that situation and teams have come through for me as a coach, and they came through as a coach again. But it's really about them. I live vicariously through them. And I think on Selection Sunday, they're going to get some nice things happen to them. I think they're a dangerous team. I think when you score as much as we're scoring, I think good things are going to happen.

Do we need to get better -- I think we're doing a better job of rebounding at times. We're making our free throws. We're passing the ball well, but Connecticut is Connecticut and they're just a machine. They can beat you 100 different ways, and that's -- you know, sometimes you can have great talent, but talent doesn't play well together.

But when you get 26 assists tonight, 23 assists, they have open shots that are really good, but they go after a better shot that's great. And that's the makings of a great offensive basketball team because they're always looking for a better shot for their guys. And you can learn a lot. I tell our guys you can learn a lot from teams that you respect, and we certainly have great respect for them.

Q. Jordan, the way you guys played tonight, does that give you confidence going forward that you played so well, that there's only a handful of teams that could have matched your guys' intensity and performance tonight's?

JORDAN DINGLE: Yeah, I think so. To be honest with you, I don't think that we played a great game for all 40 minutes, and that's kind of what it comes down to. We've gotten a lot better with that as the course of the season has gone on and our ability to fight back like D.J. pointed out earlier. I'm really proud of us for that.

Our competitive spirit never died and never waived, and we believed in ourselves till the very end. So I think that's the big takeaway for today's game, and I'm going to keep going forward.

RICK PITINO: One thing I'll say in closing. We've had three turnovers, six turnovers, six turnovers, five turnovers against really good teams. I mean, in coaching some great teams, I had nine turnovers, ten turnovers. But we're not turning the ball over at all, which is a great sign going into March.

And so we've really gotten a lot better over the last three

weeks. It's what you want to see going into March. And I think we could -- obviously if we get the right match up, we could cause some serious damage.

But I want to thank all of you for the coverage this year. It's been a real interesting experience coaching St. John's. I don't say that in a positive or negative way. It's been interesting from driving over the Throgs Neck Bridge and having people curse and cut me off, it's been great. Thank you.

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