

National Invitation Tournament: Chattanooga vs Loyola Chicago

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Loyola Chicago Ramblers

Drew Valentine

Desmond Watson

Miles Rubin

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference

Chattanooga 80, Loyola 73

DREW VALENTINE: I thought it was a big-time college basketball game, with the proximity of Indy to Chicago and to Chattanooga. I thought both fan bases really showed up and created a high-level atmosphere on top of that.

Got to give Chattanooga credit. I thought they battled us all first half long and really came out in the second half with a different level of energy. A high, high level of competitiveness and want to win.

So credit to the coaches. Credit to their players. They at the end of the day made more plays than us. But you know, I told the group in the locker room after the game, that I'm proud of what this group accomplished. I'm blessed to coach them. Grateful. I feel a sense of gratitude for this season and how it went, their belief in us, Des's leadership, Sheldon's leadership and everybody's just overall belief in the way and how we do things here.

Credit to our team for how we ended up getting to this point, and I'm going to miss coaching these guys every day.

Q. So first question I have for you two. What does it mean for you guys to play with this specific group of players and then what's the one thing you're going to miss specifically about this group?

DESMOND WATSON: I would just say the togetherness, the family, the culture we've built as players within each other, even like outside of just the coaches.

Just like us as players and us coming together, just talking and like I said the other day, just being humans and being



able to create actual relationships, I think that's what I'll miss the most.

You know, just always having somebody to lean on. Always having somebody to talk to. It doesn't always come as good as it does when you come to Loyola. It's true relationships. People are humble, loyal to you. It's just this team speak volumes and words can't really describe it.

MILES RUBIN: I'm going to miss making bonds with everybody on this team. Everybody is like a brother to me. I'm going to miss hooping with them, making memories, playing the game, go getting food with them, doing everything together.

Q. Are we going to see you in a Loyola jersey next year?

MILES RUBIN: Yes, you will see me in a Loyola jersey.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the overall experience of this tournament, and when you're sitting back five, ten years from now, what do you think the biggest memories will be for you when you look at playing in a national event like this, and what you experienced with guys that will last a lifetime with you? Go ahead.

DESMOND WATSON: I think from ten years from now, I'll look back and probably still be hard on myself about the way that I played.

But all jokes aside, I mean, it's really just being able to play at this time period. Just being able to play is just such a blessing. But a lot of the stuff, what I'll remember is like I said earlier is off the court. Just all memories, little stuff that will pop up on my phone, hanging out with the guys.

MILES RUBIN: I would say, playing this time of year, not many teams get a chance to play this time of year. I mean, everybody's watching our games on national television. Everybody has to tune in. They have nothing else to watch.

So it's a pretty fun experience.

Q. What you were talking about with this specific team, how much you enjoy coaching them. What kind of legacy do you think this team is going to leave on this program?

DREW VALENTINE: I think just like the next-man-up mentality, and like, battling through adversity. I think everybody kind of thought that we were dead in the water. We weren't going to end up being the team that we were.

For us to have 25 wins, tied for third most in program history, just shows like, one, why I recruit the way I do. Every off-season, everybody's like, Man, how is Drew going to play all these guys?

I'm like, Well, we need to have bodies just in case. We need depth. But.

I think the most important part that this team will be remembered by was their belief in this place. A combination of battling through adversity, and belief. They kind of go hand-in-hand.

Like I told Des in the locker room in front of everybody, like Des didn't have to come back here. You know, if we're, real, Des took a pay cut to come back here. But being at Loyola and being a part of this program was meaningful for him. Being a leader, trying to chase another championship, and playing for a coaching staff that truly believes in him was very important for him.

So like you know, Sheldon didn't have to come back. Sheldon knew that JD was coming back. And then obviously once we started recruiting different guys in the portal, it wasn't a guarantee for Sheldon to start this year or have the year that he had.

But none of that mattered to him as long as he was wearing Loyola across his chest. He was going to put his best foot forward and try to win games and live with the results of what happened.

Jalen DeLoach, I mean, he's an all-league player in the A-10, and comes here and literally every game, he's one of the biggest cheerleaders on the bench if he's not in the game. And then if I put him in the game, I mean, he only played -- he's so effective tonight; he played 11 minutes.

But like Miles is Miles. Like JJ's parents, I mean, there's nothing, like he's just all in on winning. So, like I'll just remember these guys, their belief in this place, the way they went about it, and also how they fought through adversity.

Q. Overall, what has it meant for you and the team to get the chance to play in tournament and get this far?

DREW VALENTINE: Yeah, I think when the A-10 tournament ended, you know, the feeling is like your season is unsuccessful in some ways, even though we were successful.

And getting the opportunity to play in this tournament, which is obviously the oldest college basketball tournament, has a national brand. It's established. Playing big-time venues versus big-time teams. Play on national TV with hundreds of thousands of eyes on you.

Like I wanted our guys to be excited about playing this, and I think as every single game came up, there was more and more excitement within the locker room and on the floor for our guys.

So like now, like this press conference is a little bit more feeling of success with the group, even though it should have been that way after the A-10 Tournament.

But I think you feel a little bit more proud, and so I think getting to play in this tournament and making it this far gives you a lot of pride in how special this year was for our guys.

THE MODERATOR: One last question. Just talk about your handprint on this program and being able to sit back in a week or two and look at the steps that you've taken. And how will you feel about that as you're moving forward to continue to try to build a program that you really want to have but you know that it can't happen overnight. What's your thoughts on those steps?

DREW VALENTINE: Yeah, obviously when I took over the program, it was in an extremely healthy spot. But it was in such -- like, literally, the year I get the job is immediate eligibility; it's extra-COVID year guys going in portal; it's NIL becoming a bigger issue.

So like the combination of, like, those three things at the same time are all an advantage for schools in the power four level. It's been really, really well established about how the NCAA Tournament had the fewest amount of upsets; these are the lowest number of seeds, all four No. 1 seeds in the Final Four. Like it's really well established who is aligned to compete at the highest level.

And so I think my imprint on the program is, taking it into the next generation and the way that modern college basketball is, and still being successful in it.

I think we've navigated through that with all the same cultural values that this program was built upon with Coach Moser and the other assistant coaches and the other players that I was coaching when I first got here. I think we've shown that we're going to a consistent winner, and we're going to be a consistent winner.

We've also transitioned leagues. I forgot to mention that. You go up a level in conference into the Atlantic 10. We have got the most A-10 wins in the last two years with probably, if I'm just talking NIL, we probably have bottom half of the league NIL and we have the most wins the last two years.

I think as our resources grow, our program will continue to grow, but I want to make it clear that no matter what our resources are, the values of this program are going to -- I'm going to try my hardest for those to maintain the same.

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