

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - St. John's vs Duke

Friday, March 27, 2026

Washington D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

St. John's Red Storm

Rick Pitino

Zuby Ejiofor

Dillon Mitchell

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Duke - 80, St. John's - 75

RICK PITINO: One suggestion for the NCAA is, when you have interviews on the court for Duke, for the winning team, and they have time there, the game started before we even came in here. You should have the losing team go first because you left us disappointed in the locker room while the other team's celebrating, rightfully so.

You should let the losing team go first and then let the winning team have as long as you want. Just a suggestion because you just left us hanging out there for over a half hour.

THE MODERATOR: I think that's a solid suggestion, Coach.

RICK PITINO: Thank you. As far as the game is concerned, we felt we had to win the 3-point line in a big way to have any shot at this game, and we did. We were up ten, we could not stop bully drives, bully drives, bully drives, bully drives, four, and we could not stop it, which is a credit to them.

Our guys played with great heart. They made some defensive mistakes down the stretch, but that's a credit to them.

We had our moments in the game. We fought hard all season. We're all very disappointed we didn't have a chance to win a National Championship, but that's a credit to Duke.

Q. Zuby, could you just describe for us your emotions



after such a tough way to end your career.

ZUBY EJIOFOR: Obviously pretty disappointed. I felt, like Coach said, we had a couple moments, we had opportunities down the stretch to be able to come out with the win, but little mistakes here and there with our coverages, and they were able to exploit us with some mismatches and stuff like that. So obviously disappointed.

Fell just short of the Elite Eight and our chance to go to the Final Four. One heck of a year, but yeah, pretty disappointed.

Q. Dillon, can you kind of elaborate or explain why it was so difficult for you guys to get stops in the last eight minutes of the game?

DILLON MITCHELL: Just making mistakes that you can't have at this time of the year, not listening to Coach. You can't have mistakes like that at this time of the year, and it cost us. It cost us the game. It cost us our season. It's just disappointing.

Q. Zuby, I want to hear a little bit more. You've had an amazing run with St. John's. You've been a legendary player. I just want to hear what you want the fans to remember you by.

ZUBY EJIOFOR: Yeah, just a competitive player on the court, but my character is something that I pride myself on the most. To all the St. John's nation, I appreciate you guys over the past three years just embracing the player.

Q. Dillon, you're talking about some mistakes about like getting the stops late in the game. Are we talking about like switching mistakes? Like what kind of mistakes are we talking about?

DILLON MITCHELL: Both sides of the ball, offensively and defensively. They were in the zone, and we didn't run what we were supposed to run. We were messed up, not getting to our stops. Defensively just not making the right switches, not doing the right things on the defensive end. Just both sides of the ball, making mistakes.

Q. When you're down three in the last 10 seconds, what kind of shot was drawn up for you guys? What



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were you guys looking for?

DILLON MITCHELL: Really just I believe it was power, try to get Zubly the ball, look at him to pop. Dylan coming down like the Kansas game, but looking for Zubly to pop and try to get the shot down there.

Q. Dillon, I just want to say thank you for the hard work this season, but not the ending you wanted to your college career. You definitely helped St. John's get another Big East Championship regular season and tournament, and you exceeded expectations by making it to the second week. Just reflect on what is one thing you could tell your younger self?

DILLON MITCHELL: Man, just enjoy the moments. It comes fast. It goes fast. It's tough.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to thank Dillon for joining us here in the interview room. First question for Coach Pitino.

Q. Rick, did you kind of agree with Dillon's assessment in terms of you guys didn't handle their zone well and guys making mistakes on defense in terms of not switching right?

RICK PITINO: We made some good plays in the zone. Zubly missed a foul line jump shot. We missed a wide open 3. I don't think it was as much as our defense.

Our defense, when we were up ten, up eight, Ruben made a mistake, Ian made no blockout. We had bully drives, bully drives, bully drives. So it was our defense that broke down.

It wasn't so much not being in the right place. We just got bullied to the basket. They do that to a lot of teams. That's why they're the Number 1 ranked team in the country. We couldn't defend the bully drives.

Q. Jon Scheyer just said that Caleb Foster had no business playing in this game, but given what he did, do you feel like that was the difference between ultimately winning and losing?

RICK PITINO: No, I think it was our defense that couldn't defend them. I don't think it was one player. He did play very well certainly, but it was a big lift for them to have him. I would have rather played without him, but I didn't get that choice.

Q. Obviously Duke did a great job on the boards. Did you think that your spacing and with the amount of 3-pointers that you were putting up, did that have an

impact on how few rebounds you were able to pull down today?

RICK PITINO: No, it was we had to win the 3-point line. It was our only chance to beat them. But if you break the game down -- I just watched the last 12 minutes because we just sat in the room. It was just the drives to the basket that we could not guard.

Duke has been doing that to a lot of people. Our guys gave a valiant effort. You can see how disappointed they are. We believed we were going to win this game. We're all very disappointed.

I told our guys, look, I've been in this situation before. You trained all year like you trained in the Olympics. Our frontcourt was 18-for-31 offensively, but you're at the podium right now and you've got a bronze medal around your neck because you won the Big East regular, Big East Championship, and you got the bronze medal. It's not as good as a gold, it's not as good as a silver, but you won the bronze, and you should feel very, very proud of that.

Q. A lot of cynicism has crept into this game the last couple years, it's a transactional game. What does it tell you about your two players leaving the podium in tears?

RICK PITINO: This team was one of the most unique teams I've had in 52 years. Never one argument amongst the players, impossible summer and regular season. Not one potential fight or somebody getting upset at somebody. I've never seen that in my 52 years.

They were just the greatest kids in the world. They wanted to win so badly. They were willing to do anything to try and win. I'll never have a team like this again with that type of attitude. I may have some good teams, but never, ever again with this type of attitude and just incredible people. My heart breaks for them right now.

Q. We haven't really heard you talk about plays by name until the Kansas game when you talked about calling power. The way that you wanted it to be executed, what would you have wanted it to look like?

RICK PITINO: We were trying to set a screen, a high screen, and get them to help. They'd probably leave Zubly alone. And if we didn't have that, we would go down the lane and find the corners.

We didn't necessarily want that shot, but that's okay. He had a slight opening, and he had the gumption to take it.

That's not the reason. I never look at offense as a reason

you lose. Obviously they weren't going to give us a 3. I always look at defense, and we couldn't guard them to the basket, and that's the reason we lost the game.

Simple as that, we made our mistakes. It's no one's fault. They all tried their tails off to win this game. Very proud of them, each and every one of them, very proud of. It wasn't that he didn't run the play correctly. It's just that he missed the shot.

Q. You have the Number 1 team down ten, to not finish it off, how hard is this one going to be to get over, especially considering --

RICK PITINO: Like I just explained to you, down ten, bully drive, bully drive, bully drive.

Q. Not how they came back, but with the guys you have and this is their last game, how hard is this one going to be?

RICK PITINO: It's hard, but I'd like to believe that Duke has come back many times. They're a great basketball team. We could not defend them. That's why up ten did not last. That's why we couldn't defend them.

We played a great first half. We answered the bell on every punch. And in the second half, we just could not guard certain things they ran to the basket. If we could have, if we were a little bit bigger and more physical there, probably could have made a difference, but we did not.

There's no regrets about that, just great feelings for the team. You can see how much it hurt them. They certainly will not play again together. That's the difficulty about a new team potentially.

We'll all take some time off and just look back, I think each and every day, as we have in the past, with great pride in what they did, the fight that they had, the people they were. Then we all take some time off because it's much needed. Thank you all for the support.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congrats on the championship season and thank you for joining us.

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