

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

St. John's Red Storm

Rick Pitino

Bryce Hopkins

Oziyan Sellers

Postgame Media Conference



St. John's - 85, Providence - 72

THE MODERATOR: Coach, do you want to start with an opening statement?

RICK PITINO: Well, we played awesome defense tonight, especially the first half was as good as we played all year. When you go in at halftime with that lead and the assists total are 10-2, the three-point shots, which doesn't normally happen, we go 0-5 against just an awesome shooting team, and we got 15 points, they got zero. And rebounding-wise we were 26-13. Fast breaks we were 10-12.

So first half was brilliant on offense, brilliant on defense. Second half, it's tough to play with a lead against a good shooting team, but they made some threes that were amazing. It's very difficult for our players here because the rules have changed so much. Right now, on every basket the offensive player just buries himself into the defensive player and it's always a foul. Where before it was 50/50, now it's 90/10.

The verticality has got to be you got to leave your feet. So that's where we got to learn to do that because they fake, they fake, they fake, and they barrel into you. You got to leave your feet and go vertical instead of into the man.

Outside of that, we played a great game. Bryce was tremendous. When you watch Oziyah play, he really doesn't make many mistakes. He knows how to cut, knows how to play. So he's a terrific basketball player having -- if you look out there and you say what did Oziyah do? He did everything right, nothing wrong. His defense is getting much better than the beginning of the year and I'm proud of both of these guys. They had really good game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. They hit 14 threes yesterday. You held them to five, and two of those were really after the game was over. What did you think of what you did specifically to shut them down?

RICK PITINO: Run 'em off the line, get 'em to take twos, not threes. And I said, the only way they're going to beat us, because we were well fired up -- for both teams, Butler as well as Providence. I said the only way this team can beat us is from the three-point line, so we were not going to let them have that edge.

Q. Bryce, it was unavoidable, but there was going to be a lot of attention on you playing against your former team. I know that in the first two games maybe you didn't perform as well as you might have liked. How satisfying was it for you to have a performance like this on this stage and in a game this important?

BRYCE HOPKINS: I try not to make it out about me. I know there was attention coming into the game, me playing my former team. But the biggest thing was just playing through my teammates, not doing too much, and coming out with the win. This is the best time to play basketball, in March, and our goal is to win a Big East tournament championship, and Providence just so happened to be our first matchup, so the biggest thing was just coming out today with a win.

Q. Are there any more adjectives or any way else you can describe what Zuby does on a night-in, night-out basis?

RICK PITINO: Well, he really didn't have a great game tonight. His numbers showed, but he really didn't play great. He played very good. I thought Zuby made quite a few mistakes tonight in the game. He didn't bless himself before the game, he didn't tuck his shirt in three times, he didn't say thank you when I gave him credit, so he didn't have a great night (smiling).



Q. Obviously you lost to Providence the first time you played 'em here. Yesterday, Coach said you easily could have lost the second game. Talk about how he had you prepared when you knew it was going to be Providence for the third time.

OZIYAH SELLERS: Yeah, obviously, we found out who we were playing yesterday, so you kind of got to prepare quickly, move fast, and just go over everything. So we watched a lot of our mistakes from previous games, found out things we can do better, and we went out there and tried to execute that.

Q. Interested to know, what has stood out to you the most about what Bryce has done this season and analogous with this performance today?

RICK PITINO: I think Bryce is still getting better. I still think there's room for improvement. Bryce is getting his quickness. His vertical's getting better in the second half of the season. He's a good ball handler. I wish he would shoot it a little quicker and take more threes because he's worked very hard at that. Both of these guys are very unselfish pros. They're professional basketball players in their attitude, the way they conduct themselves, the way they pay attention. So both guys are terrific. But Bryce has gotten better. And when you're 35 years old, getting better is still a nice thing (laughing).

Q. Most of your best teams are remembered for being dynamic offensive teams. Does this team remind you defensively of any of your better teams from the past from? Just strictly from a defensive standpoint, does it remind you of any of those teams?

RICK PITINO: Not really. My Louisville championship team was a zone team, a matchup zone team. The Kentucky team was obviously just one of the best teams to ever play the game. This team has its own identity, but the great thing about our team is we keep getting better and better, and that's what I like to see. When they had a bad game, they handled it like pros. Against Connecticut, they don't know why it happened, they were ready, emotionally, physically, they just ran into a better team that night and what did they do? They came back against a good team and beat 'em 32.

So they act like professionals, they conduct themselves like professionals, and I'm going to certainly miss these two guys.

Q. This is a team you said could have swept you in the regular season and you come out and wire-to-wire. Is there some kind of statement in the opening round winning in such a fashion?

RICK PITINO: No, the reason we played such great defense is how much respect we have for their offensive ability. I think Sellers is a lock NBA player. A lock. He can score against anyone, he has a pro-type game, he has a James Harden-type game. He goes to the basket great, he uses his body, he has step-back shots, he has great range, he has a great burst, he gets above the rim, he has a great vertical.

So he's a tremendous basketball player. He's not on a lot of first-round draft boards, but we'll look back, I guarantee you he plays 12 years in the league.

Q. Bryce, you guys were plus 21 on the glass, plus 10 points in the paint. What does that say about the aggression you played with and how ready you guys were for today?

BRYCE HOPKINS: I feel like that's the biggest thing with us is our front court is very athletic. We're physical, and we try to just impose that night-in and night-out. We knew playing Providence that they shoot a lot of threes, so there would be a lot of long rebounds, so that was a key in our preparation and a main topic that we were focusing on while we were watching film and stuff like that.

So I think that was probably the biggest part is knowing that they're shooting a lot of threes and that there would be long rebounds.

Q. The second half it seemed like St. John's was stuck at 59 for quite awhile. Was there a concern that -- lackadaisical, that perhaps --

RICK PITINO: Well, we made a couple of bad plays. The thing I love about Bryce is he didn't block out and made a bad defensive play, and he said, That's my fault coach. It's not going to happen again. No excuses, no signs of weakness, just owned up to it and we moved on.

No, I think it's really tough to play with a lead. This environment, everybody wants to play great in Madison Square Garden. Everybody. Regardless of your record, it doesn't matter, they want to play great. Last night Providence played great and tonight we played great defense and shared the basketball and did a lot of really good things. We protected our guys. Outside of Oziyah playing 32 minutes, nobody played a lot of minutes. So we were able to do that. We didn't press as much. And Oziyah is well conditioned, so it's not going to bother him at all.

Q. The reports of the Providence job opening up. You've been there, obviously it's a different landscape,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

what does it take to succeed there and how do you produce?

RICK PITINO: Well, is it opened up? I haven't seen anything that says it's opened up. No. So I can't comment if Kim still has a job, I can't comment on that.

Q. Yesterday before the game you mentioned there was a --

RICK PITINO: By the way, Kim's a young coach and he's a very good coach. He communicates well with his team. He's a very good coach. Bryce has said he does a very good job. What happened to them was they lost so many close games the beginning of the year that it went the other way for them. Unfortunately, that happens. It happens in this game. You see it all the time. So he's going to have a long career, and he's a very good basketball coach. Everyone in this league is a good coach, but he's a very good basketball coach. He gets his teams to play hard, they like him a lot. So I wish nothing but the best regardless of how it turns out.

Q. Yesterday before the game you mentioned there was a scrimmage with the ones versus the twos, and the twos beat the ones, and it was led by Ian Jackson and Josan Sanon. Do you think that translated into today's game with both of them playing pretty well?

RICK PITINO: Well, what I told them more than anything else was -- in one timeout I even told 'em tonight -- I said to them, I said, Remember yesterday, why you got beat? Josan I think was 9-16 from three. Ian was like 5-7. I said, You got beat because you played hard in the scrimmage that we had, but they made threes. So the message is, you can't let this team make threes. They can beat anyone if they make threes, the way they shoot the basketball. Even Mela shot it great last night. So they guarded the line and they paid strict attention to that line and then the better team wins.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports