

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Clemson vs Baylor

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

Ian Schieffelin

Joseph Girard III

Chase Hunter

Media Conference

Clemson - 72, Baylor - 64

BRAD BROWNELL: Obviously ecstatic about the win. Just super happy for my players. These guys have been battling all year. And couldn't ask for a better group of guys to coach. They've been just fantastic.

We obviously had a hot start to the year. Like most teams, had a couple of bumps in the road, but these guys never doubted it. We never quit. We just kept working. And we came into this tournament pretty determined and pretty confident. Just glad to see it paid off.

This was a big win for us. Baylor's obviously a very talented, well-coached team. So for us to play the way we did, I thought our defense was outstanding throughout. And that was a big key in both of our wins here in Memphis.

Q. The ACC is representing very well in this tournament. How do you guys feel about that?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: That seems like a recurring theme every year. We've had multiple teams in the Final Fours the past couple of years and multiple teams in the Elite Eight. I think that's why our league is so good; we just prepare each other.

It might seem like we're beating up on each other throughout the year, and that's why we did have some bumps in the road because the teams are so good.



But it prepares us for March. I think just the way that the league is set up, the way the league has so much talent, so many great coaches, it's going to prepare you for moments like these. That's why I think we're so successful year in and year out in this tournament.

Q. 25 percent of the Sweet 16 teams are coming from the ACC. Seems pretty significant there. And Ian, when did the chefs hats start? Has it been going on all season, before the season or was it recent?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: It started midseason of ACC play. I think it was the Louisville game I saw about 12 students wearing chef hats. It's pretty cool, especially after a win and you see those kids wearing hats for yourself.

And the next game we played Virginia, and the whole student section was wearing chef hats. It's awesome that students are wearing a hat for me.

Q. Did you ever even see that in high school, or they just started it here? Did you know right away when you saw it what it was?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Yeah, the nickname started this year kind of took off this year. People just started calling me Schief you start seeing somebody wearing a chef hat, I kind of assumed it was for myself.

Q. Ian, the first half you guys came out with energy. You always have energy throughout the game. But seemed like your teammates just saw something that you all could do to Baylor. What gave y'all the confidence to shut down Baylor's outside shooting in the first half?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Coach Brownell gave us a great game plan, and we executed it pretty great. We didn't let them get going early. And they struggled. We limited them to 25 points in the first half. We stuck to the game plan, and it worked well.

Q. Chase, two points against Boston College. As you come into this pod, 21 in the first round, 20 in this round. Just describe the mentality that you carried



into this tournament?

CHASE HUNTER: Just wanted to come in and just impact the game. Being that I only scored two points against Boston College, and I really wasn't on it defensively. I wanted to make sure I came in here and I was on it defensively, offensively, just really impact the game at all levels. I just wanted to come in this tournament and fight for my teammates. That's what I did.

Q. Chase, what do you think you guys learned during this season? Obviously you had some late leads that you let up. Do you feel like going through those situations taught you guys something that you kind of held onto here?

CHASE HUNTER: It definitely did. I think as a leader on this team, us three beings leaders on this team, we got in huddles and just we made sure we got stops and got baskets when we needed them.

There were times in this game where they started coming back. We made sure we got a stop when we needed it. That's what helped us prevail today.

Q. Joe, you made the decision to spend your last season elsewhere. You went off to Clemson, and now you're heading to the Sweet 16. Just what this entire experience has meant to you? You guys aren't done, but this team has embraced you. You've gotten to 2,000 points. You've got 99 3s this season. Just what you can say about this entire run and the continuation of it?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: First and foremost, all the credit goes to the coaches and the players that are here, because like you said, I'm a four-year guy at another school. I played against them four years. Took a bunch of shots. They didn't have to welcome me with all these open arms like they did.

These guys have been great. Coach Brownell, I tell the story, when he and Coach Donlon came to my house for an in-home visit they were bragging about the locker room, talking about how great these guys are, how close they are. You hear that everywhere.

But I didn't understand what it meant until I got on my visit at Clemson. I saw it. These guys are a brotherhood. It's something I wanted to be a part of and what makes it so special and exciting.

And it makes it a lot easier when you have a group of guys like this that open guys with welcome arms and play together and play for each other, it makes these runs that

more special.

Q. How did you guys maintain your composure as Baylor was mounting a comeback, cutting the lead to two? How did you make this one through?

CHASE HUNTER: I think it was just making sure we got big baskets when we needed them, getting big stops when we needed them. We knew they were a great team. They were going to go on runs. They have great players like we do. But as leaders in the team we made sure we got in the huddles, made sure we got stops and made big baskets when we needed them.

Q. Ian, can you talk about the shot over your head and how that came about?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: You know, he kind of like reached in, hit me in the face. I really didn't know -- I just wanted to get a shot up and try to draw a foul. I was on the ground and looked up and it went in.

If I took that 10 more times, I don't know if I make it. But it went in when it mattered, so...

Q. Ian, PJ has been in foul trouble in both of these games. You guys got to the Sweet 16. What does it say about this team that you can be without PJ for long stretches of time and win two games like this?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: One of the strengths is the depth of our team. And we've got guys off the bench that can fill anyone's role. And RJ was big today. He knocked down some big free throws. And we've got a lot of guys that can go.

Q. Chase, your shot at the first half, what did that do for the mindset going into the break? And are you going to try to claim that was better than behind your back, or are you going to give that one up?

CHASE HUNTER: Ian's was definitely better. I'll give that one to him. It was definitely a spark going into the half, to get that 10-point lead going into the half and to get momentum on our side, it was big.

I would say it was definitely a lucky shot. Definitely lucky. But it was a great shot at the end of the day, but it gave us momentum going into the half, and we came out and kept our foot in it.

Q. My question for Joseph Girard, what drives you as student-athlete?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: Just winning, honestly. As a

competitor, I kind of -- I grew up with a big family. Graduated with 12 cousins, and everything we did was a competition. I wanted to beat them in everything I did, whether it was getting my paper done first or beating them in backyard basketball.

I just kind of give them a lot of credit for instilling the will to win in me. And as an athlete, that's kind of what keeps me going, is winning games like this, being in environments like this. Getting to experience things with my brothers, my teammates, all that kind of stuff is the memories I'll have for a lifetime. And I think that's what drives me as an athlete.

Q. How were you able to shut off Missi down low? You had a lot of success against him. What were you doing to pack it in there and keep him away from the rim?

BRAD BROWNELL: He's a unique player. He's not a traditional kind of back-to-the-basket guy. You're not guarding interior screening or a million duck-ins. It's more pick-and-roll sealing and late lobs.

And I thought we had some good backside action in terms of chipping. Not to get too much detail, but just not letting him get to the rim without being bumped. And it's hard because they put so much pressure on you with ball-screen action that your big is involved in the ball screen.

But I just thought our guys did a really nice job of fighting over the screen -- Chase, most of the time -- so we didn't need a lot of help from our post player, or as much. And then our post player could concentrate on him.

Q. Your first trip to Memphis didn't leave a good feeling. But the second trip gonna be lifelong memories. How special is it to leave here with this win and to coach these guys at least for another week?

BRAD BROWNELL: That's the part that is -- I just love this team. They're really good players but they're better people. Really proud of the culture we have in our program. Outstanding students. We do things the right way.

And these guys are -- they're just fantastic to be around. The hard part now, you saw the Baylor kids. I'm sure Scott feels the same way about his kids, and you just get so attached. You love them. And when the season ends you know you're not going to coach some of them. So it's hard.

To be able to spend another week with them is fantastic. And then our team was one of the last two teams probably left out of the tournament last year. And that's

heartbreaking.

So some of these guys, you want it so bad for them. You talk to them about it all year. And now they're realizing why this is such a significant tournament and what it's going to mean for them for the rest of their lives.

Q. Want to get your take on the way the ACC has performed in this tournament.

BRAD BROWNELL: I'm not surprised. I think we have a terrific league. I've been outspoken about disagreeing with some of the metrics and how the way teams are judged. I don't know the best way to do it. I don't have the answers.

But I know this -- I just know from, I've been in the ACC for 14 years. I've been here a long time. I'm probably outspoken now because Coach K and Roy Williams and Rick Pitino and Jim Boeheim and Mike Brey, I've coached against hall of famers, and we're, like, there's a lot of new guys now. You've got to hold up the banner of your league a little bit.

And I know the quality of play. I've been doing this for a long time. I've been a head coach for 22 years. I know when I'm playing against good teams, well-coached teams. And so I'm not surprised in the least that our teams are doing so well.

I'm happy for our league. I've talked about we need to figure out better ways to do it. I don't think it's easy to do. I respect the committee and know how hard it is. But I've said that Pitt and Wake Forest are both unbelievably talented teams, well-coached teams. They could easily be Sweet 16 teams as well.

And I'm really happy for the league. And I hope we can move forward and be successful.

Q. From the late season skid to getting to this point of the Sweet 16, how would you characterize how the team was able to flush that and recreate some momentum in this pod?

BRAD BROWNELL: I said this before the tournament that we aren't playing as bad as everybody thinks we are, and that's why everybody picked us to lose.

You've got to dig a little deeper. Conference play is different. It's hard because everybody knows each other. Coach Grant at Boston College, one of my former assistants, we have no secrets with those guys.

And they just pounded us. They beat us and we weren't ready to go. Some of it is them. And their match-up wasn't



easy for us.

But the Wake Forest game, we played really well and lost against a team at their place.

We were confident. We didn't feel like we were on a skid. In fact, I think we won six or seven games in the month of February.

We had a quiet confidence about us coming here. The loss probably helped a little bit because it allowed me to get their attention after losing like that. They were embarrassed, disappointed.

We had some very challenging practices on Saturday and Sunday leading into the tournament. And from that, I think our team just played very well. It was kind of nice to play some guys that you haven't seen, much like the non-conference where we had a lot of success.

Q. I think I heard you say to someone after PJ fouled out, this is some crazy stuff.

BRAD BROWNELL: Yes, the last few minutes.

Q. How tense was that in the last minutes?

BRAD BROWNELL: Hard. I love PJ Hall. He's one of my all-time favorites. To be honest with you, I was too hard on him today. And I didn't help him play as well as he can play.

I've been very demanding with him throughout his career. We have a very special relationship. He felt bad that he didn't play well in these two games. But, I mean, he's a superstar. He's a superstar player. He's been the face of our program for the last couple of years.

And he's one of the kids, a top 50, 60 recruit who stayed home to play for his home-state school. That hasn't been popular in my time here. It's been hard for South Carolina and Clemson to get kids to do that.

So he's one of my all-time favorites. Always will be. So it was hard. And I felt bad that he wasn't playing up to his level. But the way the game was going, that's basketball. There was tough calls. And obviously the play where Jack had the rebound and had it stolen.

It's hard to hang onto these leads. It's hard to hang onto the lead against New Mexico when you've got 30 minutes to go and you're up 15.

Every team is really good. They're well-coached. Guys that can make shots and they put pressure on you and

you're trying to foul. It's not easy to finish off games.

However you gotta do it -- for us it was a guy off the bench who is not a great free-throw shooter by the stats. But two months ago, two and a half months ago I told one of our assistant coaches in a staff meeting, I want him in the gym every day for 20, 30 minutes for extra shooting, more extra shooting. He's been doing it. So all that hard work paid off for RJ today.

Again, sometimes the basketball gods smile at you, and today was one of those days for us.

Q. You had seen them on the other night shoot 16 3s. How much of that was the game plan to cut that off?

BRAD BROWNELL: Number one, limit 3s. I thought we did as good a job as you can. I think a couple of the stats for us, they only had seven assisted baskets. And Dennis is an elite guard. And they can really space you. And Scott does an unbelievable job of moving them around in all these different ways and disguising how they're going to ball screen you and backside action.

They're an elite offensive team with good players and great coaching, and we just really challenged our guys this week. I do think we mixed a couple of things up that was good within our coverages, and I'm sure they missed a few that they normally make. We obviously were fortunate they missed some free throws.

But our guys really competed. I think we were running out of gas at the end. Chase was exhausted. Joe was exhausted. So it was hard there at the end. But thankfully we were able to make one or two more plays to win.

Q. You mentioned earlier hard work and execution, but you also mentioned the basketball gods. When you talk about that shot kind of behind the back, how much do you just accept a little luck and realize it's going to take a little luck at this point?

BRAD BROWNELL: We've had three or four one-point losses where -- Jack Clark against Virginia, that far. If it hits the back of the iron. DJ Horne made a late one against us, and Chase gets blocked at the rim where he's, at the buzzer. A tip-in where both my guys are tipping it.

We've had our share go the other way. Today things worked for us. And sometimes that's why basketball can be a cruel game. It's hard.

I've got a lot of friends on the football staff at Clemson. And very few of them want to change positions with me. One of them's wife, early on -- lives across the street -- my

wife was walking to get the mail. And she's like, there's no way, I could never be married to a basketball coach. The games are stressful. Every game comes down to the last two minutes.

And the coach said, yeah, you guys have to inbound the ball like 50 times in a basketball game and people don't realize how hard that is with the athletes on the floor. Basketball is going to have ups and downs and quick turns, and you've got to be strong to survive it.

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