

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Alabama vs North Carolina

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Crypto.com Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Hubert Davis

Armando Bacot

RJ Davis

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined here by North Carolina student-athletes RJ Davis and Armando Bacot. We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. Alabama's known for their offense, but through the past and this season they've struggled on defense. That changed in the round of 32. What did you guys see against Grand Canyon on tape?

ARMANDO BACOT: Alabama definitely did a good job just on their game plan of defending Grand Canyon's actions. Obviously the way Alabama can score the ball, for most or part of the season the defense doesn't really matter in a sense because they're the No. 1 offense in the country.

RJ DAVIS: I think they did a good job of just playing their brand of basketball. They're known for transition 3s, and they rely on 3s and layups and dunks.

But they did a good job of kind of just playing their defense, corralling the paint, being in gaps and turning the ball over. There was a lot of ups-and-downs. That's what we're expecting for tomorrow's game.

Q. Armando, I wanted to ask you about RJ and his toughness. Do you feel like that's maybe an underrated part of his game, for all the other things that he does? Some of the beatings that he takes and that he plays through?

ARMANDO BACOT: For sure. All year and throughout his career, the way he's been able to go down the paint and



finish at an elite level. He's probably the best finishing guard in the country, so that just speaks on his toughness right there.

But also, too, what's been underrated this year about RJ is his toughness defensively. All year we've asked so much out of him offensively, to score the ball, play make, do all these different things. But defensively I don't think he gets enough credit for how great he's been defensively, just on the ball, off the ball, and taking on challenges, guarding the best players.

Q. Armando, the ACC got a lot of criticism this year about the quality of play, and yet there's four teams now at this stage of the tournament. Do you guys kind of take a bit of a chip on your shoulder at all that the league was talked about that way and yet has now produced this?

ARMANDO BACOT: Definitely. You see it every year. I think, especially since, like, 2018 when (indiscernible) and all of them left. I feel like the respect for the ACC just in general kind of went down. But you look at every year in the tournament we've always got a couple, multiple teams (indiscernible) deep in these rounds.

There's a lot of stuff that goes into it. I think most ACC programs are playing a high-level nonconference schedule too, so I think that really plays a factor. I feel like other conferences might not be as strong or they're kind of manipulating it in a way some sense.

This year was really crazy because you look at how great NC State has been playing and how great Duke has been playing. Clemson too has been great, but you look at teams like Pitt who's beaten three or four of those teams that I just named. Also too, UVA, they obviously got out, but this year there were a lot of ACC teams that were deserving that didn't get a chance to make it in.

Hopefully everyone sees after this year how competitive ACC basketball is and how good the teams are.

Q. RJ, when you look at Alabama's team, you can't go far to find Mark Sears on the stat line. He's the highest



scorer and is playing against you. What's that matchup you're looking forward to? And what do you see out of Mark Spears' game?

RJ DAVIS: I think it's a really good matchup, both All-American guards. I have a lot of respect for his game, just the way he orchestrates the offense. He's able to get to his spots. Does a good job of setting his man up, using ball screens. He's the head of the snake.

I think it's going to be a good matchup from both sides, from my end and his end. They put in a lot of actions for him to be great and for him to find shots for himself and for his teammates.

I'm looking forward to it. I think it's not going to be just a matchup game, but a whole team-environment game, where it's not just me versus Mark Sears, it's UNC versus Alabama.

Q. With how big sports betting has become, how aware are you guys of that aspect to college basketball? Do you hear from fans? Are there interventions? How do you deal with that side of it that it's grown so much?

ARMANDO BACOT: It's terrible. Even at the last game, I guess I didn't get enough rebounds or something. I thought I played pretty good last game, but I looked at my DMs, and I got, like, over 100 messages from people telling me I sucked and stuff like that because I didn't get enough rebounds.

I think it's definitely a little out of hand. But at the same time too, I get the point of it too. Like, if you bet a lot of money on something, and you're, like, one pick away and somebody messes it up, I understand the part of fans being made. But it's annoying, too, at times.

THE MODERATOR: RJ, Armando, thank you very much.

We are now joined by North Carolina head coach Hubert Davis. We'll jump right into questions for Coach Davis.

Q. When you think of Alabama, a lot of people think of their football program, but basketball is really starting to roll since Nate Oats has been here. What's your take on it when you look at it from afar? I know you played them in the past and now at the Sweet 16 again.

HUBERT DAVIS: Coach Oats has done a terrific job at Alabama. He's a great coach. His teams have been consistent every year, from a defensive standpoint, tremendous athleticism. They can get steals and deflections, great rebounding team. They pressure you.

They try to dictate and decide how you play on the offensive end.

Then from an offensive standpoint, it's straightforward and clear. They're trying to get 3s, layups, and dunks and free throws. And they've got the personnel to be able to do it. Great guard play, size at the 4 and the 5 positions that can shoot 3s and can finish around the basket.

They propose a lot of problems and challenges for you, but we're really excited about the challenge of playing them tomorrow night.

Q. What are the keys for your team to win tomorrow as you see it?

HUBERT DAVIS: All year we've identified what allows us to have success, whomever we play. We've got to get after it on the defensive end. And all year consistently we've been a really good defensive team.

We've got to rebound the basketball. Prior to Michigan State in our last game, we had out-rebounded our opponent 25 straight games. So we've got to get back to that. We've got to dominate the boards.

And then taking care of the basketball on the offensive end. Really that's two parts. One, obviously limiting turnovers; but two, our shot selection has to be good. I've always felt that your defense is really dictated by how you perform on the offensive end.

If you're making shots, taking good shots, getting to the free-throw line and taking care of the basketball, your opponent's always going up against your set defense, and that's good news for us and bad news for whomever we play.

Q. You guys are one of four ACC teams to make the Sweet 16. It felt like a lot of the conference got kind of a little disrespected or not as much attention this season. But you've seen how much success the conference has had in the tournament. Do you guys feel like you're continuing to prove that it is one of the elite basketball conferences in the country.

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't think we're in a position where we have to prove anything. I've always felt like the ACC was arguably the best conference in college basketball. The reason I believe that is for most of my life I've been a part of this conference, as a player, as an assistant coach for nine years, and now three as a head coach.

Just the type of coaches and the programs and the consistency in the NCAA Tournament from this conference



is proof on the quality of teams and programs that we have in this conference.

Q. Coach, you mentioned you as a player because that was kind of my question. I was hoping you could go back into the time machine to 1992 and tell me what you remember from playing Alabama in the NCAA Tournament.

HUBERT DAVIS: It was in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Robert Horry and Latrell Sprewell, Hollywood Robinson, and just a really talented group. And played them in the Sweet 16. We had to play extremely well to advance to the Sweet 16 where we played Ohio State and unfortunately lost in that game.

Much very the same as the Alabama team that we're playing now -- just tremendous length, athleticism, talent, can score in a number of directions, can get after you defensively.

I remember that game, playing them, and I remember the game before I wanted to play really well against Alabama because the game before, I was 2-for-17 from the field and we almost lost to Miami of Ohio.

Q. You always talk about guys taking advantage of opportunities, not knowing when those opportunities come, but being able to take advantage of them. What's it like for you to see guys like Jae'Lyn Withers and Seth Trimble take advantage of the opportunities, particularly like they did against Michigan State?

HUBERT DAVIS: I do. I love that. It's great for them to have that experience or that testimony of when your number is called being ready to play. That's an important trait that you have to have.

We talk about it a lot. There's very few things that you really do have control over. You have control over obviously how you respond and how you react, your words and your ways, your actions, your attitudes, how hard you prepare. And when that number is called, your job and responsibility is not only to be ready but to be at the best of your ability.

What a great example of that has been Jae Wit this past week in Charlotte, and also all of them for the entire season, but specifically this past weekend.

We're not here today without the play of Jae Wit and Seth and the impact plays they have made on both ends of the floor.

That's one of the cool things about a team. It comes from

different parts. Everybody can celebrate each other's success. For us to be successful, everybody has to play their part. And Jae Wit and Seth are doing a terrific job at that.

Q. Coach, how is it that you prepare or get your players ready for that moment, for the free-throw at the last second or maybe the key jump shot? How do you coach and get your team ready for that moment?

HUBERT DAVIS: They're always ready for the moment. At Carolina there's very few programs that are at our level, and the spotlight is bright playing at North Carolina. So in those situations, this is something that's not new to them. They've lived it throughout this entire season.

To play UConn in the Garden, to play in the ACC Tournament final, to play Duke at Cameron, to playing here in the Sweet 16 against Alabama in the NCAA Tournament, this is something that our guys not only are used to or accustomed to, but it's a position that they want to be in.

They want to be in those late-game situations where not only do they have to come up with a shot or a free throw, but a rebound, a stop, a loose ball. Those are things that our guys enjoy being in those moments, and they look forward to them.

Q. I don't know how much you keep track of former players or anything like that, but are you surprised at all at how well Caleb Love has played with a new program in Arizona in the Pac-12?

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't -- my concern is the University of North Carolina. So the only thing that I have on my mind is our players, our program, our university. And that's where my focus needs to be.

That being said, I'm not surprised at all that Caleb won Pac-12 Player of the Year and he had a successful season. And I'm very, very happy for him.

Q. Coach, what surprised you about your team this year on offense and defense?

HUBERT DAVIS: I don't think anything has surprised me about this team at all. For us, offensively we wanted to be better this year at being more efficient on the offensive end. We wanted our pace to really dictate and be our identity on the offensive end. I feel like we have, in terms of the way that we transition from defense to offense and trying to be as fast as we can from free-throw line to free-throw line.



I'm really proud of the team and their full commitment to what has allowed these guys to be successful is defending, rebounding, and taking care of the basketball. It's just we clearly identified it at the beginning of the year for us to have success. And we have a full commitment and buy-in by all 14 players in those areas in order to give us a chance to be really good.

Q. Welcome to California. I tried to look it up and didn't find the answer. When was the last time you were part of a game, either as a coach or player, in this state? Second question is is there a mantra as you enter Los Angeles trying to get two wins out of here?

HUBERT DAVIS: The last time we were here, I think it was 2015, we were playing in the Sweet 16 here against Wisconsin. So that's the last time North Carolina was here. Marcus Paige was a junior, and now he's on staff here. What was the second part?

Q. A mantra?

HUBERT DAVIS: No, not at all. Once the bracket for the NCAA Tournament came out, I did the same thing that Coach Smith did for us when I played at Carolina, the same thing that Coach Williams did when he was head coach. We break apart the tournament in parts.

I said, as of right now, we've been invited to the Charlotte tournament. If we're fortunate enough to win two games, they'll invite us to the Los Angeles tournament. So that's what we're in now.

Our focus is on Alabama and winning two games here in the Los Angeles invitational. If he play as well as we want to here, then we'll get invited to the Phoenix invitational. That's the way that we've always approached it, and that's the way that we've done it this year.

Q. In speaking to your players, toughness, resilience was the words I kept hearing over and over again. Was there a moment this season that you knew this group had what it took to get to this point?

HUBERT DAVIS: Yeah, not necessarily in terms of getting to this point, but I knew that we would be a good team from the first time that these guys stepped foot on campus and they were together as a group.

I've said this a number of times, the first time that this group all together stepped foot on campus, they had a burning desire and a commitment to being a team, not just on the court, off the court.

I've said a number of times that, if they're going out to

dinner, the whole team goes out to dinner. In our hotel, we have a meeting room, the guys don't want round tables where there's seven chairs at each table. They want one big table where everybody can sit together.

They just enjoy being together. They enjoy practicing and preparing together. It has translated out there on the floor.

So in terms of being here and what our record was, that wasn't something that I anticipated, but I knew that we had a chance to be a really good team by their commitment to wanting to be a team the first time that they got together last summer.

You can ask my youngest son a question if you want to. He says he can handle the heat. (Laughter). No, he said he was cold blooded. That's what he said. Okay, Micah.

Q. Coach, what are the challenges guarding Mark Sears, especially as a left-hander?

HUBERT DAVIS: The challenges are he's one of the better players in the country, a very confident, gifted scorer, has the ability to score off the bounce. And when the ball is not in his hands, in terms of coming off screens, can shoot 3s.

I know they don't shoot a lot of middies, but he's a three-level scorer in terms of 3s, pull-up jumpers, floaters, being able to get to the rim, get to the free-throw line.

He also has a really good understanding of when to shoot and when to pass and just being able to distribute to his teammates.

He's really competitive. As I said before, a very confident player. It will be a huge challenge for us to be able to defend him tomorrow night.

Q. A question for Micah. Did you get a special present?

MICAH DAVIS: Yes, ma'am.

Q. What was it?

MICAH DAVIS: They gave me a soccer jersey -- who was it? Yeah, the photographer for the national team. That meant a lot because, first of all, I didn't know they were going to be in Los Angeles, so that was a big surprise when he stopped at the hotel. But, yeah, it meant a lot. It was cool.

Q. Have you gotten (off microphone) --

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

MICAH DAVIS: The jeebies. That's an everyday word in the household. I don't think I've heard him say anything else but the jeebies. (Laughter). That's about it.

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