

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - NC State vs Marquette

Friday, March 29, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Arena

NC State Wolfpack

Kevin Keatts

Casey Morsell

DJ Horne

DJ Burns Jr.

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

NC State 67, Marquette 58

THE MODERATOR: We will begin with a question for coach and then go to our three student-athletes.

Q. I just wanted to ask about at halftime what the outlook was. We watched Marquette all year drop behind in the first half and come back and dominate in the second half to win or almost beat Purdue, but you really never let them get it back to single possession.

Was there a key coming out of the half having dominated, you felt, to keeping them down?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, we thought that if we could defend the three-point line, obviously that would give us our best opportunity to win. We talked about at halftime playing it similar to a scrimmage. We had won the first half by 13, and wanted to talk about playing it 0-0. I thought we did a good job.

The difference in the game is when you can defend teams, and you look at Joplin who can really shoot the ball. He was 0 for 7. They were 4 for 31 from the three-point line, which that's an incredible weapon for those guys.

I thought when we defended the three-point line, that made a huge difference. Then offensively I just thought we really shared the ball. We did some good things. Turned it over a little bit more than I wanted to, but when you get 14



assists on 26 made field goals, that's a good night.

Three guys up here, older gentlemen, really carried us when we needed baskets. I can think back of when they made big baskets. DJ Burns had his career high in assists with 7. Obviously they did a good job of taking him away, but he became a very efficient passer. I think Casey made a big shot. DJ Horne made big shots. We just relied on our experience and on our defense.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. What has been your favorite memory so far this tournament off of the court?

DJ HORNE: I would just say building the chemistry and the relationship that I know the success that we found late in our season will carry over for the rest of my life.

CASEY MORSELL: Man, I would just say proving everyone wrong. Going into every game, we're pretty much the underdogs. We have that conversation heading into every game about trying to embrace everyone doubting us and just proving everyone wrong and going into the locker room and celebrating.

DJ BURNS, JR.: As far as off the court moments, I would have to say probably today at pregame meal, those guys were pretty funny. They kept it light when it got a little tense.

Q. Casey, Tyler Kolek is an elite scorer and elite passer. He got his points today, but it seemed like you really kind of denied him getting the ball to his teammates. Was that the plan, or is that just something that kind of happened?

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, you know, they need him to get going in order for them to be very successful. He had a pretty good scoring night, but trying to hold him below his assist average was something that I at least tried to prioritize.

Q. For DJ, after the game, you guys came over to the fans and gave everybody a shrug. What was that



feeling like, and could you ever imagine this two weeks ago?

DJ BURNS, JR.: Oh, man, if you let me tell it, I imaged it way back in October.

Yeah, it was the why-not-us thing. We're going to keep that going. We get a lot of disrespect. People still don't think we're supposed to be here, that we're going to go further. We're going to keep trying to crash the party.

Q. For each of the student-athletes, just what can you say about the ACC playing in the conference? It's gotten a lot of disrespect, but now we're seeing at least two teams in the Elite Eight from the conference. Just what the level of competition was like and your thoughts on the conference and how it prepared you for this.

DJ BURNS, JR.: I think that the ACC is one of the best conferences, if not the best conference. I feel like we're not the only team that took it with a level of disrespect, and that's why we're all fighting now.

CASEY MORSELL: I agree. It 100 percent prepared you, even from a physicality standpoint. We were prepared just for a lot of different things that teams throw at us, whether it be super fast, super slow. That's kind of what has been a major key for us to adapt with different things that the game presents.

DJ HORNE: I agree as well. ACC is a great conference. I just believe that we come into the arena, put our pants on the same way they put their pants on, so like I said from the jump, why not us?

Q. When I was a little kid, y'all made me cry because you beat the University of Houston. Has your coach now given you any background about that game that happened about 40 years ago and the fact that that matchup could happen again on Sunday?

KEVIN KEATTS: I can answer it. No. No, because we take one game at a time. It's two great teams that's going to play here in a little bit, and we don't know who is going to win the game.

Q. (Off microphone)

KEVIN KEATTS: Possibly. Some of the conversations I have, you guys are not privy to. That's why we're here.

Q. I'm going to try that same question, Casey, a little differently. You've been here a little longer. It is starting to look a lot like 1983. How aware are you of

the history of the program and that it is starting to dove-tail like that?

CASEY MORSELL: I'm fully aware. We pay homage to that team and that group all throughout the year. Those guys have been valuable to us by coming back, giving us feedback, giving us different things that we could do to be better.

So we definitely appreciate them, and we honor them just by going out and trying to win.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes go back to the locker room.

Questions for Coach Keatts, please.

Q. Kevin, sundown was just after the first TV time-out of the second half. Understanding that, how impressive was what Mo did tonight?

KEVIN KEATTS: You can think about this run. He has been so impressive. What happens is when good players start getting great stats, you don't even realize they have it until the end of the game. Like I never knew he had 15 rebounds.

I mean, he's been so valuable. Double-doubles and playing great defense, and we're asking so much of him. I'm proud of him. He has stayed true to his religion. He stayed true to our basketball team, and we're talking about a young man that gives us everything every time he steps on the court.

Q. Again, similarly along the '83 thing, it doesn't want to be a big history lesson, but how aware have you been of that as this run has continued, and what will those conversations be like over the next couple of days?

KEVIN KEATTS: I think every team has to create their own path, and our '83 team, not only our '83, our '74 team has been tremendous. They've been big brothers, uncles, maybe some of them granddads to a couple of our kids. Been great.

We talk about -- we don't have to talk about that history now because we celebrate it the entire time. It's been talked about since I've been here, and it's going to be talked about as long as we ever are going to remember.

It's not one of those things where we have to point to it and say, here's what happened in '83, here's what happened in '74. We talk about the great David Thompson. Obviously we had his statue unveiled for him this year. Those guys

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

are always around.

It won't be the conversations about, hey, by the way, this is what happened. It will be more so, hey, your big brothers, your uncles, this is what they've done before, and you know because we've celebrated it the entire time.

Q. DJ's second foul that got overturned after the review, what was your understanding of what happened there?

KEVIN KEATTS: I'm so glad they did that. We are a pressing team, and we trap all the time, and every time -- he was in the cylinder. He was too close to him. It's a new rule that we get called all the time because we trap, and basically they called him in the cylinder, meaning he was too close. We were doing -- I'm just glad they went to the monitor. It's the right call. Any call that went our way was the right call tonight.

Q. How big was it?

KEVIN KEATTS: I think it was big. I think it was a huge call, but it was the right call.

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