

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Vanderbilt vs Saint Mary's

Friday, March 21, 2025

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## Vanderbilt Commodores

## Mark Byington

## Grant Huffman

## Devin McGlockton

### Media Conference

Saint Mary's 59, Vanderbilt 56

MARK BYINGTON: We're on the tough side of it. The NCAA Tournament, it's such a great opportunity, and it's something we cherish. There's going to be a team that has that unbelievable feeling of jubilation and excitement, and we're on the side of it with hurt.

I'm hurt for these guys. They gave it all and had such a special year, and they fought, and they really just kind of believed in the process of us trying to be good and us trying to get as good as we possibly could, and they did that.

This was a hard-fought game. Saint Mary's is terrific. They made plays, whether it was guys who don't shoot threes, making threes or rebounds or whatever else. A lot of times it comes down to something like that in those situations.

But I thought we had a couple good looks at the end. I think Jason Edwards' shot was a really good shot. He probably makes that 75 percent of the time. That was a good one. And Devin had to rush one up. That was not a great shot because it was hard, but some -- you're hoping for that moment to be able to make one of those, but we didn't.

It's a hard ending to a special team, a special group that believed in us this year and helped do a lot of good things for Vanderbilt basketball and Vanderbilt University.

**Q. Grant and Devin, their size and physicality, how much of that as the game wore along, did that get into**



**your legs a little bit as the game progressed?**

GRANT HUFFMAN: I would say just as the game goes on, that was our main focus is taking care of the glass, and I think we did a great job of that in the first half, and I think easier when are bench is by them and our coaches are telling us what to do. But I think part of us lost our focus in that second half, and we gave them some easy looks on offensive rebounds.

DEVIN MCGLOCKTON: Yeah, I would say our main emphasis coming into the game was rebounding. I thought, like Grant said, we did a tremendous job in the first half, but yeah, like you said, the fatigue, they were deep, they had a couple bigs that came in and out of the game, and they got some offensive rebounds and defensive rebounds that helped them win down the stretch.

**Q. Grant, with that being your last college basketball game, what are the emotions for you? How do you reflect on playing college basketball as a whole?**

GRANT HUFFMAN: It's one of those things where the days go by slow and the years go by fast. It's like a blink of an eye, and I can remember it was my freshman year, I was incredibly fortunate to be able to play my fifth year, especially under Coach B and my fellow teammates like Dev.

So the emotion, I'm pretty down right now, but I'm also extremely grateful for the opportunities I've been given.

**Q. Grant, kind of off of that, the last game being played right, kind of, in your backyard and near your hometown, does that add anything to the emotions you're feeling now? Would it have mattered whether it was here or Seattle or wherever?**

GRANT HUFFMAN: I mean, it's always great to be back home, but at the end of the day, a loss is a loss. It's the last time I'm going to be suiting up with these guys. It's unfortunate. But yeah.

**Q. For both of you guys, could you kind of describe the emotion during the game in the second half? What were the conversations like, things along those lines, in the second half?**



DEVIN MCGLOCKTON: Yeah, we were just trying to keep playing our brand. In the first half, I thought we played very well. Second half, we lost a little bit offensively and defensively and on the glass, too. We were just trying to get back to what we were doing, make adjustments, and trying to finish out the game, which we've done a lot of times.

GRANT HUFFMAN: Yeah, we were just in those situations trying to stay positive, keep upbeat. I felt like that was Coach's main message to us was, it's going to be a game of runs, so the only thing we have is ourselves, so we have to stick together and do what we do.

**Q. How much of a difference, the size difference make in this game in terms of rebounding, and what they were able to do height-wise, and how difficult has that been all season to overcome that for you guys?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, it's one of those things, we know who we are, and we've got to compensate in certain ways. They had one offensive rebound in the first half, but that was a big reason, because of our defensive pressure, of us keeping them outside the paint and really turning them over and doing some things there.

They're an experienced, good team, and they made adjustments. We lost some of our pressure in the second half on the outside by being able to guard the ball and keeping things outside the paint. And then, they were going in and they would make a shot, and it's 275 pounds sometimes you've got to box-out, and that weight and that push, that can wear on you.

We were undersized, but at times it was a benefit to us. In the second half, it was not a benefit to us.

**Q. What led to the second half breakdown in particular? Coach Bennett attributed it to attrition, which has been a conversation around your team the entire year. What did you see from your perspective?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, we started the second half off well. We just lacked energy, the defensive presence, the defensive energy, in the second half.

It's not something uncommon where a good team is going to make a run, make a push. I think we had -- there were some plays there that were kind of out of character for them, and it took a lot out of us.

Ross hasn't made a three in at least five games, and he made two of them, and one of them, they threw it at his foot and he picked it off of his foot and shot it in.

Saxen makes a three, his first three of the year, and those things kind of happen sometimes in these moments, and we've got to overcome them.

We overcame a lot of those things. We had a chance to win in the second half, and there was some things that we did not overcome. We missed free throws in that run. We missed some shots around the rim. We missed some open threes. It was a lot of things there.

One of the things, I think this team really wants to win and really cares about winning, and I think sometimes you kind of see it. They want it so bad that they press. Me as a coach, I never could quite get the button there pushed of getting them to relax and being in a possession.

With a new team, that's kind of hard sometimes. We didn't quite know where to go. Jason Edwards was making some plays, and then I think he wore down, and we were trying to find some different avenues out there and just didn't find enough.

I think it was really more about Saint Mary's finding a way, making some plays, getting their rebounds. We made some mistakes and didn't make ours, but I think the credit belongs to them.

**Q. You've talked about Saint Mary's' physicality. What are you unable to appreciate about it until you actually get out there on the floor and have to handle it for a full 40 minutes?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, it is the size. A lot of international players, and they play a physical brand of basketball, and we're used to a physical league, and they just have different ways to kind of take advantage. It's angles. It's wedging a guy under the rim for a rebound. It's screening hard. It's the body blows throughout it.

That's good players, that's a well-coached team, and I think those body blows got us. At certain points, I think we wore down on it, and it is one thing when those guys are that size, they're not losing any weight or getting any shorter throughout the game. The big fella in there is going to be 275 pounds all the way through, and he's a handful.

But it really wasn't that in particular. I really think it was the fact that we couldn't keep Ross out of the paint in the second half, and I think he made some timely threes, and there was some timely rebounds of 50/50 balls that we just didn't come up with.

**Q. One of the things we heard in the locker room over and over again a few minutes ago was, this group was**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**special despite the fact that there were a whole bunch of players from a whole bunch of different programs coming to a new program with a new head coach. What was the secret sauce to putting this together this year with basically no continuity?**

MARK BYINGTON: Well, you know, it was one thing when everybody came together, and we addressed this right away. We said we're against the odds, odds to being successful, odds coming together, odds having a winning team, odds being in the NCAA. We were against all those, and we used that as a unifying thing, that we're going to try to overcome the odds and try to be in this situation.

This is a special group. To be able to do what they did and be able to go against that and get to this place, I'm always going to cherish them.

I hope the Vanderbilt fans understand what a special group to get our program going and get us in the right direction. We're going to build on this. This is a setback. This isn't permanent. A setback for a game.

But to get different guys in this situation, to get Vanderbilt used to being in the NCAA Tournament, that's definitely the future goal, and this was a first step. We didn't get the win today, but there could be something down the road that really does help us.

**Q. The impression I got from you was you really liked this group of guys. How disappointing is it for it to end like that with those guys?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, that's really my biggest reaction is I want it badly for them. I wanted them to experience a win. I wanted them to try to go on a run. They've done a lot of things, and we played good basketball today. Not for 40 minutes or we would have won. But to have them ready to play, ready to compete and in this moment, I wanted it for them.

It's always the hardest locker room you ever have as a coach when you have players who finish their college eligibility. We have that with Chris and Grant and A.J. Those are emotional. Those are hard, knowing that's the last time that I get a chance to coach them and appreciative of them and everybody else. But that's a really tough feeling for a coach.

**Q. Do you anticipate Kijani Wright being with the team next season?**

MARK BYINGTON: He's on his way back of getting healthy, and that's our No. 1 thing.

**Q. Now that you don't have to build a roster with 11 transfers, what is the off-season going to look like for you, and how refreshing is it to not have to do that again?**

MARK BYINGTON: It's still difficult. The next, whatever it is, three or four weeks is really the hardest part of the year for any college coach. There are some players, I want to make sure they're back at Vanderbilt because to build a good program, you want to retain and have them here and to be able to get back to this moment and get back to this moment with them.

But the next three or four weeks are extremely difficult in college basketball. There's meetings, and with the players that want to be back here, we want to understand that we don't want this feeling ever again.

But I don't even want to think -- I'm probably going to take the night off, the rest of the night off, and then tomorrow, it really gets a lot to building the roster for next year because, unfortunately, you can't take much more time than that.

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