

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Xavier vs Illinois

Friday, March 21, 2025
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
Fiserv Forum

Xavier Musketeers
Sean Miller

Dailyn Swain

Ryan Conwell

Media Conference

Illinois 86, Xavier 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with a statement from Coach.

SEAN MILLER: This is the hardest part, when you lose. You sit on that couch and you listen to the winning coach and the winning players. I don't know if anybody wants to be there.

The great feeling of being in the NCAA Tournament, what it means to these guys, what it means to our program and university, you're on such a high. In our case advancing from Dayton to here was quite a thrill for us. It comes to an end. That's the amazing nature of this tournament: you win, there's no better feeling and you lose, God, it's terrible. From the sport's perspective, it's hard to describe. Really is. Because in our case, we don't have anything left. No practices, whatever.

I'm very, very proud of our team getting to the tournament. Even playing here today. I thought we played an excellent Illinois team. If that wasn't their best, then they're real, real good.

I felt like they played really well against us. If they do that, we would have had to have had an extraordinary game to beat them. Today we were not as good as Illinois was.

But really proud of these two guys, Ryan and Dailyn. They both had great individual years. Yeah, it's over. Very, very disappointing, yet very proud of what we were able to do.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.



Dailyn had a career-high 27 points.

Q. Ryan, your first year at Xavier. Can you sum up what this season meant to you in terms of your development, how much fun it was to get to this stage.

RYAN CONWELL: Yeah, first and foremost I got to give all glory to God just to be in this position.

I would say my first year at Xavier, it's all a blessing, just the opportunity that was given to me. Just the competition I got to play against every given night. To play with a great of group guys for a great coaching staff, it was just all a blessing.

I enjoyed it. I feel like I grew a lot as a basketball player but also just as a young man. I'm just excited for what's to come.

Q. Dailyn, Ryan just spoke of his growth over this year. Big growth for you this season. Where did you develop the most?

DAILYN SWAIN: I think like Ryan said, I definitely developed in the game, but most as a young man. I learned so much from Coach Miller and my teammates, guys like Zach and Jerome, just fighting through adversity. Jerome has been through so much. He's a great role model for me, being from my city.

Just like going through rough times, ups and downs. They never let me hang my head. They always keep me confident. I feel like that's the biggest area that I've grown this year.

Q. Coach Miller talked about the defense for Illinois tonight. What did they do to make it so tough on this offense?

RYAN CONWELL: I would just say they're a very lengthy team. They have a lot of size. I think they just scheme well. They just play great on both ends, offensively and defensively.

I would say they're a good team.

Q. Dailyn, to score a career high on this stage in the



NCAA Tournament, what do you hope you can take from this now moving forward in your career?

DAILYN SWAIN: I mean, I've always thought that I was capable of having games like this. Obviously I wish I could have impacted a win. The circumstances are unfortunate.

Just a little bit more confidence, I guess.

Q. Ryan, Illinois hits the buzzer-beater to go up five at the half. Was there the same message from Wednesday night in Dayton? What was the message in the locker room?

RYAN CONWELL: Yeah, I mean, Coach Miller always preaches at halftime the first 20 minutes is over, you got to go play another 20 minutes. We just put an emphasis on just trying to get more defensive rebounds, getting stops in transition, so...

Q. Dailyn, what kind of message did you have or moment did you share with guys that just played their last game at Xavier?

DAILYN SWAIN: I really just told them how much I appreciated them, like Jerome, Zach, Dayvion, Dante, Marcus. Like I said, I learned so much from them. They made my job easier all year because I'm the young guy. They made it their focal point to teach me while they were going through their years as well. I just let them know how grateful I am and super appreciative of them.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you very much. Appreciate your time.

Questions for Coach Miller, please.

Q. What message did you give to the guys that you'll no longer coach and played their final game at Xavier?

SEAN MILLER: Like I said, it's what makes it the most difficult part of the season, is when it finally ends.

Number one, I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to coach them. Each of them has their own story. I've talked about it over these last couple of weeks. Dayvion McKnight is like the silent assassin. Doesn't say a lot of different things. I was thinking about it actually earlier today, I don't know if he missed a single thing in the two years he played for us. When I say 'miss anything', I'm talking about June, July, August, any conditioning, any weight lift, prepractice, post practice, practice, games.

His ability to be dependable, trustworthy, be a great teammate, play through the injuries and the discomfort. He

gave us every fiber of his body, like everything. He gave us everything.

When you have a chance to coach a guy like that, and by the way you're in the Tournament and you have some success, it's really sad when it ends, but you're also incredibly proud of him.

He has more basketball left in him. I could go through every one of the seniors that are no longer going to be here.

I thought their attitude, their growth during the year, and really their will to want to win, is a big reason why we ended our season here today against Illinois.

The other part of my message is, every once in a while you got to tip your cap to the team you played. Illinois played really well today. They were a better team than us. They were.

We would have had to play our best, and maybe catch them at a night where they don't make as many threes. Tonight was not that night. That's what you have to do to advance in this tournament. I wouldn't be surprised if Illinois doesn't advance again.

Q. They go 12 for 30 from three. Were you happy with the way you defended the perimeter?

SEAN MILLER: No doubt they hit a couple that we challenged, and they made the shot. But our coverage broke down. We had to actually change our coverage mid game, which is never a good thing. We kind of went to our plan B.

A lot of times when you go to your plan B, it sounds good, but you're not as good doing it. As we went to our plan B, which is hard hedging, being more aggressive, we gave up a couple rolls, didn't protect the rim a couple times.

Once we started to do that better, I thought that was our best bet. Maybe I should have gone to it a little bit earlier. That tells you everything you need to know in that they were forcing us to do things we normally don't do quite frankly because we didn't have an answer against their offense.

The way they pass and their guards' size, really striking. They're young, but they're very, very talented, well-coached. Good on both offense and defense. They're a really good team.

Q. You mentioned Dayvion McKnight, this group leaving as a whole. Zach Freemantle and Jerome

Hunter spent a long time in this Xavier program. What will you remember most about them?

SEAN MILLER: Their resiliency more than anything. Their ability to get up off the mat when things weren't going well. For everybody's knowledge, Jerome Hunter overcame a heart attack and a torn Achilles. I mean, in life if you have one of those two, that's a tough break. He had both things happen before he left school. That's not even counting the fact that before he came to us at Indiana, he had season-ending surgery on his leg. Got his degree, ended in the tournament. Jerome played in two tournaments. Played his best basketball the other day at Dayton. He had a great game.

Ditto for Zach. Zach had three season-ending injuries. Played last year without him. We thought we were going to lose him this year. Came back. I think tonight was the first game Zach didn't score in double figures his entire senior year. But we wouldn't be even close to the tournament without Zach's outstanding play.

I also think both of those guys grew as a person. I thought their leadership was also a fixture of what we did this year.

Q. What can you take away from either this game tonight or this season as a whole that you can look to as you look to the future into next season?

SEAN MILLER: Look, when you have a chance to have success and you're in the Tournament, it has a funny way of repeating itself. Because now you have tournament experience, you've climbed a mountain, and you got there. You know what? Guys that are younger who return, guys that you recruit, you recruit them to that.

Look, our program has always been built on continued excellence. We have to use what we did, especially the last eight weeks of this season, to build.

Q. You mentioned the last eight weeks. A month ago losing record in the Big East, win seven straight to make the Tournament. How does that speak to the resilience of your squad, the attitude heading into next season?

SEAN MILLER: I mean, you said it. You need leadership, you need guys that believe in what we're talking about. Most importantly everybody is fixed on the games.

But it's between the games that it's the most important. I thought our process, our practices, us being able to learn from circumstances. We did a lot of great things that allowed us to be in this tournament, for sure.

Q. You spoke of Zach and Jerome. For some of the first-year guys that finished their career at Xavier, like Marcus and Dante, you talk about being a part of something that's bigger than yourself at Xavier, what was the process like of getting them to be all in on that process?

SEAN MILLER: Marcus and Dante, they sacrificed. They both bought into the role that we needed them to have. They got better at that role. They embraced it. I think they're the definition of two guys that came in here and impacted winning. Did a great job for us. Clearly bought into being a part of something that is truly bigger than themselves.

I have no doubt that Marcus and Dante will go on and make money playing this game at the pro level. In large part, I think some of the lessons they learned here this year, that will be a big reason why both have great careers.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Miller, thank you.

SEAN MILLER: Thank you.

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