

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

St. John's Red Storm

Coach Rick Pitino

Zuby Ejiofor

Aaron Scott

Postgame Media Conference



it early. I just want to thank my coaching staff and my teammates for putting me in the position to be successful.

They told me, you know, to come out and be a lot more aggressive than I did last game, and that's exactly what I did. So I just want to give all the props to them. Coach P does a great job of just challenging us to be better every single game. Now it's on to the championship game, and we look forward to it.

Q. Zuby, from where you were from an individual standpoint at this time last season to what you did tonight, can you kind of just wrap your mind around it and see how far that you've come in 365 days?

ZUBY EJIOFOR: I mean, it's been crazy. It's been a crazy ride. Last year didn't go as planned. We want to be in these moments. We want to go into the NCAA Tournament.

This year we're putting ourselves in a great position to do that. Individually I knew I had a bigger role this year and a lot of -- a role to fill, you know, backing up Joel. I want to thank Coach P and the staff for preparing me for these moments, like I said. And all the player development sessions and the amount of time that I put in on the court, off the court to be able to do things that I did tonight.

Q. Coach, you just heard Zuby talk about the growth from last year to this year. To see that pay off on a stage like this, a career night, how do you kind of put it into words what that means to you?

RICK PITINO: When Zuby came in, I put him through a hard player development session. First thing I noticed is he never complained about the drills. He went through it. Then he shot the ball really well.

I said to his dad, I said, I got myself a hell of a player here. He said, I've been telling everybody Zuby can shoot. I said, well, Zuby can do a lot of things.

But every coach wants to have a player like him: selfless, just cares about the team. You get blessed in coaching

St. John's 79, Marquette 63

RICK PITINO: Tonight what I said to the young lady after the game, there's no panic in this stock market. These guys don't panic. Down, they dig in, they play hard. That's a very good Marquette team.

We were almost the perfect five tonight. M.J. is a five-plus now, so understand that. But we were like a five, five-minus tonight. We were brilliant at all phases of the game. This guy with a bad thumb at the end of the game got every loose ball. The big dog over here just was tremendous.

Last night he got a little frustrated because he didn't get the ball much, and tonight he just showed unbelievable leadership every time-out.

I don't know what was better, his play or his leadership tonight. They were both pretty extraordinary. But these two guys are what St. John's basketball should be about. It's all about the team. They're all about each other, and I'm really proud of them.

This was a brilliant night for us, and now we're in the championship game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Zuby, you set a St. John's and a Big East tournament record with 33 points. You also had the most points in a Big East tournament semifinal since Kemba Walker in 2011. Can you just describe what tonight felt like for you having that kind of a game?

ZUBY EJIOFOR: It was just an amazing feeling, and I got



him. I'm coaching 50 years, and there are very few Zubys that come along that just think about the team. Whether he scores 33 or 3, it's all about the team. Every time-out he's saying something positive to the guys.

We're lucky. We got him back again, and we're lucky to have him. He's our captain.

Q. Both of you guys, Sean Miller said about playing St. John's, the relentless pressure eventually breaks you down. When you guys were down early in this game, I leaned back on his comments and said, that's no problem, they'll be back. You guys just were attacking the ball all game long. I want you to tell me, do you think about that? Do you say, hey, we got this game even when you're down?

AARON SCOTT: The way we practice -- you know, we've been through it, we know -- we knew it was going to be a 40-minute game. We knew they were going to make their runs. We just keep telling each other, stay positive. Our captain, Zubu, encourages us every huddle, every time-out. Just stay positive. Keep getting stops.

ZUBU EJIOFOR: I think it's just, like he said, the way we practice and our identity is on defense. It starts on defense. Our willingness to win every single game. Pretty much everybody on this team hates losing. Coach P the most (laughing).

You know, we just love these types of moments. Whether we're down 15 or up, we stay level-headed and do whatever it takes to win, like I said.

Q. Aaron, I saw you nodding there as Coach was talking about Zubu's leadership in the huddles during the time-outs and what not. Can you tell me what he said that got you guys going?

AARON SCOTT: He keeps us going all the time, whether it's bad or good. You know, he stays solid. He never gets too low, never gets too high. Stays sane, and that's what we need each and every game, and that's what he brings.

Q. About the way the team was able to get it together in the second half after being down by 15 in the first?

AARON SCOTT: Say that again.

Q. What do you think about the way the team was able to get it together?

AARON SCOTT: Just staying together. We knew it was going to take all 40 minutes, and we knew we were just going to have to stay together through their runs and our

runs, and that's what we did.

Q. Coach, a lot will be made of Zubu's 33 points, and rightfully so, but can you also speak to the impact he had closing off on dribble drives and his impact being able to defend multiple positions?

RICK PITINO: Yeah, Zubu is getting better. We talked about his stance all day. He's getting better and better defensively. The good thing about him is he's had so much more growth. By the end of the summer, I want him to be a knock-down shooter, play some power forward as well. He has the ability because he has a very good-looking shot. He's improved his passing.

Tonight when you look at it, they're a really good team. They have 6 assists and 17 turnovers to our 17 assists and 11 turnovers. That's huge.

We did a terrific job of switching, matching up. Our coaches did a fabulous job of preparing with very little time. They paid us strict attention. I'm most proud that they all got Zubu the ball. We ran some plays where they thought they would play behind him, and he got the ball, but they got him the ball.

Kadary is very good at that. The whole team is very good at that. He made some great loose ball situations with a really sore thumb at the end of the game. Just dug in. Awesome, awesome young men.

I tell you, people keep saying to me, what about this year? What about this year is I've been so blessed to have such nice young men that I'm coaching. That to me is worth more than anything else. I'm very, very lucky.

Q. Zubu, yesterday four points, and then today obviously you explode. You got 17 and 12 against Marquette the last time out. Coach just talked about the team, making a concerted effort of getting you the ball today. How was it with your mindset after yesterday having an off game by your standards, but then today kind of turning it on and getting back to the way that you've been playing for most of the year?

ZUBU EJIOFOR: I just leave the past in the past. Obviously I didn't play to the level of my play and to the standard that Coach and everybody expects of me. So I just, like I said, came out more aggressive today. And I was able to -- my teammates were able to find me in situations where I could be successful.

It really paid off, and I'm really proud of how we stuck it through the entire night. When we're playing off each other and when everybody is really locked in defensively, we're a



really scary team. And I'm just really, like I said, so proud of each and every one of us for how we stepped up today.

Q. Rick, obviously you don't know who you are going to play. Either going to be either Connecticut or Creighton. Can you say a word or two about the challenges each team presents and what do you expect in the final?

RICK PITINO: No, I'm not going to say anything (smiling).

Q. Aaron, bloody lip against UConn earlier --

RICK PITINO: I'm too tired to think about it.

Q. Aaron, a bloody lip against UConn earlier this year. A messed-up thumb towards the end today. Is that just the type of player you are helping your team to a win in any way possible?

AARON SCOTT: That's the type of team we've got. That's our identity. Nothing stops us from playing: injuries, bloody lips, messed-up thumbs, hamstring, nothing. I want to be out there to help my team win.

RICK PITINO: Before we leave, 35 years with really no recognition -- a little bit the other night at the Big East -- but someone for 35 years has worked in this Big East, and it's amazing to me that with all the exposure that Dave Gavitt started -- and John Paquette has just been an incredible man -- but never, ever getting any exposure at all. And so we waited to have this great year to present this to you (laughing). (Presenting jersey to Moderator)

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