

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Clemson vs Alabama

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Los Angeles, California, USA

Crypto.com Arena

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

Joseph Girard III

Chase Hunter

PJ Hall

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference



key transfers to come in, looking at how the state of college basketball is now with transfers coming in, what would be your pitch to anybody that is coming in interested to play for Clemson?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: Do it. For me, this place has been unbelievable. And it all goes back to the culture, really, and that's what was attractive to me. The people at Clemson are great. I think I said that, like, the first week I got there. There was cookies at my apartment day from some random person that I still don't know who it was to this day.

So Clemson is just an unbelievable place. There's unbelievable people. They obviously developed their players and they win a lot of basketball games. Anyone looking forward to living in a great place, playing with great people, playing for great people, and doing great things should go to Clemson.

Q. PJ, how quickly can you put into perspective just the enormity of what you guys were able to accomplish? Or does it still sting right now because you're coming off a loss?

PJ HALL: Yes, it still stings a lot right now. Probably will for a couple of days.

I don't think that it will really set in what we've accomplished because we had our eyes set on big goals. And obviously we've achieved great stuff, but we came up a little short of what we really wanted to do.

But I think it will set in whenever we get back and reflect a little bit and feel the love from the campus and community, knowing they had our backs through all this.

Just an incredible ride. It was an expected ride. And I'm proud of these guys.

Q. PJ and Chase, Coach Brownell just mentioned it was a memorable ride with you guys. How much does this team mean to you both?

CHASE HUNTER: It means the world, man. Like Coach

Alabama - 89, Clemson - 82

BRAD BROWNELL: First off, what a basketball game. Fans were treated to some high-level play especially in the second half. The shot-making was elite. Credit to Alabama. Give Nate and his kids a lot of credit for the win. It's a huge win for their program. And they deserved it.

Their second half performance was outstanding. And for whatever reason, we had a hard time guarding them. I need to do a better job helping our players be better on that end.

But I'm so proud of my team and especially these three guys. The ride we've been on the last couple of weeks has certainly been memorable, not just for all of us but our fan base, which is significant. But more than that, just for the kind of people we have in our program.

Our players are just such good kids and they allow us to coach them and they represent our university in an unbelievable way. And, man, it's just a joy. And I love all of them dearly, and I'm just sad that we're not going to get to play more together because we've just had so much fun. And this is such a fun-loving group, that the hardest part about these losses is that it's the end of a season.

But a lot of great memories. Again, super proud of our guys, our team, what they accomplished. And again, congratulations to Alabama.

Q. Joe, when you look at this past year as one of the



... when all is said, we're done.®

said, these guys, we're all loving. We love each other. We've been through a lot this year, a lot of ups and downs, a lot of people doubting us.

But it's just been about us. We've been just about us. And to end like this, it definitely stings, but we accomplished a lot. We did a lot of great things this year, and I'm definitely proud of our guys, and I love our guys.

PJ HALL: Yeah, put the nail on the head. I'll say that obviously it stings to the core that we lost the basketball game, obviously. But on top of that, it hurts even more, like Coach said. You're not going to be with the same team next year. Especially the older guys like me and Chase and Joe.

I mean, it was such a fun group, man, from top to bottom, from redshirts to fifth-year seniors. It was an incredible group. And there's nothing I'd change about it.

Q. PJ, Chase, can you talk a little bit about just the state of the program from when you guys came in to how you guys are potentially leaving it? Coach Brownell said a quote a couple weeks back about it's time to raise the ceiling now that we've raised the floor. I'd say it's safe to say the ceiling has been raised with the second Elite Eight appearance in school history?

CHASE HUNTER: Yes, when we came in we were highly recruited guys. Our careers kind of started off slow. To get to this point, me and him just had a moment in the locker room, and I told him we made history.

We did some big things for this program. I think that with me and him doing that, we set this program to a new standard. We plan on keep being in games like this.

PJ HALL: Yeah, special moment embracing Chase in the locker room. Now with a couple of tournament appearances, a lot of wins in the ACC, an Elite Eight, it's stacked up a quiet resumé that has helped build the program up.

We can attribute that to the coaching staff and the culture they've built. We came into a situation where it was a doubted culture, even though they had such a great thing building up. And to come in here, validate what they've done, validate the work they do, is special. And it's amazing.

Q. You guys have used defense as a strength to get to the Elite Eight. Just in the second half, what do you think Alabama was able to do offensively to where it was tough to get stops?

PJ HALL: Yeah, I mean, they hit big shots, man. They really spread us out. They hit a couple of corner 3s, like, three in a row. It was 9-0 run. We hit two in a row. If we can get a couple of those to bounce out it's a different ball game at that time.

Like I said, they hit big-time shots and we couldn't quite get the misses we needed them to make. Credit to them, man, they went out there and hit them. It was big-time basketball.

Q. Joe, as PJ was alluding to, 3-point shooting, they had 16 to eight. The disparity in the 3-point shot, how much of a factor do you think that was in the outcome?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: It was huge. We knew going into the game that's what they like to do. And they shoot them fast, especially when they're making them. When they're making them and the momentum is going and they're rolling, they get those 3s up fast and it seems like they'll never miss.

So, I mean, it's unfortunate how it ended, unfortunate how it went down. But, like PJ said, you've got to give those guys credit too. They put the ball in the basket. They get good positioning to get open shots, and they just made some plays.

Q. Joe, reflecting on your career -- I know you just spoke about it a little bit here -- but having this extra season, this extra opportunity, you chose Clemson and in the same respect Clemson chose you. What you can say about what this entire journey has been to you and this home away from home that's been created in Clemson for you forever?

JOSEPH GIRARD III: It's tough to talk about right now already. Coach Brownell didn't have to call me. These two guys didn't have to help recruit me, but they did. These guys are my brothers for life. Coach Brownell is another father figure for life. It's just another home away from home, like you said.

It sucks to talk about already that it's over. I feel like I just got here. But I'll talk to these guys for the rest of my life. I'm so proud of what they've become and what they've done -- I've watched them obviously for four years now, playing against them and then being here.

They've done an unbelievable job with this program. Obviously Coach Brownell, his stuff speaks for itself. I'm lucky to be here, lucky to have this as another home. And it was everything I could ask for and more.

Q. Just how different was this game in terms of the



shot-making that they had and just playing from behind and just constantly them answering?

BRAD BROWNELL: Two different halves. Certainly the start of the game was our way -- I told the guys before the game, last two days, that if we're up 10, we're down 10, when you're playing Alabama, that's about five. It's not 10. You just cut whatever the lead is or whatever you're up, cut it in half. You're up 15; you're down seven. Your down 15; you're down seven.

Because of the number of possessions they play with and the freedom with which they play, we were actually down seven, I think, at their place in game one and turned and flipped it and went up six in, like, two and a half minutes in their place.

You just have to know that going in, that you've got to keep trying to win the next possession.

Again, the quality of play was unreal in the second half. It's what people want to see -- 50 points for both teams. But 10 out of 15 3s by those guys, we had it happen at Miami and you just can't win.

I told the guys when we won down there, the 3s were 11 to 11. 11 for them is normal. 11 for us is a lot. We just needed it to be closer.

I'm disappointed in the rebounding because that was something I made a big point of. We fought back in the second half with that, but Pringle's rebounding was significant, the extra possessions there to keep them alive. And then Stevenson's shot making, he's going to be a great player. He's a good player. But you don't count on a guy coming off the bench making five 3s who really hasn't done that this year.

They had some guys step up. Our kids played very well. We just couldn't quite get enough stops to win the game. So, again, give them credit. They played terrific.

Q. You've been at Clemson for 14 years. Just reflecting on this year's team, how special is this group to you?

BRAD BROWNELL: Very special. Again, the winning is part of it, for sure. The ride we've been on these last two weeks, phenomenal. Something we'll always remember. But just the kind of kids that they are, right? To be around them every day, the fun that we have, the way they allow us to coach them, the connectedness, just the togetherness. In this day and age it's rare.

We've been fortunate these last two years back to back

and probably other years as well but just these last two have been phenomenal runs in terms of you just feel it with your team.

And you want so badly for those guys to be successful. And obviously we all wanted to make a Final Four. But you just want your guys to have success because you care about them and you watch them work so hard. And we go through frustrations and ups and downs.

And basketball seasons are long. They're long. There's always long weeks and a couple of weeks that don't go well. Our guys responded most of the time. Obviously after the ACC Tournament, a lot of people doubted us.

But PJ said it, we really talked at the beginning of the year a little bit and in the middle of the year that we believed we could be a Final Four team. This was not an accident.

One of my assistants was spouting stats that we had the hardest run. If you look at the NET rankings we played the three toughest teams in the NET to get to this point.

This wasn't an accident. Our guys played great basketball. We just needed to do a little bit better today.

Q. PJ mentioned just how tough it is to defend when they quickly get 3-point shots off like that. Was there anything that you guys tried to do during the half to counter that?

BRAD BROWNELL: Run faster. You know, it's crazy, I think it was the first or second possession we tried to play zone. Joe hit a 3 and they threw it up the court and shot a quick corner 3 before our guys could even get back.

The challenge for our team all year is, we're not very fast. We're big. We're physical. We're tough. We're smart. But we're not very fast. And there are times when that really was a problem for us. In the second half it was a problem for us.

We couldn't keep them in front of us. When they start making 3s, you start inching out in space. And even them shooting before we could get down and get our zone set a couple times, there's not many teams that play that way. And so credit to them because it's modern basketball.

When those shots go in, it looks great. And when they don't, then people probably say that the coach is letting them play too loose and why aren't we moving the ball.

But this is modern basketball. You've got to understand all the scores are going up. The NBA, college, everything's changing a little bit. And Nate's done a really good job of

adjusting. And his team, it benefited from it today, second half especially. First half we had it the way we wanted. The second half, it got a little too quick for us.

Q. Girard just talked about what his pitch would be to anybody potentially interested to play for Clemson, to come to Clemson in the portal. What would be your pitch to anybody coming to Clemson?

BRAD BROWNELL: My pitch would be what Joe just said. But I think it's coming better coming from a player. There's a lot of great salesmen in our business, a lot of guys that sell a lot of things that don't end up being what they really are.

I'm proud to say that what we talk about at Clemson is real. And Joe Girard got to experience that. We just have tremendous people.

We have great leadership. We have great administrative leadership. We have unbelievable athletic support. We have tremendous coaches. It's an unbelievable place to live. That's why I've been here so long. My girls went to school here.

And since we got our facility renovated in 2017-18 we've been to a Sweet 16 and Elite Eight, another NCAA Tournament. Got a couple of guys in the NBA.

I don't know why you wouldn't come here, to be honest with you. Like I always tell folks, at the end of the day, guys like Joe Girard, we're doing them a favor because this place is special.

Now, that guy was unbelievable to have. His swagger is why we went and got him. His second-half shooting is the reason we got him. But the real reason is the kind of kid he is. He just showed who he is right here. In one of the toughest moments in his life, he is explaining in detail how much this place meant to him. He's about the right stuff. That's why he fit our team. And that genuineness is the reason why these two guys wanted him to be part of the program.

Again, I couldn't be more proud of our players. What we did beyond these two weeks, but just the way these guys carry themselves every day.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your special relationship with PJ Hall, who is going to go down as a program legend, might have his name in the rafters one day?

BRAD BROWNELL: He should. I might get choked up. I'm trying not to. He's obviously very special because he's

a top-50 kid that chose Clemson from our state. And we've tried on a bunch of other guys, and he's one of the first ones to stay home.

We've been selling this same thing to all these other guys. You can come to Clemson and have a chance to play in a Final Four. You're going to get a great education. You can be a pro. You can be an all-conference player. You're going to be around people that care about you.

That kid's been through the war. He's had major surgeries. Our athletic department has flown him to see the best doctors to take care of him and treated him like the superstar he is.

But the best thing about him is that he's just a regular guy. He's the same every day. I coach him harder than anybody in our program. He allows me to do that.

And one of the reasons why our team is in the Elite Eight is because our best player allows the head coach to be demanding of him. And so then the tone is set for everybody in our program.

And so we have discipline. We have accountability. We have respect. And a lot of it is because he's the way he is as a young man. And his parents deserve an unbelievable amount of credit. And it's been a pleasure to coach him.

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