

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

NC State Wolfpack

Coach Kevin Keatts

DJ Horne

Casey Morsell

Postgame Press Conference



NC State 74, Duke 69

KEVIN KEATTS: What a great game. Obviously you get a chance to play against a really good Duke team, and obviously they're as good as advertised. Top 10 team in the country with really good players.

I thought our guys were really focused and locked in from the start of the game to the finish. I thought we made big plays on both ends of the floor. We got stops. I thought we executed the game plan to the right direction and did everything right.

I'm proud of these guys. We're fighting, and that's a good thing about it.

We talked about coming to this tournament and really not looking ahead. I just told them I have no idea who's next, but we wanted to concentrate on just our next opponent, and I would say since we got here on Monday, these guys have been very professional, locked into everything we needed to do, and we've got three really good wins right now.

Once again, I know you guys love this, if you're a part of Wolfpack Nation. We survive and advance.

Q. For both players, when Ben misses the dunk and then gets the technical on the stick back, what did you guys think and what did you understand about what was being called there?

KEVIN KEATTS: Don't say what you really mean.

DJ HORNE: I'm going to let him go ahead and answer it.

KEVIN KEATTS: His face was bad. We had to have a conversation about it.

CASEY MORSELL: I didn't know a tech was coming right after that. I was already shocked at the tech by itself. It threw us all in awe.

But all we could do is just focus on the next play. It was good that we got the ball back, and it gave us a good opportunity to execute and get a bucket.

We just had to move on and have a short memory.

Q. For both players, you guys are the first double-digit seed to make it to the semifinals since 2010. How does it feel to hear that, and has it really kicked in what you guys just did today?

DJ HORNE: I mean, coming into this tournament, we came in with a mindset that we're just going to be focused on the guys in our locker room. I think we've been showing that.

And to accomplish what we just did today is good, we're going to celebrate it, but we know it's going to be a short turnaround for tomorrow, and the job is not done, so we've got to do it again.

Q. DJ, at the back end there you made the free throws, NC State was struggling at the line. Did you want the ball in your hands at the end of that game?

DJ HORNE: Yeah, I did. Yep. Straight like that. I just wanted the ball. It's winning time.

KEVIN KEATTS: I wanted him to have the ball, too. Just so you know that.

Q. Coach, you've played BC and Virginia a total of four times this year. You've not lost to any of them in regulation. Do you have extra confidence because of your track record, or do you think you have a good idea of what they put out on the court so you know



how to respond to it?

KEVIN KEATTS: No, I mean, listen, they both are good programs and well-coached. Obviously you can take a little bit from the games that we played against them, but everybody is a little bit different at this time.

Virginia, when we played them early at our place, they were just trying to figure it out. We got a great win. Obviously went on the road and we did a good job.

But Boston College is good. He's really got those guys playing. Quinten Post is really good. Both players got good players, good coaches. We'll have to go back, and it's going to be a long night for my staff and we'll have to figure out how they're playing now and just try to prepare for tomorrow.

Q. After losing seven of nine, four in a row to end the regular season, it would have been easy to fold like we've seen teams do before. What's keeping y'all going? What has fueled what I think we can now call a run?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, I'll answer that first. We had a tough back-end schedule. I've said this before. When I look at our schedule, it's a lot of teams in there. We got 15 teams all ranked in conference schedule. We've got the third toughest conference schedule, and we play all the ranked teams and everything else.

So when we looked at our schedule, we knew that our back end was really tough. Obviously I don't know if any program in the history of basketball has played Carolina and Duke on a Saturday and turned around and played them on Monday thanks to the ACC. I've got no problem with that now. That being said, we just had to refocus and understand that everything we have done before that, we're a good basketball team, we just had some challenges down the stretch, and during that time a lot of things were going on.

We said when we got to the tournament, we can play and we can beat anybody in this league. The unfortunate thing about it is that everybody else can do the same thing. So I think we're locked in.

Q. Kind of piggy-backing on the last question, the vibe outside the program, fans and us, when you were losing those four in a row to end the season was oh, wow, now it's the opposite. What was it like in the locker room? How different was the vibe during that last couple of weeks during the regular season compared to these last few days?

CASEY MORSELL: I would say throughout the good times and bad throughout the season, we've always been connected. We've always believed.

I think throughout our last few stretch of games, we just have to not beat ourselves as much. I feel like we were kind of our own worst enemy in terms of second-chance opportunities, just different opportunities that I think other teams took advantage of, and we reduced that heading into the tournament.

I think that's what propelled us to get momentum.

Q. For Coach, how much of a concern now does it become to keep your guys fresh and healthy as you embark on your fourth game in four days?

KEVIN KEATTS: We've played four games in four days? I didn't even know that. Listen, you've got to play every game. Obviously we're prepared for this. I would say this: a lot of people, we talk about our conditioning and how it pays off for us, and when you look at those three games that we played, honestly, we've looked like the more fresh team than anybody.

We're still picking up, we're still getting after people, and it's more of a mindset than a physical thing, and our guys believe and understand, and we've been able to rotate guys in and out.

At this time of the year, everybody is going to have some nicks and bruises, and you've got to be able to fight through some of that.

Q. These guys always play a ton of minutes for you. Mohammad doesn't always play 37. Michael doesn't always play 35. How do those two guys make your chemistry kind of maximize what you have to offer?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, Michael is the only pure point guard that we have on our team. He's the smartest guy in our program. I'm talking about book smarts and just basketball wise. He knows what he's doing. The kid -- not kid, the young man graduated from Stanford in three years. He's very heady, knows who to get the ball to.

He's starting to get a voice, which I didn't have early in the year. Now he's starting to talk to everybody and telling everybody obviously where to be and get motivated.

Then Mo has just gotten better. He's our leading rebounder. He's kind of one of those guys who can play inside out. He's doing a lot of good things for us.

I think with the emergence of those guys added to these



three guys in Jayden Taylor and DJ Burns, it's kind of given us seven veteran guys who are really good, and then the other guys are adding to what we have.

Q. Coach, you've mentioned several times that you grew up watching this tournament. Everyone remembers games like this. What does it mean to you at NC State to have a win like this going on a run now to the first semifinal that you've been at?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, it means everything. I grew up in Lynchburg, Virginia, and I knew ACC basketball. Loved it. My time in -- other than, I will say this, this will be a good one. You can report this. I actually like Greensboro a lot. I like it, just a little bit, just so everybody knows they're part of it. I'm very familiar with it.

It means a lot to me, my family. My parents are back home, and they're watching basketball. They're not really into sports. They're Kevin Keatts fans. They're obviously getting a chance to see me on TV and have the opportunity to coach these guys. Man, it feels great. It's really good.

Q. Casey you talked about earlier in the week coming home. How special has it been to be here back in the DMV, and not only that, but to now be a part of this run here in your home area?

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, it's huge. I think it's a great story. I think we -- I love this team and I love this city. To be here and shine on the biggest stage here in D.C., it's a great moment that I value.

Q. For both players, you heard Coach talk about the energy and looking like the fresher team. Obviously you want to rest tonight. Will you guys watch this next game in your hotel rooms as a team, by yourselves? What's the plan?

DJ HORNE: We're just going to keep everything the same. Probably go home, watch a little bit of film, personnel and all that.

But really about getting rest right now, get ready for tomorrow.

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, they won't watch film tonight. We don't even know who we're playing.

Q. Watch the game --

KEVIN KEATTS: No, they'll get back and we'll get dinner. They don't watch games. The coaching staff is going to watch games. We'll put a game plan together. They're not going to watch a game.

Casey, I saw them last night -- it's great he's back home. He was sitting in there hanging with his mom and dad. It was a great thing. He'll be in the lobby shaking hands and everything. I think everybody from the DMV has come by to see him, and he may be the last player that's standing from this area. I don't know that. But I know Judah Mintz and Jeremy Roach and some good players from this area that's playing in the ACC.

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, I agree.

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