

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Arkansas vs St. John's

Saturday, March 22, 2025
Providence, Rhode Island, USA
Amica Mutual Pavilion

St. John's Red Storm
Coach Rick Pitino

Zuby Ejiofor

Kadary Richmond

Media Conference

Arkansas 75, St. John's 66

RICK PITINO: Congratulations to Arkansas. They were very athletic, played a great game, took away a lot of what we do. Very thankful for these two guys. They were really fun to coach. Kadary didn't play real well because he was in foul trouble. Foul trouble certainly hurt us but they were a better team. They outplayed us. They deserve to move on and we don't. That's what March Madness is all about. No matter how good a regular season you have, you play this way you're going to get beat. I'm very grateful I had these two guys on my team and Arkansas moves on and we don't.

THE MODERATOR: Let's gear our questions toward Zuby and Kadary.

Q. Zuby, can you describe what your emotions are like after a great year and to see it end at this point?

ZUBY EJIOFOR: Obviously, it sucks. I felt like we could have been better in a lot of areas. Yeah, it just sucks. Yeah... it sucks.

Q. Kadary, can you take us through how you're feeling about this game, the last game of your college career and you being limited so much by the whistle?

KADARY RICHMOND: It's a tough one. It's a tough way to go out. Some tough calls. They played better than us. Just some tough calls.

Q. Kadary, was there one or two of them, was there one that you felt you disagreed with? Was there one



specific one, or...

KADARY RICHMOND: Yeah, but that's not up for me to decide. They blew the whistle, they called it and the result is the result.

Q. About your one season at St. John's? The most --

KADARY RICHMOND: We had a special group of guys from the coaching staff down to the players and the managers and I'm thankful and appreciative they allowed me to come here and be the person I am and I will always be thankful to them for that.

Q. Zuby, did you think, you guys have made so many comebacks, was there a point at which you thought this is where St. John's gets over the hump? Was there a spot or two there where you thought we're going to take this?

ZUBY EJIOFOR: We were down three starting the second half. We've been down before, so, you know, we didn't think too much of it. We were just telling each other that we're just going to do whatever it takes to win, start on the defensive end, just get stops. Then we took the lead and then obviously we ended up -- I don't know what happened but we ended up losing the lead again and we couldn't really recover from that point, so...

THE MODERATOR: You can head back to the locker room, thank you.

Questions for Coach Pitino.

Q. What happened for you defensively at the start of the second half? They hit eight of their 12 shots and they were in the paint or at the rim.

RICK PITINO: Well, I think we got a little (inaudible) because of foul trouble. That's what happens -- the fact that we withstood all our foul trouble and were still in the game was a positive sign, but offensively we did not share the basketball enough and that was our demise.

Q. Rick, you had RJ on the bench for a pretty long stretch at the end. Was that just because he wasn't making them or was there something more to it?



RICK PITINO: He played 30 minutes. That's a long time.

Q. So he was tired?

RICK PITINO: No. He played 30 minutes, I played other people. You know the answer, Roger. You're asking leading questions. So don't ask me any questions. You already know why he didn't play.

Q. You kind of alluded to it before the game but now that you saw Arkansas up close and personal, how did their athleticism and physicality match up with the teams you guys played previously?

RICK PITINO: We haven't faced that type of length in athleticism this year. That's not the reason we lost the game. We lost the game because we did not move the basketball enough and that lead to us shooting a very low percentage. We're a team that we have to get a high number of assists to win and we didn't tonight.

Q. Considering all the first half foul trouble, to only be down three at halftime, did you kind of feel like you got away with --

RICK PITINO: We should have had the lead if we made free throws. We should have had the lead. We battled. We just didn't get the job done, obviously. That was one of our poorest jobs offensively. Give credit to their defense but we shot ourselves in the foot with our lack of passing.

Q. Rick, when you're starting to make shots in the second half and you're on the run to get within two, are you thinking here we go again? This is what we have done all season and you had them almost where you wanted them?

RICK PITINO: I was just thinking of possession by possession. We had a shot, but we missed some free throws again and didn't make some defensive plays. But, again, it goes back to we just didn't do the little things to win that game and you got to give them the credit and they were the better basketball team by far.

Q. With RJ, Rick, he said he felt like he wasn't a good leader today. What did you think of in terms of that?

RICK PITINO: I'm just very appreciative for Aaron Scott. He had a bad game but he gave me his heart and soul with a broken finger. I'm very appreciative of Kadary Richmond. He was he was a true pleasure to coach. He had a bad game tonight defensively, took him out of the game. He was pure joy to coach. I'm very, very appreciative of Deivon Smith, who has been hurt and gave me everything

he had. I'm very appreciative. I'm very thankful to the guys who gave me every single thing they had.

I hate to see them go out this way. We thought we were championship-driven in our minds, but I have been disappointed before with this. You hate to see us play like that. I don't mind going out with a loss, I just hate to see us play that way offensively. You gotta live with it. You put in a lot of time and effort, the coaches did, and it's just a bitter pill to swallow with that type of performance.

We'll give the credit Arkansas and I'll be very, very thankful to those three guys for giving me everything they had and we move on.

Q. Was there one play with RJ that made you sit him the last five minutes?

RICK PITINO: You know he was 3 for 17. You know he was 0 for 3, so you're answering our own -- I'm not going to knock one of my players.

Q. Rick, I know that obviously the loss is very fresh, but this was pretty a sensational season for St. John's and its fans. Can you speak to the big picture of what you think this was and what it does for the program going forward?

RICK PITINO: I hope it does a lot. I hope it's -- I've had a lot of tough losses and I've had a lot of great victories in the NCAA and it always ends with you hating this moment. It always ends that way. It never ends -- the only time, I think we lost to Kentucky in the Final Four and it didn't end bitter because we gave everything we had. Tonight we didn't play a great brand of offensive basketball and that's disappointing, but overall I'm grateful for these three guys that gave me everything they had. They were the reason for the turnaround that St. John's had winning a regular season and winning a tournament. I'm just very, very thankful for them.

Q. What has this season meant to you and what do you want people to remember about this group?

RICK PITINO: I think the turnaround happened the first year. I think the guys -- I think what Ruben and Vince and Lefty and Sim and some of the guys that were on the bench and witnessed what the run is all about, and what you have to do to make the next jump, they witnessed it. And it's only going to help them. They're getting better. I was sorry that Lefty had to be thrown into that tonight. That's a very difficult team for him to play against as a freshman.

I think there was a lot of great moments this year. You

wish that you could go out playing better offensively, but that's the breaks of the game. Give them credit, move on and see what happens in the future.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time, Coach.
Congrats on a great season.

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