

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arizona vs Duke

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Newark, New Jersey, USA

Prudential Center

Duke Blue Devils

Cooper Flagg

Kon Knueppel

Tyrese Proctor

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



there's a lot of end-of-game situations that we can learn from and execute when it's our time.

Q. Cooper, a lot is made all season of your defensive versatility, your impact on that side of the floor. For you, what's the level of fun that comes from that? For a lot of college players it feels like something that can be a bit of a chore, but it seems like you really embrace it. What's your favorite aspect of getting to change the game on that side?

COOPER FLAGG: I think just being able to get energy from players blocking shots, getting steals, and those type of plays lead to kind of easier offense. So I think that's kind of where it starts from.

I think even for us as a team in general, we just take pride and enjoy helping each other out, having each other's backs. It's just about being connected and playing together.

Q. Coop, I know you've had a lot of Maine supporters come to your games. We're not that close to Maine, but we're a little closer than Duke. Do you expect a lot of people from Maine to be here, and do you have other people coming to the game that you think will support you, and what does that mean to you?

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I mean, I already know a ton of people from Maine that are planning on driving up. It will definitely be a pretty big Maine population at the game, so I'm definitely excited to see a lot of familiar faces.

Q. Cooper, last year in the tournament, Carolina beat Michigan State by 16, Bacot had 18 and 8, but yet he got 100 angry DMs on Twitter because he didn't hit the over on his rebounding total. Have you dealt with anything like that this season, and how do you block that type of stuff out?

COOPER FLAGG: I mean, no, not really. I mean, I think -- kind of like you said, the DMs and stuff like that, all throughout the season we kind of see that a little bit. Talking for myself and some of my teammates, I know all of us have gotten DMs and stuff like that. But it's not that big of a deal. We kind of just see it and laugh at it.

Q. Guys, you start three freshmen. Two are here. You really haven't had a lot of close games of late. I heard Grant Hill talking about -- this is probably all before you were born, but he was talking about when they faced UNLV when they went through a similar season as you guys, where they kind of rolled, and then when they met Duke, all of a sudden they were in a tight game. Have the coaches talked about that with you guys, and how do you prepare for that, to face adversity when things have been pretty much just kind of cruising along?

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I think what I would say is we had some early close games. We've had some moments that we've been in throughout this year that I think we've kind of taken and learned from. And some were losses, I think all three of them. We had some good late game situations that we definitely watched a lot of film on and learned from.

I think just by executing and taking what we learned from those games.

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, we practice a bunch of game situations, whether it's in the half, start of second half, end of the game. That's something we do a bunch in practice, so when close games come, we'll be ready.

TYRESE PROCTOR: Yeah, we faced adversity in the ACC Tournament, UNC, Louisville, Georgia Tech, all three games we were down or we had a lead, and they came back. But like Kon, said, like Coop said, we do end-of-game situations every day in film, and there's a lot of college basketball games going on in America. So



Q. Kon, obviously Duke has a long history of great three-point shooters on their team. For you, how did you sort of develop that game as a kid or that part of your game as a kid leading up to this point, and what is it about the way you guys play offense that gets you so many open looks that you can shoot such a high percentage?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, we have a bunch of good shooters on the team, especially this guy and Isaiah and Cooper. It's hard to guard a bunch of shooters on the floor, so it gives us a bunch of looks.

But growing up, my dad was a pretty good shooter, so just learning from him, getting reps up. I wasn't great in middle school, but once I got to high school, just the amount of reps that you take really, really helps you prepare.

Q. Cooper, three years ago this month, to go to the Maine point, you won your state championship for Nokomis against my hometown high school. Three years ago you're a 15-year-old freshman, now you're an 18-year-old freshman at Duke. At 15 years old, could you have seen yourself on the biggest stage? What motivated you to that point from the state title to now Sweet 16?

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I think it goes back to something -- like you said, this is just something I dreamed about ever since I was a little kid. These are the moments that I imagined myself being in when I was in the driveway, things like that.

Just a surreal feeling to be here in these moments and have these opportunities. I just feel really blessed.

Q. Cooper, I was talking with Matt Cohen yesterday, and he told a story about you guys facing Paul VI last year and that Pat Ngongba was trying to say hello to you in the hotel lobby, and he said I didn't get much of a hello back. He and Darren were kind of given the "next year, next year, we'll be friends. How hard was that for you to stay locked in in that moment and say, that'll wait for next year when we're buddies?

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I think for me, it's all competition. Like it's all friendly competition at the end of the day. But we can be friends outside of the court or whatever it is, but if I know I'm matched up against somebody or I have to play them the next day, I have to be locked in and have no friends on the court. So that's kind of where that comes from.

Q. Cooper, how do you feel about the comparisons with Larry Bird, and what do you remember watching

clips of Bird when you were a kid?

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, obviously I grew up watching old Larry Bird videos and stuff like that, the '85, '86 Celtics team and their championship that year. Obviously it's really cool to hear people say that. He's a legend, so it gives me a lot of confidence, and it's just a big compliment.

The comparisons? I don't really have too much to say on how I compare to him or not. I don't really compare myself to anybody. I just try and be my own player.

Q. Kon and Tyrese, about the guy next to you, a lot of people are talking about him and his ceiling, his play. What's Cooper like outside of basketball like as a teammate, as one of your friends on the team, that kind of thing? Feel free to embarrass him as much as you want as he stares at you two.

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, I mean, obviously he's my roommate, so he's very kind, but he kind of keeps to himself. But he likes to joke around. He's a good guy. He's good to us even when he's talking crap.

Yeah, he's a great guy to be around off the court.

TYRESE PROCTOR: I mean, he's just a kid. (Laughter). I mean, he's always joking around and stuff.

No, he's cool. He's cool.

Q. Cooper, you've been rocking the Nikes throughout the tournament, but you are with New Balance. Where are the New Bs as opposed to the Nikes during the tournament?

COOPER FLAGG: Obviously I love New Balance and I would love to wear their shoe, but we're in a situation where Duke is with Nike, obviously. So just respecting the rules that are in place and kind of what we have to follow.

Q. Tyrese, how has Sion starting at point guard -- you've been red hot lately, and basically you do an off guard for the most part. How has that helped you, and do you think you've found a home? Do you think you've really found your niche with this team?

TYRESE PROCTOR: I mean, Sion is such an unselfish player. I think as a group, we're very unselfish and just understanding how we play together and understanding the spots that we can excel at on the court. So I feel like Caleb, Sion, Kon, Coop, really everyone, just being able to put me individually in a position to succeed, getting into my spots. When I have the ball, I'm trying to do the same thing for them.

I think just having the understanding as a group is why we're such a good team.

Q. Tyrese, you have obviously played the most games up there against Caleb Love. What have you enjoyed about the battles that you've had with him out on the court, whether he was in North Carolina or now Arizona?

TYRESE PROCTOR: I think just the intensity. It's always a high level matchup. It's always a great game, and that's really it.

Q. For Kon and Cooper, you guys have not really seen a lot of Henri Veesaar in that matchup. What have you seen with him on tape about what makes him good both offensively and defensively?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, Veesaar is one of those guys that just plays really, really hard, mucks up a game. Obviously he's really dangerous on the offensive rebounds, but knows how to play on both ends.

COOPER FLAGG: Yeah, I would say after what Kon said, just a good player, can play really hard and just be a weapon for them.

Q. Cooper, I imagine it's hard to zoom out at this point when the goal is still in front of you, but when you look over the course of the season, what are you most pleased with as far as where you've progressed in your game or improved?

COOPER FLAGG: I'm not really sure. I haven't really, I guess, taken much time to look back and look at the year we've had. Something I'm most proud of is our team as a whole coming together and being so connected, going into so many battles together and just coming out with a lot of wins.

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