

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

Thursday, March 28, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Crypto.com Arena

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

Ian Schieffelin

Chase Hunter

PJ Hall

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Clemson - 77, Arizona - 72

BRAD BROWNELL: Obviously huge win. Just really happy for, obviously, my players, my staff, and really all of Clemson Nation. This was a big-time game by our guys.

We got off to a great start. Arizona, obviously, punched back a couple times, but these guys have hung in there and finished a game against a really good team that has had a really good season. We have a lot of respect for them.

But today was our day. We made enough plays to win, and I'm just super happy that these guys are going to get a chance to continue to play and we get to spend more time together.

Q. Coach, what did you tell your players when Arizona was making that run in the second half?

BRAD BROWNELL: We talked about it at halftime. Guys, they're going to make another run or two. And we've used the phrase "we're built for this, we can handle this." We have confidence in our team.

We've won some big-time road games this year. We've played a very challenging schedule -- again, my point that the ACC is much better than everybody maybe assumes is bearing fruit again. And I just think the league prepares us for these kinds of games.



And I've got an older team. These guys have seen a lot, done a lot and experienced success. And so just really happy that they were able to withstand it, and we executed some things really well down the stretch.

Q. Chase, that three-point play was pivotal in securing that win. When you saw that basket go in and you got the foul call, was it at that moment you felt, we're really going to win this? Or was there a moment other parts in the game where you were just, like, we're going to have this win?

CHASE HUNTER: That was definitely a big moment for our team. When that went in I had confidence we were going to win that game. And little bro got that and-one and sealed it for us. Big play, secured the win.

Q. You had one 20-point game prior to the start of the NCAA Tournament. You've scored, 21, 20, and 18. What does it feel like for you to be playing your best basketball at the most important time of the year?

CHASE HUNTER: It feels great. It feels great. I've been thankful for my coaches, my teammates for still believing in me for this long season. I definitely started off rough.

To be playing great here is everything as a player. I'm definitely grateful to be playing this well and I'm just happy for my team. Happy I could do this for my team and my coaches. Definitely feels great to be playing this well right now.

Q. P.J., that inbounds pass, what was drawn up in the timeout, and what kind of came open for you to be able to dunk that?

PJ HALL: So we were drawing that up and I told (indiscernible), knowing they'd been switching a lot of off-ball screens out of bounds. Coach drew it in the time out, we came out, executed a great play, and Chase led me right to the rim, and it worked. It was a good play.

Q. You guys held Arizona to five made 3-pointers, and during (indiscernible) holding teams to low shooting



nights. How were you able to hold them to a low shooting night?

PJ HALL: All three teams, it's been a strength of them. They had a fast pace from Baylor, New Mexico -- they each went up and up in their tempo. Arizona's the fastest in the country. Limiting rhythm 3s and good open 3s was a huge key to the game.

Q. Were you surprised at how many 3s they were chunking despite the fact that they weren't hitting and the success they were having inside?

CHASE HUNTER: No, we weren't surprised. We knew their guys like to get up shots. A few players are volume scorers. We wanted to make it hard for them. When they don't make it easy, when you don't see it going in, your confidence gets down. That's what we wanted to do to them.

Q. You established yourself early with a quick seven points. Were you exploiting the matchups or just giving what the defense gives you?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Just taking what the defense gives me. He played back on me and I got to hit a 3 early. And just taking what he gave me and he played back off me and I hit a touch shot early, too. Just kind of taking what the defense gave me.

Q. You guys have played in hostile environments before, but in this environment, in March Madness, a pro-Arizona crowd, how did you handle the pressure with those factors?

PJ HALL: I said earlier to the team, we've played in more intense, harder environments than that, (indiscernible) tougher road games, one at Chapel Hill, one at Alabama, one at a ice hockey rink in Canada against TCU. We've played in tough places coming into this game knowing we were going to have a good amount of fans.

We were calm. That speaks to our veterans, too, a lot of older guys in the group. Staying calm and being able to withstand runs.

Q. Coach, yesterday you basically said -- I'm paraphrasing so forgive me if I don't get it exactly right -- but basically said we're not just here to be here. And this is a game where I feel you really showed that. When I looked at this there were only 20 seconds when the other team led in this game. Talk to me about that mentality how you were able to essentially lead and win this game wire to wire?

BRAD BROWNELL: I just think our guys have a lot of belief in each other, and I certainly have a lot of belief in my team. And we're playing good basketball right now. And anything can happen in these tournaments.

You've got to have really good players. I have good players. When you have players you try to do the best job you can as a coach to put them in positions to be successful. And when these guys capitalize like they have been, good things are going to happen.

So we have a lot of confidence in our team. We've been through a lot together, especially these three guys. These guys are all -- Chase five years, Ian third year, and P.J. his fourth. We've been together for a long time. And so we know the ins and outs of each other and our personalities. I think that helps our team.

Q. Ian, I noticed you were wearing Kobe's (indiscernible) today, and obviously this is the house that Kobe built. You established yourself so early, did you feel like you were just in that Mamba mentality all night tonight?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Shout-out to my brother. He's a big Kobe Bryant guy. I guess you could say that.

BRAD BROWNELL: Please do not compare yourself to Kobe Bryant.

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: They call me Durant. Can't get much closer. It was good to get going early.

Q. PJ, talk about what this has been like, the long road you've had with Coach Brownell, why you've believed in this Clemson basketball environment, this culture. Just what all this has meant to you and to see the fruits of that labor going to the Elite Eight.

PJ HALL: Yeah, I mean, I can only thank God. There's a lot of guys on our team, we talk about it all the time, our devotion and our faith and stuff. Chase and I talked about it. RJ Godfrey.

It's incredible to go through some trials and tribulations to get where we're at now. Even in the season, but over the course of the years, Chase has battled injuries and I battled injuries, battled tough seasons, tough losses and stuff in order to get to the point we are at now. It's incredible to see the fruits of your labor. And it's special.

Q. Chase, their star player, Caleb Love, 0-for-9 from 3. Pac-12 Player of the Year, 5-for-18 shooting. Talk about the great job you did on their star player.

CHASE HUNTER: I knew it was my match-up coming into the game. I knew he was going to get a lot of shots up and I tried to make them hard and make them not as easy for him. He started off not that well. I could see in him his confidence dropped. For me I wanted to stay on him, and offensively I wanted to keep attacking him.

PJ HALL: Chase Hunter is the best two-way guard in America now. You need to figure that out.

Q. Ian, did you call bank and how big was that shot for you guys momentum-wise?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: I thought it was going to hit the back of the rim. That's March for you. Shots like that are going to go in. I did not call bank. Either way, it counts. I'll take it.

Q. Chauncey, Hunter, Godfrey, huge minutes in the first half. How crucial were those minutes to get you the lead in the first?

BRAD BROWNELL: It was. Those three guys have played great in the tournament, Dillon and Chauncey and RJ. They upped their game. That's what has to happen this time of year, you've got to have a lot of guys play at a high level. They've done that. And I'm really proud of them.

They're young players that have worked really hard, and their minutes obviously -- Chauncey made a couple of big 3s and RJ was battling and Dillon really guards, helps us defensively, he's a good decision-maker. So he helps us handle the ball on our offense.

Q. You've held every opponent in the NCAA Tournament under 40 percent from the field and you held the third highest scoring offense that averages 88 points a game to 72. How important is it for you as a coach to know your team is playing some of its best defense of the year at the most important time of the year?

BRAD BROWNELL: It is. It's been a process. I've talked about it with our team and media that follows us closely that I have a lot of guys that are offensive players. We probably have more of an offensive mentality and identity than some of my other teams.

So challenging these guys and getting them to understand how important the defensive end is has been critical. And certainly we've had some ups and downs with that. We've had some very good defensive performances this year and we've had a couple of really bad ones.

We were fortunate tonight. I mean, I do think it's important to mention, Arizona had some good shots and missed them. And that's part of March Madness. It's part of the pressure of making shots this time of year in the tournament.

But that's an unbelievable team that just had a tough shooting night. Obviously we were able to capitalize on some of that.

Q. They had that stretch in the second half where they didn't make a single field goal for a 10-minute period but they kept getting to the foul line. That's how they were staying in the game. What are you telling your team to maintain their composure, hey, they're getting to the foul line a lot and that's kind of why they're lingering around?

BRAD BROWNELL: We switched to zone. And we played a lot of zone late in the game because we knew that they were just putting their head down and driving and trying to get fouls. And our frontline was falling apart with fouls.

And so we just hoped that we could pack it in a little bit, try to keep them in front of us a little bit more. We knew we were going to give up some 3s. If they make them, it's going to be hard.

The way the game was going for that stretch, we wouldn't have had many guys left in the last four minutes if we would have stayed in man. They were just putting too much pressure on our rim and we were having a hard time keeping them out of the paint.

Q. You and I have spoken about this, you mentioned it in your intro, just the ACC, top to bottom, no matter who the team is on any given night, just the gamut that you run through the conference that helps to prepare you for a national tournament like this?

BRAD BROWNELL: I've said this. I've been in the league 14 years. So I've seen a lot. And I've coached against a bunch of hall of fame coaches and coached in the league when we had three No. 1 seeds. I just knew that this year's league was much better than it was getting credit for.

And we easily had seven or eight teams that were NCAA Tournament-worthy in terms of talent, and a couple teams had some injuries early. We had a lot of young teams in our league that November and December were figuring themselves out. By the time they got to the conference they were beating some of the better teams in the league, us included.

Yes, I just felt like our league was really good, and I knew that the battles of those two months were going to help us. We started playing better in February again after a bad January. And I do think what we've gone through from the beginning of the season to now has hardened our team a little bit and certainly prepared us for this time of year.

Q. What was your evaluation of the officiating tonight? Was that a point of frustration for you guys at any point in the second half?

BRAD BROWNELL: No. It was fantastic. (Laughter). We obviously won the game. No, the officiating was fine. I mean, it is what it is. These are hard games to call. There's so much physicality and the players are so athletic and it's just hard to manage it all. It really is. It had no bearing on anything tonight.

Both teams got into the bonus and both teams got players in foul trouble. At the end of the day it's about players making more plays than another team.

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