

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Creighton vs Auburn

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Creighton Bluejays

Greg McDermott

Steven Ashworth

Jamiya Neal

Ryan Kalkbrenner

Sami Osmani

Media Conference

Auburn 82, Creighton 70

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Creighton Head Coach Greg McDermott, student-athletes Steven Ashworth, Jamiya Neal, Ryan Kalkbrenner and Sami Osmani.

Coach?

GREG McDERMOTT: We lost to an outstanding team. We recognized we were going to have to play a pretty perfect game if we expected to win. While we weren't perfect, I certainly applaud our effort. We game into the game trying to make it tough for Broome and I think we did that. We didn't want Kelly to get a lot of clean looks, and we were able to accomplish that.

Baker-Mazara, Denver Jones and Pettiford absolutely got us, got us in space. If you had told me before the game that Kelly was going to have 5 and Broome was going to have 8 and we were going to shoot almost 50% from the field and 45% from the three-point line, I would have probably told you that we would have won, especially the fact that we assisted on 17 out of 25 baskets and held them to only 11 assists on 30 baskets.

But their ability to do things off the dribble was very, very effective and really proud of this group. Proud of these four seniors. They've been selfless. They've done so much for this program in their own ways, and it's absolutely



been a pleasure to coach this team. This has been a great ride that they've taken us on. I couldn't be more proud of them.

Q. Steven, the defensive adjustments by Auburn in the second half, what kind of things between switching guys off of you, how was it affecting the perimeter game? It appeared to be pushing it out. Was it just making sure you all just didn't get set?

STEVEN ASHWORTH: I think a lot of it, especially in that second half, was more switching on their ball screens, keeping the bigs up high as opposed to maybe the bigs showing and then trying to get back to Kalk, as great of a rim threat as he is for us. So in the first half a few more open looks around the perimeter off of ball screens.

In that second half definitely they were trying to meet those ball screens higher and any dribble hand-off or other action switching it, and if we tried to get it to Kalk up high and run some of our motion, denying any of those cuts and forcing us to back cut toward the basket and push our catches out for sure, which limited our three-point efficiency I think in that second half.

Q. Ryan, are you in a different state of mind right now, compared to the way some other seasons have ended? Are you just trying to appreciate the last few moments of your Creighton career?

RYAN KALKBRENNER: I would say definitely a little bit. This year in particular has been a really, really fun and rewarding year. This team has been such a joy to be around. When I made the decision to come back all the way in the summer you think you're making the right decision when you make it but you don't know for sure.

Sitting up here today, obviously the season ended a little bit sooner than we wanted it to but it was definitely the right decision.

Mainly for all the things that happened off the court with this team and how we bonded together and how, family for life with them. Definitely taking it all in and enjoying the last moments with each other, like this. We're obviously still going to stay in contact with each other, still be friends the rest of our lives but trying to take these moments in.



Q. Steven, on that same note what's going through your mind now that your Creighton career has come to a close?

STEVEN ASHWORTH: I think the first word would have to be gratitude for the experience and the opportunity to put on this uniform and represent a brand and a tradition like this and play for Coach Mac. Can't do any of this without my teammates and the incredible brothers that they've become and the uncles that they've become to my son Tommy, and all the joy, like Kalk said, off the court. It's sad that it's over but at the same time we can be happy that it happened.

Q. Jamiya, yesterday you told us that in some way it caught you off guard, the bond that you ended up having with this team. It wasn't something that you necessarily expected to happen. As you were out there battling tonight and the seconds were ticking away, what are you going to remember about what this year represented and how it fulfilled your last year of college basketball?

JAMIYA NEAL: I definitely cherish the time I had at Creighton a lot, especially as I get older, just thinking about it. Obviously only being there one year, I feel like I just got here and now it's already over. That's what I was thinking when the seconds were going down I thought, damn -- sorry, just meeting Coach Mac, I was like, I didn't know he was that tall. Now he's been a father figure to me. Somebody that I'll always call on, not just on basketball but advice on being a man. When I become a dad, I will probably call Steven and ask him how he started.

Just little things like that. The bonds I've built here, they're going to last forever. So that's where I'm at with it.

Q. Sami, what have your five years meant and what has it meant to have this run with this team in your farewell tour?

SAMI OSMANI: Five years have been extremely special. Being around these dudes, especially this year, I think this team has been the most special team I've been a part of. It's been a joy to be around these guys every single day in practice. I felt like I think I did a great job of staying in the moment. I knew it was going to be my last year taking it all in, but there is definitely more reflecting to do. There is so many more memories I could pick out.

But overall it was a pleasure to be around these guys. Unfortunately, we ended short today but we played with class throughout the year and did the right things and just ended short.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Questions for Coach.

Q. What's it mean to you to hear those guys each in different ways, Ryan has been here forever, Sami forever, Jamiya just one year, and Steven for two, they all have common themes on what this place has meant to them. What's going through your mind when you hear that?

GREG McDERMOTT: A lot of pride. A lot of teams throw the word family around. Some of it's B.S., it's not here. These guys have just been selfless, from Sami for five years knowing you're not going to play to show up every day with the right attitude and get that scout team ready to go, and Jamiya, just the growth in one year. You don't see one-year players make the strides that he's made from when we watched him play in those first few games in November to how he's played in March. It's been very rewarding to see that.

And Steven, everybody is worried about what are we going to do without Ryan Nembhard and I think the best compliment I can give Steven is, what are we going to do without Steven Ashworth? His fingerprints are all over the last two years. His positive leadership, he has a way of talking to his teammates and helping correct them that makes them feel good and that's quite a trait to have.

He shows up at practice with his -- the glass is half full every day. Even when us as coaches are maybe a little bit down about the last game, it's hard not to be fired up and ready to go when you see Steven's approach in practice. And then, you know, Ryan. We live in an era of self-promotion, and that dude has no agenda for himself, zero.

You hear guys talk about building their brand. The only brand he cares about is that name on the front of his jersey. That's all he's ever cared about. As I told him in the locker room, I remember watching him in that gym in St. Louis, tripping over himself, and wondering, can we make a player out of this guy?

Just to see what he's done and how he's done it, and how his leadership evolved and his confidence has evolved, you know, for two years he wouldn't even ask a girl out on a date, let alone thinking about marrying somebody. Now he has a wonderful wife in Rachel.

It's been an absolute pleasure. The journey has been incredible with this group and especially where we started in December. Our margin for error was gone because of a lot of things that transpired in November and December,



and we played really well in a good league, and in the tournament.

To take that decision, there was no decision on whether Creighton was going to be in the NCAA Tournament. Then we fought a great team for 30-some minutes before we kinda got away from us.

Q. Mac, you've talked extensively throughout the season, how much Ryan has meant to you guys the last five years and this ever-changing landscape, that he's become somewhat of a son to you. What was it like to have that last embrace with him now that it's over?

GREG McDERMOTT: It's hard. Hard on one hand, sad on one hand, but so prideful on the other. Just to see where he's -- how far he's come, and the way he's carried himself. And, you know, he's won more games than anybody that's ever worn a Creighton uniform, he's won more NCAA Tournament games than anybody who has worn that Creighton uniform. His jersey will hang in the rafters someday, and he cares nothing about that, zero. That's what makes him so special.

His leadership this year, with this team, when we were struggling, like, he just was an every day guy. All you can ask for your leaders is -- everybody else in your organization needs to know what to expect from you every day, and that never changed with Ryan, and it never changed with Steven. But, you know, he's become like a son to me, because we've been through a lot, together. He's always had my back; I've always had his, and I'm obviously going to really miss him, not just on the court, but our relationship off the floor.

Q. Coach, these players played their hearts out all the way up to the last second of the game, and it's been that way the whole season. What does that show about their attitudes and the way they have played up to the last minute of their season and career?

GREG McDERMOTT: They really care about this program, and they really care about this university, and they're very grateful for the support that we receive.

17,000 people every single night, and the way our booster base has stepped up to support our program in so many ways, in this ever-changing landscape. You can't have a successful program without tremendous support. We've got some of the best. Some of the people that have been with us through thick and thin, it's been incredible.

That's why it's easy for these guys to go out there and lay it all on the line, like I said, in this world that we're living in

now, where things are becoming so transactional, and everybody is looking for the best deal. Ryan Kalkbrenner could have left a couple times. He never even thought about that. He had to make a decision whether to go in the draft, but in terms of chasing a higher number somewhere, he never thought of that.

All these guys, it's never become an issue. Their teammates are the only thick that's important to them and representing this university in a first-class manner. Those days are harder to duplicate in the world we're living in, and that's why these four are so special. I hope in a few years I'm still saying the same thing about our leadership, that it's been selfless and about the name on the front of the jersey, but that's becoming increasingly difficult.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time, thank you.

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