

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Duquesne vs Illinois

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Coleman Hawkins

Marcus Domask

Media Conference

Illinois 89, Duquesne 63

THE MODERATOR: The Illinois Fighting Illini are with us. They are going to play Iowa State in Boston on Thursday. We have head coach, Brad Underwood with us, along with student-athletes, Marcus Domask and Coleman Hawkins.

Coach?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I'm still trying to get the water out of my ear from post game. What a great start to the ball game. I have so much respect for Keith Dambrot. What an unbelievable career. What a way for him to end it. Great win against BYU. Very, very talented team. I think they won nine in a row and maybe 16 or 17 out of 19 or 20 at the end of the season, but these two guys, boy, they made a difference on the defensive side to start the game.

They're two terrific guards I thought we did a good job on, and we got out in transition. When we get stops and rebound, we can be pretty special. So just kind of continued a little lackadaisical to start the second half, letting them have three or four threes. But for the most part, we got Marcus going in booty ball. Coleman got us off to an elite start with his threes. And Terrence, those three guys, are pretty special players.

Q. Brad, what does it mean to get this monkey off your back program, get to a Sweet 16, get to the next step?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It's never been on my back. You guys have made it that. These guys don't know anything about that. And I treat every team independently. I think for the program's sake it's mindblowing to me. And I think



there is frustration that we had a one seed and got upset this very game. But this program is elite. And to not be there in 18 or 19 years to me, that's more mind numbing.

We had tough draws and a couple of injuries and you get beat. That's the beauty of March Madness. It feels good to be advancing with this group. I've said all along, this is one of my favorite teams to coach, if not the favorite. So, yeah, on to Boston.

Q. Coach, I noticed you had a moment with Keith Dambrot at the end of the game where you stopped and chatted with him. I was wondering if you would be willing to let us know what you said to him and what that moment was?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I've known Keith for a long time and done clinics with him. So much respect for him as a coach, so much respect for his accomplishments, what he's done. He's always found winning. Winning is really, really hard to do.

No matter the stops along the way, whether at the high school level, whether at Akron, and obviously here at Duquesne. Coaching is a pretty small fraternity and really, really good guy.

You pull for the good guys. For him to be able to go out and do it on his terms and have this run is pretty special.

Q. Brad, the team got off to a hot start. What was the message to the team going into the game?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: We talked about it. These guys made it a point. It wasn't very much fun being down 9-0 in a minute and a half. I'm to the point where anymore I don't have to say a lot. These guys are grown men. And they care. And sometimes they care too much.

But they made a point to it, and we talked about it. We had to get off to a better start. We couldn't let this team get confidence coming off the BYU game, and we needed to make a statement.

Q. I would like to hear from Brad and Coleman on this. When do seeds go out the window? You're a 3, you're going to play a higher seed next for the rate to play



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potentially the highest seed after that. Do these seeds matter anymore?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: No.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I feel like the seeds don't matter as soon as the ball is tipped in that first round. I feel like that's evident every year. I feel like as soon as the ball is tipped, anybody could beat anybody. Whatever team plays the hardest.

It's an imperfect game. And to try to base it off of seeds is kind of bizarre. There are so many great players that play in the tournament, so many great teams. All of them are chasing that one common goal. Everyone is going to compete extra hard. I feel like the seeding is out of the window in that first round really and it's game on.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, I agree with that. I've been a 14 and won, I've been a 12 and won, I've been a 1 and lost. I think it's more about how you're playing. I think it's about the match-up.

I think it's so many little factors that are involved. I think it's what makes this March Madness is unique. We have now seen 16s beat 1s in this thing. Our task that we have in front of us is a team that was seeded higher than us. Okay. We've played in the Big Ten. We've played some of the very best teams basketball has to offer. We've played a great schedule. We've been on the road.

That's what you do all those things for is to prepare yourselves for these moments.

Q. So do you guys feel like underdogs now, you know, going against the 2? According to the bracket, that's how people look at it. Do you feel like that?

MARCUS DOMASK: I mean, every time we step on the court, I don't ever feel like an underdog. No matter who we're playing, I think with this group of guys, we can always go out and beat anyone in the country. So I'm really want looking at the seeds. I'm looking at Iowa State, who they have and how we're going to win.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Same. Every game -- when you've got a group that's veteran, when you have a group that's old, they know how to win. They know how to play.

I go in with a feeling of respect for the opponent and how good they are and what they do, but I never go in with the mindset that we got no chance. Maybe if we were playing the Celtics in Boston, I might feel different, but we've shown we can play with the best.

Q. So you've been a found additional piece for the program. Walk us through how you're feeling in this moment, Coleman.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: Part of me wants to get really excited and part of me wants to keep the job is not finished mindset. So it's in between right now.

I'm really happy for everything we have accomplished this year, but to sit here and say I'm happy with making the Sweet 16, it's not what I want to say. I want to be happy with winning a national championship, so.

I'm aware of the history because it gets thrown in our face a little bit. But I think the goal now is to really go out and do it and, you know, become national championships, because that's why we're here.

Q. You guys have won six straight games now in the postseason. How do you feel going into Boston about your team and what gives you confidence that you can compete for a national championship?

MARCUS DOMASK: I feel good about our team. I think we're hitting our stride and turning in the right direction. You always want to start playing your best basketball come March. And I think we're doing that. I feel confident. Iowa State is a really good team. So we've got to play our best to beat them.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: Yeah. I mean, I feel really confident in this team because I feel like there is still something missing that we haven't reached yet. I think there is a whole other level of intensity that we can play with, both offensively and defensively. I feel like there are moments where guys gotta step up and knock down shots, and that's on me.

There are moments when we've got to step up and lock in our defense and limit defensive mistakes. I'm really confident in this team because like I said, I feel like we got a whole other level we can tap into, for sure.

Q. Coach, a lot of people say this is a guard's tournament. How important is it to have Marcus being the engine of this offense and was that a point of emphasis to go out and get a guy like him in the off-season?

And Marcus, how much pride do you take in making this offense go?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah. I think we had a lot of ideas when we recruited Marcus. We knew how good of a player he was. Between Marcus and Ty and Nicco Moretti, I have



said all along, I felt like our point guard position was in great hands.

And Coleman gives us an unbelievable luxury, as a five man who can really handle and relieve pressure. So it wasn't about having that position. It was about taking -- being able to put guys into position to take advantage of mismatches and putting guys into positions to be successful.

Marcus's basketball IQ, Ty's basketball IQ, Coleman's basketball IQ, those allow us to be able to get away with the, quote, unquote, nontraditional point guard. He's as much of a point guard as anybody in this field and the triple-double last game proved that.

MARCUS DOMASK: Can you remind me of what was my question?

Q. How much pride do you take in making this offense one of the best offenses in the country go the way it does?

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, I don't really consider myself like the engine of the offense, I think that's what you said.

When you play alongside guys like Coleman and Terrence, the list goes on and on, we get the ball to where we need to get it to. Some days, it's me. Some days, it's Cole. Some days, it is T.J.

And we just go out and play basketball. Coach has done a good job of getting the ball where it needs to go and allowing us to use our strengths. I think why our offense is so successful because everyone uses their strengths really well.

Q. I'm curious to know what you guys think you did against Dae Dae Grant. You held him to 7 points. Not a lot of players this season have been able to do that.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I think it was our physicality as well as forcing tough two's. We try to keep everything two on two. And we try to go over ball screens and have guards, Ty, everybody take a crack at him, Terrence.

It was exciting to see because obviously we made it tough. And just limiting threes, crawling up in the space, rather than letting him create with the ball and create his own shots. So I think we did a good job of forcing tough twos and sticking to what we do.

MARCUS DOMASK: I think just our size and physicality is something that they don't -- they probably haven't seen before, between TJ and Ty, that duo on the ball, the whole

game guarding you, it wears on you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

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