

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Richmond vs Duke

Friday, March 22, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Value City Arena

Richmond Spiders

Aaron Roussell

Grace Townsend

Addie Budnik

Media Conference



I don't want that final score to indicate or let these guys think that there was anything other than a Herculean effort today. We've come a long way. As much as we've forgotten about the first two games, let's not forget, these guys outscored us by 81 points combined in the two games that we played them before. We were up nine at the half. You don't get trophies for that, but I think that shows a lot about the heart of this team.

I've used the word 'special' a lot with this group over the last three weeks, and it's because they earned it. This was an incredibly special group and very honored to coach them.

THE MODERATOR: I'll open up with a question for each of the players. A comment about the game and then a comment about the successful season that you guys have had.

Addie.

ADDIE BUDNIK: Like Coach said, our last two meetings with them weren't great. We lost by a decent amount. Keep having a ten-point lead at half and then only losing them by 11. Wait, yeah, okay.

I mean, it shows our growth. It shows who we are as a team. We stuck together through it all. There were a lot of ups and downs in that game, but overall I'm super proud of us. We had an incredible year, and we can't let this game define the historical year that we had.

THE MODERATOR: Grace.

GRACE TOWNSEND: Just piggybacking off of everything Coach and Addie both said, I mean, we knew coming into this game what we had been through the past few years with playing Duke, and we kept that chip on our shoulder. I think we came out great.

When we go into the half up nine, I think that's incredible. It really gave us the energy and the motivation to keep going. I think Duke is a great team, and I'm proud of how we played this year. We came together. I think it shows

Duke 72, Richmond 61

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you would like to open up with some comments, please.

AARON ROUSSELL: First off, thanks for being here. Along with that, ESPN, The Ohio State University, administrators, everybody who put this event on, it's been incredible. I thought the atmosphere out there was outstanding for both games. The way that they did everything was first-class. NCAA, ESPN, you guys were fantastic. Everybody here on campus in Columbus, you were awesome. Thank you for that.

Our kids were outstanding today. I really thought that first half was incredible, and we'll come back to them. I do want to give a shout-out to Coach Lawson and her team. I think we were able to do some things to get them maybe a little more uncomfortable in that first half. I thought we really kind of had them out of rhythm. Really, really proud of our kids in that first half.

They made some adjustments. They started switching some things, played some different lineups, probably got into them a little bit because they were a load on the boards. I thought we maybe kind of got punched in the face a little bit starting the game with the transition defense and with the rebounding, but then after that, man, our kids were on another level.

I could not have been prouder. Everything you ask your players to do at the end of the season of playing their best basketball, playing their hardest, playing together, they were just so fun to coach here the last few weeks.



how special this group was and we're so grateful to be a part of this group.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Just wanted to ask any of you, what has the experience of this week and getting to participate in March Madness meant to you?

ADDIE BUDNIK: I mean, it's an incredible experience just the little things like going in the locker room and seeing that they put soap in our locker really excited all of us. It's such an amazing experience. Everybody has been amazing.

To be here to have the opportunity to do this is something that we wouldn't trade for the world, and it's a once-in-a-lifetime memory and experience with a group of best friends that we're never going to forget.

GRACE TOWNSEND: The soap was incredible. There was an uproar in the locker room when we walked in. We weren't expecting that one.

But, no, I mean, we're blessed. This was an incredible opportunity. We're so grateful that we fought our way here, and we were able to get here and compete in such an incredible environment. Although we only played one game, it was definitely an experience we'll never forget, and we're forever grateful for it.

Q. Coach, for you, what has it been like? I know you've been to the NCAA Tournament before, but getting to watch your players experience it for their first time and getting that experience this week as well?

AARON ROUSSELL: Yeah. Again, it's a special experience with a special group. I think held it together pretty good in the locker room, but the lip was quivering quite a bit here over the last few weeks just trying to think, one, that this was coming to an end at some point. But I don't know how I would have gone on. I don't know how I would have felt. I don't know how I would have gone on just ever thinking that this group didn't get this experience.

This meant the world to me. Probably through some of the things that they didn't enjoy of taking them through some of the trials of what a season has, what a career has, but everything was about I wanted this group to experience the NCAA Tournament so badly.

The fact that they got to do that means a lot. I think I so badly wanted the storyline of, again, getting outscored by 81 points combined by this team, getting matched up in the tournament, and then what a story that would be. These

guys deserve to have that awesome feeling if that were to happen. It unfortunately came short, but like I said, these guys played incredible today.

I think we're going to sit back, and as a coach you think about adjustments and line-ups that you maybe could have done. I'm sure at some point they watch the film and think about a mistake that they made. But these guys were so great for so long, and that includes today.

Sometimes you have to tip your cap, and I do, to Kara. I thought they made some great adjustments and were able to do some things and kind of went after some rebounds that just... It was no fault of their own. They just went out and made plays.

When you can get to the end of the season and you can say somebody beat you instead of sitting back for years and saying we lost that game, we choked, we blew it. We went out and forced them to win that game, and they did it.

Unfortunately, we don't get that feeling of celebration for today, but I'm very grateful that these guys get memories for the rest of their lives from these last few weeks.

Q. I know for the team it started and ended the season with a Duke loss, but I know the team wasn't the same team on the court in both of those games. Can you just talk about the growth that occurred from November 6 to now March 22nd? Any of you.

AARON ROUSSELL: Personally I think that game forced me to be a better coach. I think we did some things in the offseason. I don't think that first game was indicative of what we were at that point on November 6th. Maybe you can still say that some of those things in the second half today reared its head a little bit with some of the things we struggled with on the boards.

Some of that, like I said, was you can sit here and talk about, Hey, go box this kid out and go do this. They went and made some plays. Some of those were great defense that it's an air ball, great defense, it's a bad miss, and Jadyn Donovan is there. I can be upset she got the rebound, I can't be upset with our kids for their effort on that.

Natalie, you were with us for the tournament. I haven't seen a team in our league look as sharp and look as good as we did that weekend in quite a long time.

To have some of the loss that is we had from -- go back to George Mason game or the Duquesne game. Some of those were, like I said, I would have -- I don't know what I would have done if they didn't get that experience.

Some of those games tell you that the sky is falling, the sky is falling, but I think the growth that came from the Duke game in particular and then the two conference losses forced us to re-evaluate, re-look at ourselves. These guys put the pedal to the metal. They were not going to let this team not have this experience.

Very grateful to these two, the rest of the seniors, and really this entire team.

Q. For Grace and Addie, I know the loss is fresh, but have either of you thought about whether you'll use your COVID year of eligibility and come back next season?

ADDIE BUDNIK: Still figuring that out.

GRACE TOWNSEND: I second that. Still thinking about it and figuring it out.

Q. For any of you, what are you most proud of for the team this season?

GRACE TOWNSEND: Coming into the season this previous offseason and postseason I think we knew we had a special group. It was just a matter of putting all the pieces together.

I think throughout the year that showed us how much we've grown and matured as a team. As well as we've also become more confident in one another.

I think you can tell even on our chemistry on and off the court, it's incredible. I'm so grateful to be a part of this special group. Even though we ended on a loss today, we have to look back at all the good things we've done throughout the season and remember those ones too.

ADDIE BUDNIK: Just our resiliency is also amazing. I think in the past had we lost a game or had a few errors in a game, sometimes it would turn into a couple of game skid or bleed over into the next couple of plays. We're able to bounce back, hold our heads high, rally around each other, and get that next play.

I think that shows our growth, our experience, and that's just huge for us.

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