

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Colorado State vs Memphis

Friday, March 21, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Colorado State Rams

Niko Medved

Nique Clifford

Kyan Evans

Jalen Lake

Media Conference

Colorado State - 78, Memphis - 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

NIKO MEDVED: These guys will tell you, I really challenged ourselves at halftime this group. I thought they were a lot tougher than we were that last seven minutes of the first half and like this group always does, they, you challenge 'em, they look at each other and we all respond as a group and boy did we respond in the second half. I thought down the stretch in the last eight to 10 minutes we were the team that was getting the loose balls and the 50/50 plays. Just a phenomenal effort all the way around. Again, just when I don't think this group can give us more, they just find another gear and guys step up and just tremendous performance and man, survive and advance.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll open it up to questions, please.

Q. Kyan, obviously a big night. When did you feel like you were in a groove with the threes, I think you were maybe 6-7 at one point. How were you feeling during the game?

KYAN EVANS: I don't know, usually just when that first shot goes in, especially when it's this kind of like just all net first shot, then it just starts feeling good from there.

Q. Kyan, can you describe the feeling, during that



game, after the game, when you have a performance like this.

KYAN EVANS: I'm not really thinking about myself too much, but just like this team, how far we came and just to get a tournament win is just crazy for us.

Q. Will you speak to -- obviously Kyan led the team in scoring today, his pace of play, how he controlled the game, he didn't seem to get flustered out there, will you speak to what he means to the team other than just the points he put up.

NIKO MEDVED: First of all, whatever Kyan was feeling tonight, I just want to feel that one time. Because I haven't felt like that. You know, he's one of those guys, he's an unbelievable competitor, he's a live it hoops guy. He learned a lot last year playing behind another great point guard and just watching his development this year has just been special. He comes in every day, he soaks it up, and he just, he's aggressive, he really believes in himself and what he can do. And I agree. I thought he really controlled the game tonight, really brought us a swagger, and he just really had a special game. But he's really had a special conference season for us. He's been one of our leaders and he's playing at a high level right now and he's just got a really, really bright future.

Q. Kind of take us through your night, obviously there it seemed like they were really intent on trying to keep the ball out of your hands. How did you manage the pressure and how did you guys adjust to that in the second half?

NIQUE CLIFFORD: Yeah, I didn't have a great night, but I could care less. I'm just so happy, man, I'm so happy for my teammates, the guys who haven't been here before who get to experience a win. Like Bowen and Keeshawn, dudes like that, I'm so happy about that. So, yeah, they did a good job on me tonight, I didn't have my greatest game, but I'll adjust and be ready for the next game. But I'm just happy to get this win any way we can. My teammates stepped up big time.

Q. Nique, you say you didn't have a great night but you have that steal and Bowen gets it in for the lay-in which to me seems like the turning point in the game.

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Do you think that was the case for you guys, then it seemed to really build-up some steam after that?

NIQUE CLIFFORD: Yeah, I'll rephrase, maybe not my best shooting night, but I just tried to find ways to do other things to impact the game when I'm not shooting well. Plays like that definitely get our team going, get us some momentum and feel like that was a big swing in the game just giving us some energy.

Q. The season has been milestone after milestone. You haven't won, or gone to the second round since 2013, how do you think people will see this team in years to come as a Colorado State program?

JALEN LAKE: I just think it's the culture that all the coaching staff and everybody that they built here. We really take team together to heart and it's awesome and I just think this culture is only going to keep growing. We just have so many guys that step up in so many ways and not only is guys great basketball players on the court, but they're great people, and that's what it's all about.

Q. What did you see defensively from you guys in the second half to really frustrated them and keep them from getting to the game that they wanted to have? Seemed like they really struggled to find shots in the half court?

NIKO MEDVED: I thought in the first half our first shot defense wasn't bad, it was just man, in those last 10 minutes there was one possession they got three offensive rebounds and they were beating us to loose balls, we had to finish possessions better. I thought we started with doing that better in the second half. Dain Dainja is a load. I mean, he is really hard. I thought we did a little bit better job in the second half of kind of taking his real estate, not allowing him to catch it where he wanted, bringing a little bit of help earlier to him when he put it on the floor. So I thought those were the two biggest things for us. Haggerty is a load for them. I thought we did a pretty good job of staying in front of him, not putting him on the free-throw line too much. So I think those three things, but in particular in the second half it was really just the rebounding and just doing a little bit better job on Dainja.

Q. Along the same lines, on Dainja in the second half how much of that was making him work, considering he didn't sit at all this game, did you expect that at halftime that just with the seven guys they were playing your depth might win out in the end?

NIKO MEDVED: I might have mentioned that at halftime that, you know, not for him, but I thought, give that kid -- I mean, he played 20 minutes and, I mean, the last part of

the first half he was just all over the place. The guys that weren't playing as many minutes as him we needed to try to exceed his energy and maybe that happened down the stretch.

Q. In addition to Nique's spark in the second half what can you say about Rashaan Mbemba taking a break in the first half, coming out, having a great sequence.

NIKO MEDVED: He's just a warrior. He just goes one speed. He just goes after it. And I love him. I got on him for not set ago screen and he's yelling at Kyan for not waiting for the screen and I just went, man, take a deep breath and he does, but he just, he just brings so much spirit to our team and toughness. He's just a great teammate. Again, he just is one of these guys in an along line of guys for a team that just plays all about the team but he's really one of our emotional leaders of the.

Q. This being the first game out of the group here in Seattle what were your observations of the building, the crowd as well and how that maybe fed you guys too?

NIKO MEDVED: What an awesome venue. An awesome setup here. Just incredible. Boy, I really felt it fill in. I thought this place was pretty packed, the energy was great, in the second half and I'll say this, I know this, this is a great basketball area. People love basketball here. But again, great, great job. I love the atmosphere here, the crowds were terrific, just a great venue. So, yeah, what more can you ask for an NCAA tournament game.

Q. Was there a conversation at half, looked like coming out of the half you guys were forcing the issue, kind of going inside and they were fouling a lot versus the first half. Was there a conversation about that?

NIKO MEDVED: Yeah, they decided, they do a -- penny does a great job coaching those guys and they made the determination you don't know what they're going to do, they just started switching everything. They were switching to take away our ball movement. And we did, we made an effort to throw the ball inside more, we did on the first possession. And then we also thought we needed to spread 'em out a little bit more and we put Kyle Jorgensen in, who is a big who can shoot the ball and we kind of spaced the floor a little bit and we kind of were able to drive it, get multiple paint touches and I thought that that really, really helped us in the game, so we made a couple adjustments offensively to kind of talk advantage of what they were doing and our guys did a great job of it.

Q. Compared to where this team was in November and now this run that you guys are on now, what has

changed within the group and how they're maturing and developing?

NIKO MEDVED: These guys have said it, I mean, we've got character, and we were 5-5, we knew it would be hard early, maybe harder than we thought. But they said it, over that Christmas break, that three, four week stretch, we were out of class and I just told the guys I'm like listen the teams that can make the biggest jump here when we can watch extra film, be in the gym more, connect more as a group are the ones who can make noise in conference season and they really took that to heart. Just went to work every day, guys really found their roles and accepted their roles. We made a commitment to defense. I thought our defense really took a big jump. I thought that's what allowed us then to really build some offensive confidence. Then these young guys, like Kyan, they just started to get confidence. So all those things came together. What's great about this team, we just keep getting better. We're playing better these last three weeks than we were the three weeks before that. That's what you want to see. So hopefully we can keep playing better because if you want to advance in this tournament we'll have to play even better on Sunday.

Q. Jalen, you guys obviously won a First Four game last year, obviously it's hard to do right at the moment how does it this one feel winning in the full 64 bracket?

JALEN LAKE: It's awesome. I still have the same feeling when we won last year. It's a March Madness win. So Like coach said, we survive and advance. And it's a great feeling. We just want to keep things rolling with our defense and keep clicking on offense and just keep our confidence up.

Q. Nique, you can tell when the fans knew you guys had won it, what was it like to feel that energy far away from home in a venue that you're not used to?

NIQUE CLIFFORD: I think Coach said it best, the energy was crazy in there. I saw a lot of green. So I knew our fans traveled and it was super cool to see that, have them be able to experience this feeling with us. We're going to need their support again on Sunday, so we're just happy that they made the trip and super grateful for them.

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