

Villanova University Basketball Media Conference

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Villanova Wildcats

Coach Jay Wright

Donte DiVincenzo

Jalen Brunson

Mikal Bridges

Championship Postgame



Villanova - 79, Michigan - 62

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Villanova head coach Jay Wright and student-athletes Donte DiVincenzo, Jalen Brunson and Mikal Bridges. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH WRIGHT: First, we'd like to congratulate Michigan on a great season, great game. They came out -- John Beilein is one of the greatest coaches of all time. We weren't prepared early for some of the things they were doing; they jumped on us, and I should have known better with John.

And we kind of got settled in after that and did a good job defensively. But we have great respect for them. And it was an honor to play them in this game.

And we are -- we just feel so blessed that we were put in this position to have each other, have guys like this to play with, and we've been able to stay healthy all year, basically, especially towards the end. And we really feel humbled and blessed to be in this position.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Donte, you've had some nights where you really filled it up, but doing this on this stage, what was this night like for you?

DONTE DIVINCENZO: Honestly, it was a credit to these guys up here. They did a great job of making it difficult for Jalen and Mikal, and they were just making the right play. They were trying to be aggressive and they were finding me. And Omari was setting great screens and getting me open.

Q. Donte, take us through the night two years ago, the title game night, what you were doing, what you were thinking, where you were exactly.

DONTE DIVINCENZO: I was on the bench in a suit. That last play, the ball got to Kris and I had so much confidence in that shot that I was standing up before it even released.

But I think that year versus this year, it was tough not being out there. I think that was the biggest thing, not being able to compete with these guys. And being out there this year, competing with these guys that were in that game really taught me a lot and taught me how to compete.

Q. Donte, did you have any inkling at all today that you might have this kind of a night, or was it a situation where the ball just -- you just saw the first one go in and it just opened up the floodgates?

DONTE DIVINCENZO: Honestly, no, I did not think that I was going to have this kind of night, because every night I come into a game, I just try to bring energy. And if we start off, we get off to a good start, I try to take the energy to a new level. I try to defend and rebound to the best of my ability and just trying to get it going.

And, like I said, these guys did a great job of finding me, and I just found myself in a rhythm.

Q. Donte, when I spoke to Phil earlier this week, he said that when you redshirt, you feel hungrier to get out there because you're sitting back watching. As someone who didn't get to play in the 2016 title game would you agree with that?

DONTE DIVINCENZO: Yes, absolutely. He's right. You just want to compete. You just want to go out there and you want to play as hard as you possibly can. And when you get the chance to, you don't want to back away from that.

Q. Jalen, we've been asking Donte these questions, but I wonder what you would say are his attributes and what you think allowed him to do something like this



on a night like this?

JALEN BRUNSON: He's worked so hard to make himself the best player he can be every day. Honestly, this is nothing special -- excuse me, this is very special, this is nothing surprising for us. We've seen Donte do this multiple times this year.

But we just -- we just -- I'm just so thankful that he was able to have one of these nights tonight. It just shows you how much depth we have as a team and how we just don't care who gets the credit. If someone is hot, feed him. And just trying to play off each other and just trying to make sure we're all playing together.

Q. Jalen and Mikal, what is Donte like going against? What is it like to go against Donte in practice? We heard the story about two years ago that he played Buddy Hield on the scout squad. So, you said you've seen this before, but what kind of things does he do to you guys in practice?

MIKAL BRIDGES: It's very tough. Sometimes I think about, like, if I'm a good defender or not because sometimes in practice he just makes me look bad. But especially that year he sat out, when he played Buddy Hield, I think that really made it easier, when we went into that game, defending Buddy Hield because he did such a great job mimicking him, and knowing how he plays he really helped us out a lot. And I'm thankful to have him, and he's going to keep getting better from here.

JALEN BRUNSON: "Buddy Hield" Donte was a special person. It's someone that might have just came out tonight. He's just so special. He works his butt off and he deserves all this. And just to see where he's come from since us rooming together freshman year to seeing how his work ethic has gotten better every day and just to be the best player he can be. In practice, he just goes at everybody. He just has that mindset that he's a killer. And that's what makes him special.

Q. Jalen, you were down 21-14 with 11 minutes to go in the first half. Coach talked about how John Beilein would game-plan for you. You turned it around on a 30-9 run. Donte was part of that, but when did you see it turning in your favor, and what caused that?

JALEN BRUNSON: I really think it started with our defense. We've been trying to make ourselves the best defensive team all year. And we just kept chipping away, chipping away, knowing it wasn't going to be perfect, wasn't going to be easy. But we have to keep grinding.

To be able to do it defensively while making shots, really

accessible. We were getting stops after that first burst they had, but we just were able to play together on defense.

Q. Jalen, you're the national player of the year, but when you have a teammate catch fire like Donte did tonight, what do you do as a point guard to get him as many shots or touches as possible?

JALEN BRUNSON: From what I remember, I was on the bench. I just kept telling him to keep going, keep going, keep going. But he knows how to play the game of basketball. He knows how to be aggressive but at the same time get his other teammates shots. And he just has a knack of doing that. He's just so special. And it just showed tonight.

Q. Second title in three years for the program. Obviously the last five years have been memorable. What do you think the future is for this program with what's coming in, what's coming back? I know a few of you guys obviously have decisions to make, but what do you think this program is going to continue to do?

MIKAL BRIDGES: Coach does a great job recruiting guys and finding guys that fit perfect for Villanova basketball. And all of us, we're all going to get better every year. Spring and summer, we're going to get better, and every guy is going to keep developing. And we're going to keep getting better at Villanova basketball, as good as we can.

And that's a lot of credit to Coach, him just pushing us, making us be the best player we can be at the end of the day and him also recruiting.

JALEN BRUNSON: I just think it starts with Coach Wright and his mentality of recruiting. He recruits great young men, not just on the basketball court, but in the classroom and obviously as a person. We're very intelligent on and off the floor.

And I think that's a credit to just making sure he gets the right people for this program. Not everyone is fit for it. But I mean it's just the type of person that these kids are, that we are. We're great people. I like to say all of us are great people off the court.

We try to be the nastiest on the court, but off the court we try to be genuine people as much as we can. I think that's the most important, is just finding the right kids to keep this culture alive.

DONTE DIVINCENZO: I think these guys said it, honestly. But one thing, as the older guys on the team we have so much confidence in the type of person Coach is going to bring into the program.



When we were younger, those guys had the same type of confidence and we know what we're going to get next year. We know that we have guys coming in that are hungry to get better and great people off the court. And like these guys said we know when they're coming in we're not going to have any issues with these guys.

Q. Mikal, Jalen said this started with defense, the big run in the second half. What did you guys do to limit Wagner there down the stretch after he started so hot?

MIKAL BRIDGES: He's a very talented player, as you can see. We were just being more aggressive and just trying to help more, just looming towards him, playing as a team, not just one guy on him. Make it tough on him. If one guy is guarding him, he drives. You've got other guys maybe attacking or blocking shots or something like that. Just a lot of team defense that helped that out a lot.

Q. Jalen and Mikal, compare the two championships; sweeter this time, first time?

MIKAL BRIDGES: Two different roles. The first one, you know, just coming off the bench, bring energy, learning a lot from the older guys. And now this, being the leader, I think leading the team and going through a lot of struggles we did throughout the year and just Coach staying on us as leaders and me getting on the young guys, but also have to do what we have to do because why would they look at me if I'm not playing Villanova basketball, why should they? So I think this one means a lot just being the leader.

JALEN BRUNSON: I'd say the same thing. It's great how things come full circle. As a younger guy, you're doing what's best for the team trying to make sure everyone's playing together and you're not trying to take anything away from that individually, just being able to do that.

And winning a national championship my freshman year, it just shows you what can happen when you buy into thinking about the team, not just yourself.

And as an older guy, you're doing the same thing, but you're trying to teach the younger guys how to do that as well.

Being taught that as a freshman and now as an upperclassman shows you, when you buy into team things, a lot can come your way that's unexpected. And you're just going to keep getting better and have the right mindset to make sure everyone is on the same page and things will come out pretty special.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Thank you.

Questions for Coach.

Q. There's no question Villanova was committed to basketball, has obviously a long tradition. When the Big East reorganized itself, how did you think it would go with the Catholic 7 and just being out there on their own playing basketball only?

COACH WRIGHT: Initially I was scared to death, I really was, just because I've been an assistant in the old Big East. And then as a head coach was in the old Big East and it's everything. I knew I thought it was the greatest conference in the country. I always compared it to SEC football. It was the best to me because I grew up in the northeast. I was scared to death.

But what I learned over time is being -- we're authentic. Everybody's basketball. Everybody's metropolitan, private school. Played home and away. We are what we are. And we want to be good at it.

We want to be the best we can be and it's amazing how much authenticity can carry you. It's really surprised me and I love it and for us it's the best league in the country.

Q. Do you think Donte might have done enough tonight where he has a decision to make in terms of his professional future, a lot of eyes. He played well. And two -- in the big picture, two titles in three years, what keeps you going at Villanova and not getting a wandering eye to the next level?

COACH WRIGHT: Donte question, honestly, I never -- I'm a college coach. Sometimes it amazes me, I don't have a great feel for how they make decisions on drafting. I probably would make a horrible GM. So I don't know. But we'll find out. We'll definitely look into it.

And then I just love, I just have the best job in the country, my hometown, my wife's alma mater, my favorite team growing up. And I got a great president, great AD, Father Peter and Mark Jackson, I just love going to work every day. Our guys graduate. You see these kids are great kids to coach. As a coach, there's just nothing better.

Q. I'm curious, when you're in the season, you've got tunnel vision, you're worried about your team getting better. But at what point did you have an inkling that you might have the best team this year, and does that mess with you at all as a coach knowing that you don't want to screw it up?

COACH WRIGHT: Yes and yes. You really do just get on to the next game, the next game. I thought after the West Virginia game, watching film of West Virginia, I thought

they were really, really good, and really physical.

I knew we were good, but you don't think we can win this. After the West Virginia game, I knew we had a shot. You get into the mindset, don't screw this up; you've got a really good team here, really good kids. You've got a shot. And on the other side, it's a constant struggle, don't screw this up and then don't be afraid to fail. It's a struggle in your mind up until three minutes ago in the game tonight.

Q. The preparation for today's game, you seemed a little nervous about it. Obviously I know you don't relax at all, but when you got up this morning, were you sure that these guys were going to play their best basketball? And how do you feel about rolling through the tournament by an average of 17 points a game six games?

COACH WRIGHT: To answer your question correctly, we got a little out of kilter getting back late after our game Saturday, and then with Jalen getting the Naismith Player of the Year award on Sunday morning, and then having to go to practice and having to come back and Jalen getting the NABC award and having to go to that, being at the award show to do a thing with John Beilein that actually went longer, I got paranoid that I didn't do a good enough job with our staff. I have to give our staff a lot of credit.

Kyle Neptune had to scout, Ashley Howard, George Halcovage, they were holding everything together. But I would say by the walk-through this afternoon I felt like, all right, we're good; we got this.

But I didn't until this afternoon in our walk-through -- I was paranoid all day. As a matter of fact, my poor wife sat here, I was antsy; I was driving her nuts.

But then the game started and they did some things that we weren't prepared for. And it hit me again, I thought damn, we didn't do a good job. But as we got into it, we did. And Kyle Neptune did a great job, one of our assistants, did a great job.

Q. I was wondering if you could take us, as abstractly and concretely as you like, how you kind of plan out three years ago, three years ahead, three years ahead from who is going to be in your program, who is not going to be. It's not quite a school where you have a stream of one-and-dones, where you turn over every year, turnover, is there turnover and how do you plan for that?

COACH WRIGHT: Actually we do, we have a chart. We have a chart with three years, three years out and then a list under the chart of all the players we're recruiting and

we have a roster of our team on that chart that we all carry with us, and we change it, we change it based on our guys' play. We'll list the guy -- like Jalen, we list it as a senior this year, like, so we knew that guy's going to go.

Even if he's not, even if he might not, we list him where we think he's going, to recruit for that spot. And we're constantly changing it. Always got a date at the top. As Mikal starts playing really well this year, all right, he's gone, you move him up a year.

And you know you've got to fill in that spot. So we're always doing that and evaluating our young people. The young guys, like, okay, is this guy going to be a good enough next year to be a starter? That's probably what we talked about. We call it roster structuring. Talk about it every day.

Q. What kind of mindset does it take for a player to have a night like Donte? He's had big games for you guys before but he's not a starter, national title game, you're struggling a little bit, is it his mindset? Is it his skill? What is it?

COACH WRIGHT: It's his mindset. We want our players to all have a clear mind. We want them to be able to go out there and play and not worry about that they're coming off the bench or they're not getting enough shots or they're going to leave early or the NBA guys are watching them. We really feel like to be a good basketball player you have to have a clear mind.

And that's something we work on all the time talking to them all the time about it. And Donte competed for a starting position this year. He worked really hard and he wanted to start. And he was initially a little upset that he wasn't starting. A little. Not bad, because he's just a great kid.

But we spent a lot of time talking with them not to appease him but to make sure that his mind was clear that he understood what he was doing and tonight was the greatest example.

I actually heard my assistants on the bench when he was starting to go off, I heard them saying: This is great for him; he deserves this. Because he really did. But he couldn't have done it if he didn't have a clear mind.

Q. One observation, one question, Donte, when he scored tonight, we noticed he scored in these quick lethal bursts, 8-2, 10-3, 9-2. Is that what you see in him? His ability to score a lot of points quickly and secondly how did he get the nickname the Michael Jordan of Delaware?

COACH WRIGHT: I'll do the Michael Jordan of Delaware first. I said it -- he told me this. I didn't know this. He said I said it to him facetiously in his freshman year when he was acting like a superstar and I said to him: You act like you're the Michael Jordan of Delaware. I don't remember saying that. But he said that. And then other people started saying it. So then I thought that the players started repeating it. So I thought they called him that. So I started saying it. That became his name.

But what the reason -- it's interesting you brought that up. The reason he does that, he can get really hot. But then when the other team sees that he's hot, then they adjust, which Michigan did.

Then instead of taking another shot, a heat check, he'll make the right pass and he'll stop scoring for a couple of possessions to make the right pass, that's a really unique quality.

Q. You've answered a little bit of this with a couple of other responses, but you just beat a couple of good teams by a total of 33 points here. You won every one of your tournament games by double digits. Does it seem as dominating to you in the moment as it does to us throughout the tournament?

COACH WRIGHT: No. Not at all. When you're in the game, it does not seem that way at all. Even that game against Kansas, you have so much respect for Kansas you feel like, you know what, Graham and Newman, they can start drilling 3s and this could be a two- or three-point game.

With the 3-point line, you don't feel like that. And I know I was asked that question earlier. We don't really look at -- we don't look at it that way, like, oh, we just dominated that team. Okay, we played well.

We played a good 40 minutes. We need to get better. So I don't think these kids will even think that we dominated the tournament. They'll just think we played Villanova basketball. We got better the next night. We did keep getting better. We got better from the Kansas game. We got better defensively tonight. That's what they take pride in.

Q. I asked your wife this, she said I needed to double-check with you: Are you wearing the same suit you wore when you won in 2016, or do you not believe in repeating successful outfits?

COACH WRIGHT: No, I'm not wearing the same suit. I try not to do that. I try not to wear -- get too many people

critiquing it back home. So I have to make sure.

Q. Even when you win?

COACH WRIGHT: There's a website or something Jaywrightsuits.com and they critique it. I don't spend as much time on it as people think. I know if I would wear the same suit, they would say it so I make sure I don't.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.