

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Mount St. Mary's vs Duke

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Lenovo Center

Duke Blue Devils

Jon Scheyer

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're with Coach Scheyer. Coach, if you could give us an opening statement, please.

JON SCHEYER: My thing always is, what a privilege it is to be here. I'll never take for granted the opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament for our guys, to coach in it. It's a blessing.

It's something you work -- I know a lot of us were just talking the last few days, it's something you watched growing up as a kid. For our guys to be playing in it, most of our team has not played in it, and I think that's an exciting thing for us.

Incredible privilege. We're ready to go. It was great finally finding out who we're going to play tomorrow. We've done our prep for Mount St. Mary's, and the run they've had is terrific. They played a great game last night, and we're really excited to kick this thing off tomorrow at 2:50.

Q. Coach, congratulations on getting here. I know we've talked about it a lot over the last few weeks, but what have you guys learned as a team with Cooper, when it was the foul trouble against UNC, and then the injury with the ACC Tournament, with him having to be on the sidelines a little bit and Sion taking the reins and Kon taking the reins and Tyrese, what have you learned about your team, what have you learned that you guys can do differently to maybe of surprise teams that scouted you guys in preparation for this?

JON SCHEYER: Actually, a friend of mine texted me this the last couple of days, but sometimes injuries are bad luck, and when there's bad luck or things that work against you, it's really an opportunity is what it is. I thought that presented an amazing opportunity for our team to show our toughness in a critical moment.

The Georgia Tech game, we're down, we're playing horrible, they're playing really well, and to be able to come back and turn it around the next two days against two really good teams -- with all that said, we all know we need them and we're a lot better with them.

But for our other guys to step up in close games to make big-time winning plays, I think that just gave us even more confidence with what we can do getting him back healthy and ready to go at the same time.

Q. You guys announced a couple of minutes ago that Cooper is officially going to be active tomorrow. What has it taken the past week to get him to this point, and also do you have an update on Maliq and his potential availability at this point?

JON SCHEYER: Cooper, for us, this is about him being able to move properly. He wasn't going to play if he was compensating or if he was -- look, no matter what, an ankle sprain, to say he's 100 percent tomorrow, he has to work through that a little bit still. But he's not compensating.

Actually, the time off, I think, has helped him, his explosiveness, he's getting a little bit of rest. The ACC Tournament is a grind. The regular season tournament is a grind. So our medical team staff has done a great job making sure with this force play testing, with how he's jumping off of each leg, that there's no -- there's not an imbalance of the way he's moving. So I think that's the biggest thing.

Then the second thing, you have to make sure he goes against contact, where he's getting knocked off his base, moving the right way without having it plan the way that he's moving. He looked really good yesterday. He had contact.

We built him up slowly and really progressed him the right way, but he's ready to go. In his mind, he was ready last weekend, but he wasn't. He wasn't. But he's been itching to get out there. I think that says a lot about who he is because a lot of guys would be more patient or not as anxious to get out there. That's just not the way he's wired, his family, everybody with them.

As far as Maliq goes, can't give you any more other than,



look, he wants to do whatever he can to get back and have a chance to play. I'm lucky to be coaching all these guys where they have that attitude.

I don't know if that's going to happen, but that's his mindset, that's our mindset to do everything we can to just give it a chance if we can continue to progress in this tournament. Can't give you more than that because I don't know more than that, but that's the mindset for him and for us.

Q. Jon, there's been some conversation the last week about whether the ACC should expand or perhaps form some kind of alliance with the Big East. I was wondering if you had some thoughts about where the league is now and what the future should look like.

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, I've seen that, and I think it's really important to talk about all these things because the sustainability of getting three teams in and then one -- now four. I'm sorry, four teams in, but three into the main field initially. It's concerning.

What ends up happening is a lot of the wins that we've gotten in the ACC this year -- we're not alone, it's anybody in the ACC -- a lot of it's discredited because you get into a league, you really can't go wrong with some of the games, even if you lose, you're not hurt by it necessarily, so there's only upside in a lot of respects. Where in our league once the ACC started, for the most part, it's downside.

So as teams, we obviously have to do a good job of winning and controlling what we can, but also, I think, looking at ways to -- I'm not going to comment on the Big East because I've been so focused on this year with our team, and I would like for us to make a special run, blow it out with this group, do the best job that I can with my platform here of finding ways to make our game better because I think there's a bunch of things we need to do, specifically with the game play -- to go to quarters, to have a 24-second shot clock, to modernize the game.

Also, ideas like that need to be thrown around because this thing's changing too quickly not to. Sorry I can't give you a better answer, but I'm fully, fully embedded with our team. I'm not trying to give much else a lot of thought right now.

Q. Coach, if you think back two years ago to Orlando compared to now, is there one area of your game that you feel like you've improved on the most? Second part of that question, do you find any extra motivation that you're going to be starting this journey below the Final Four banner that ended your season last season?

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, I didn't think of that. It's going to give me even extra motivation being here. I think there's a lot of -- it's interesting, when you start, there's always things along the way, at least for me, that helped motivate me. So you just gave me one more, which is great.

I would say I think the best thing you can do as a coach is give clarity. So as you go on, at least for me, I think it's very clear what we're asking our players to do. We're not asking them to do 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 things. My thing is more simplicity and really focus on how tough and connected we are in addition to, of course, you want to win the details of the game. In the details, I think clarity is a big thing.

So for me, I think if I was evaluating myself in that moment till now, there's a lot of things I would say, but I think a big one for me is clarity with making sure, not just what you know, but most importantly, what your players know that you're asking them to do. That's been a big point of emphasis for me with what we've done.

As far as the other question, each step -- I mean, when I'm in this tournament, I always take what happened last year, and in the back of my mind I always use it as a motivator. That's never going to change. That's only going to help.

Q. Coach Scheyer, I know the story line all season has been the performance of Flagg, Maluach, and Knueppel, but what about a guy like Isaiah Evans that really stepped up when his number was called in the ACC Tournament? Even if he wasn't contributing to the score sheet it just felt like he provided a spark of energy for your team in a time of need.

JON SCHEYER: You talk about Isaiah, he had one of the best plays of the ACC Tournament when he anticipated a steal, ripped it out of -- I think it was Paul on the play, but one of the Carolina players' hands, and then he dove on the floor, but without hesitation.

Isaiah and I have had a lot of amazing conversations since he's been here. I think he's misunderstood to some degree because he's -- man, he's all about the right things. He's a big time competitor. He's an amazing teammate. But to see his game progress -- shooting and scoring, it's not like we made him a good shooter when he got here. That's something he could already do.

But his willingness and want to become a complete player has been awesome to coach. So that play, diving on the floor, we're up in that game, and just his emotion and understanding how important that was, I was really proud of him. He's been in some crucial moments for us, made some big time shots, but his whole game has progressed

because he works on it, he takes coaching, and he has the great balance of being very confident in his ability, but also having great humility and being very objective with analyzing what he can do better and needs to do better.

I've loved, loved coaching Isaiah Evans, man. He's been awesome.

Q. Coach, the way you orchestrated this roster and then survive an advanced scenario, a tough nonconference schedule with Arizona, Kansas, Illinois, you name it all tournament teams, Kentucky, what do you think was so influential for you to build the roster with the way that you orchestrated it to be prepared for this moment and to survive an advanced scenario with a one game and one game only mentality?

JON SCHEYER: I think what you try to do is you try to simulate as much as you can what you're going to expect in those moments. So the only way to do that is to put your team in really tough environments against great opponents, see how they respond and react. Obviously your goal is to win. Every game we go into, our expectation is come out with a win.

But we knew, even the Kentucky game, the Kansas game early in the year, we learned a ton from it. Our team grew like crazy. As long as you have the right people, high character guys who are all into winning, even when it doesn't go as well, I knew we were going to be tougher for it.

Unfortunately along the way, we've had Maliq be out, we've had what happened with Cooper last week, and Maliq as well again. So different guys having to step up in different moments.

I think we've seen -- I don't want to say we've seen it all, but I think we've seen as much as you could see in 34 games. So I know our group is confident from those experiences, and we're ready to go.

Q. Kind of building off of that, Duke is one of the younger teams in the field and like you said a lot of guys who have never played in an NCAA Tournament before, so what vulnerabilities do you think that opens up for Duke? And on the flip side, how do you think that could turn into a strength?

JON SCHEYER: These guys have continued to be different, and I don't want to put -- sometimes you can make it too big of a thing where because they haven't seen it before, whatever. At the end of the day, it's basketball. The sense of urgency and all that you have to have, well, you have to have that to win 31 games and to win a regular

season championship and tournament championship.

So what I want for our guys, I don't want -- there's a lot of different things. We haven't had a press conference like this the day before a game and open practice, media, you guys are in the locker room. There's all these different things that come with it. I just don't want that to change who we are and what we do.

So I think that's the case whether you have the most experienced group or whether you have a team full of guys who haven't been here before. I'll tell you this much, no matter what, I think the thing for us we've done, we've gone for it. We haven't hesitated. We haven't flinched, and that's my expectation for us with not to go into this thing with the weight of the world or whatever.

Like go into it to have fun, go into it to attack, and I think as a young group, they have the ability to do that.

Q. Jon, as you would expect, without Maliq and Cooper, your defensive metrics in the ACC Tournament weren't as exceptional as they were during the regular season. What about as you watched the video was different or lacking in Charlotte?

JON SCHEYER: Well, you're missing two of your best activity guys. To me they're the two most versatile defenders in the country, and they're on the same team. So you miss the flexibility sometimes you would have with them, but also the steals and the deflections. So being able to turn some defense into offense wasn't there.

But to be honest with you, David, I thought, look, we're playing Carolina, and they have 24 points at halftime. That second half, we just gave them a ton of transition. A lot of that came from not being as strong as we needed to with the ball. I thought our defense against Louisville was really good.

Terrence Edwards, tip your hat to him. I thought the shots he was hitting, I'm not sure Cooper or Maliq, it changes. It was really good defense. So the length and the activity of those two guys can't be replicated, but I thought the effort, the game plan, the execution was right there. .

Q. Duke has lost 7 of the last 11 times they've played in this building, including an NCAA Tournament. Is there any rhyme or reason to that other than the fact that you're playing a rival there's a lot of other things that go into that kind of thing?

JON SCHEYER: I think it's just 7 of the 10 are road games, are they not? Obviously I was here for the one

game in the tournament as a coach, that was my first year back, which was, we weren't -- we didn't do a good enough job that day and Mercer did.

But besides that, I think it's a reflection on how hard of a place it is to win here on the road, NC State, the teams that they've had, and I don't think it's anything you take from that and say, man, we've got to do this because we're playing in this building.

I think it's all about us and our mentality. It's not like the rims are a different height or slanted. I think it's the fact they beat us those days, and we have to win tomorrow playing Duke basketball.

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