

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Colorado State vs Maryland

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

## Maryland Terrapins

## Kevin Willard

## Derik Queen

## Rodney Rice

## Julian Reese

### Media Conference

Maryland - 72, Colorado State - 71

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the student-athletes after an opening statement from Coach. Coach, let's start with an opening statement.

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, extremely proud of this group of guys for battling through. Colorado State is really good. Niko does an unbelievable job and I thought it was a great game.

Julian Reese gets a thousand rebounds in this game comes up probably with the biggest rebound of his career and then makes his free throws. So give Colorado State a lot of credit. They're an excellent basketball team. I feel bad that they had to go that way, but I really felt like maybe we were due eventually for one of those to go for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please, for the student-athletes.

**Q. Derik, only three seconds to go there. What was going through your mind once you got that ball in your hands?**

DERIK QUEEN: That I got to get fouled or go out there and make a shot.

**Q. What are you doing to block out the noise and focus on what you had to do once the ball was in your hand and how did you keep your composure?**



DERIK QUEEN: First, that was my first game-winner and when Coach drew up the play, my teammates trusted me, he trusted me. I was a little bit, like, nervous, but I knew we were due for one and I had to make this.

**Q. What's going through mind when you see him hit that shot and it goes through and you know you're going to the Sweet 16?**

JULIAN REESE: Yeah, we have all confidence in him. We knew where the ball was going to. We had to get the ball in his hands. He had the mismatch, so I feel like he just took advantage and doing the things that he usually doing. I was there for a rebound if it would have came off and you-all saw what happened.

**Q. Julian, at the free-throw line, knocking down the two free throws to give your team the lead, talk about the thought process going into that and the confidence that you must have had to get that done?**

JULIAN REESE: Yeah, when I was at the line, I was really just excited because this is really what I work for in the off-season. That's literally all I was thinking, like, the off-season work, it's the same shot, and I was literally -- before we went in the huddle, when they were reviewing it, we were, like, let's just worry about defense right now. I got these shots. Let's just worry about defense.

So I really wasn't thinking too much about the shot making it. I was really thinking about defense, and I was extremely confident going into the line.

**Q. When you grabbed that big offensive board, I was thinking that somewhere your sister was probably freaking out. I don't know if you've had chance to look at your phone yet, but I wondered if you had and if she said anything. And also just why do you think the two basketball players in your family are such good rebounders?**

JULIAN REESE: No, I haven't looked at my messages yet. I know she's probably going crazy on my phone still right now. But as far as the rebounding that runs in the family, I think it's just a heart thing. We just play the game with so much intensity and just wear our feelings on our sleeve and try to play our hardest, and I just really didn't want that



to be our last game, so I just really wanted to play real hard.

**Q. Derik, you were saying you were kind of due. This is your first game-winner ever?**

DERIK QUEEN: Yeah.

KEVIN WILLARD: I wouldn't have given it to him if I had known that (laughing).

**Q. Did you come to Maryland to make moments like this, especially in March?**

DERIK QUEEN: Yeah, of course. I mean, first of all, I just want to put out for Baltimore. A lot of people don't really make it out of Baltimore, and then I just wanted to come here and make a change. And hopefully I did make a change, so Coach Willard can keep getting a lot of local kids.

**Q. What was, if any, the adjustments at halftime? It looked like you came out more aggressive, particularly in the second half shooting the three ball.**

RODNEY RICE: Yeah, even though I missed shots, I'm still going to shoot the ball, still going to be myself, still going to be aggressive no matter what. I'm sure everybody knows that. They're giggling next to me. Yeah, I'm going to stay in attack mode all game.

**Q. Were there any adjustments defensively that maybe helped you kind of win this game?**

RODNEY RICE: Yeah, as a team, I think we were in our own heads on the offensive end in the first half, and then at halftime Coach was telling us that defense dictates offense. We got to get deflections and just play defense, lock up.

**Q. Coach Willard said, tongue in cheek, on Friday that no one listens to him in his household, his wife, his kids, but tongue in cheek. What makes Coach Willard -- what makes -- or otherwise -- what makes him someone who basketball players listen to and what has he meant to you guys in the short time he's been with you?**

DERIK QUEEN: First, he did pay us the money (laughing). And so we got to listen to him. And we all trust him because he's, like, a player coach. And then he want nothing but the best for us and he just coaches hard. He talks to us other than basketball. He's just always there and just want us to win.

JULIAN REESE: Yeah, I feel like as a player, you got to put that trust in your coach. It's part of being a team. And as a leader, I got to listen to him and we got to take something from each other and just that's what we got to do for to us win. I feel like every good team has that that listens their team leader and everybody works together just to do that.

RODNEY RICE: Yeah, both on and off the court we love Coach Willard, man. So I mean, that trust is there, like the guys were saying, and, yeah, that goes into everything else.

**Q. A lot of times when Derek's out on the floor, he just looks like a little kid. He's always smiling. He's playing with his mouthguard all the time. What is it like to play with someone who has a lot of joy about the game?**

RODNEY RICE: I think we need that. I think while we're playing, we get -- well, especially me. I'll speak for myself. But I get so locked into the game, I need to relax a little bit. Having him in the locker room, I'm not so tense. So yeah, I appreciate that from him.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

**Q. Can you tell us the feeling to be on the right side of a one-possession game finally in the most important of circumstances?**

KEVIN WILLARD: It feels really good, to be honest with you, because we battled back, Ju making the free throws. These guys have bounced back every time we've had a buzzer-beater. And really the gut punch was Michigan State. These guys have shown such character in how they have bounced back. That's all I told 'em in the huddle. I said, Guys, for the first time we have time left. It's our time to kind of make our moment happen.

We haven't had that chance, and so I was really just -- they just bounced back. They're a great group. They do listen. And I'm just happy for them. I mean, this is a moment that they will remember for the rest of their lives. I'm still going to be coaching for hopefully 10 or 12 more years, but for these guys, Ju's a senior, DQ is going to the pros, Rodney's going to be around with me for a while, but it's a great experience for 'em.

**Q. Can you take us through the huddle with 3.6 seconds left, what you told the guys and what you drew up. The result obviously was great.**

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I run the same play at the end of

the game now, ever since Isaiah Whitehead made a buzzer-beater against Villanova. I'm not mentioning that for -- it's not -- y'all got to stop that shit. It's not -- that's not, like, a pseudo thing.

I ran that for Isaiah Whitehead and we ran it twice this year for Derik and he scored. And I asked the guys, I said, Who wants the ball? Because sometimes you can draw something up for a guy that maybe doesn't want the basketball, and his exact words, I want the M-F ball. So once he said that, it was a pretty simple decision. And I could see everyone's body language kind of perk up a little bit because he was so confident in the fact that he wanted the basketball. So it was just a simple zipper, give him the basketball and let him go to work.

**Q. Good call on the game-winning play. Was he the only one that had eyes lit up or was he the first one that eyes lit up?**

KEVIN WILLARD: He was the first one and he was very enthusiastic about wanting the basketball. And again, I know he's only a freshman, I know this is a big stage, but Rodney's never been in the NCAA Tournament, Ja'Kobi's never been in the NCAA Tournament. Hard to run a play at the end of the game for a six-eleven center like Ju, so when he said he wanted the basketball, it just made it pretty simple.

**Q. They beat you on the offensive boards, they beat you in steals. How do you explain the win of this game outside of guts and guile?**

KEVIN WILLARD: No, Colorado State's good, man. I watched film -- we watched film after Grand Canyon, and I said, This might be the best team we've played all year offensively. They pass the ball, they screen well. Niko runs stuff -- he's got eight trillion plays. So this is just a great win for our guys.

**Q. I know you mentioned you want these moments to be about the players, but for you getting to your first second weekend as a coach what's that feeling like?**

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I mean, it's nice. I'm not going to lie. I would much rather be coaching than being back home. I wish my first weekend would have been at Seton Hall, to be honest with you. Seton Hall was really good to me and I thought we had some chances. It's hard, to be honest with you. I know it's always been on my back and it's always been a stigma, but I knew I had confidence in myself that eventually if you keep getting to this tournament, which my teams keep getting to this tournament, that I was eventually going to knock the door down.

I wish I would have done it at Seton Hall, to be honest with you, first. It's a place I loved and still love and they were so good to me. I wish I would have been able to do it there. But I'm glad that -- this is only our second Sweet 16 in 23 years here, so I'm just as happy that it happened at Maryland.

**Q. Rodney's own words. We were in our heads offensively. I think at one point he was 1-8 and there were other guys not shooting that well. At halftime what did you try to get out of them and what did you see in the execution?**

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I've learned this team. They don't react well to me being negative or me being angry. Not that I get angry any more, but I just reminded everybody that as bad as we played offensively, we were only down seven. We should have been down probably 13 or 14 points as bad as we played offensively. Just reminded them that let's go back to doing what we've been doing.

The nerves are real. Playing in your second round for these guys, a lot of these guys the nerves are real, and they want to perform at a high level. The game has changed. They play well and next thing you know their NIL dollars go up. The transfer portal opens up, I think, that opens tomorrow. Brilliant move by the NCAA.

So there's so many different stresses, plus they want to win, they want to play well. Their families are here. So for me, I just try to give them a stress-free zone in the locker room. The locker room is their safe spot, the huddle is their safe spot. They know they're going to come over and not get yelled at, they know that they will get encouraged. It's same thing at halftime. We watched film at halftime and we watched our defense, and everybody kind of just looked around at each other and was like, all right, that's not what we're about. So pretty much just being a dad, pretty much to just letting these guys know it's okay, we're going to play better.

**Q. I wondered what it's like when you have Derik, he looks like a little kid, a lot of time and then for him to say that in the huddle emphatically which is something that often you need a senior a really experienced veteran to say.**

KEVIN WILLARD: Yeah, I mean, I've talked about Derik at length. He is, his positivity and his joyfulness for life, his mom has the same energy. He just has such a great energy about him that he, when you're around him you're going to smile, you're going to laugh, you're going to hug him. His teammates are the same way. He just has, not

too many people in this world have positive energy any more and he's so fun to be around because he's always positive. So when he said that he wanted the ball and the way he said it, I knew something good was going to happen because good things happen to great people and he is a great, great person.

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