

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Mike Brey

Postgame Press Conference



Notre Dame 80, Wake Forest 77

MIKE BREY: Well, I'm extremely proud of our group because we took a big punch early. It was a Wake home crowd in this building. I don't know if people could tell. They had a nice crowd and their kids played and responded, and we didn't rebound early to dig that hole. But I thought our defense the last seven minutes was the difference. We really defended a team that's hard to guard, spreads you out, and I thought was having a great offensive night.

I give our kids a lot of credit because we hung on in there when every time we'd get it to 6, somebody would make a play and get it back to 10.

It's a group that showed a lot of character. I know we don't have a hell of a lot of wins to show for it, but this group has kind of hung in there together, and at the 10-minute mark, it didn't look very good. But I thought our leadership was great, and I thought Prentiss Hubb after a very tough first half -- you can't keep a winner like that down for 40 minutes.

Q. What got into this group defensively the last 7:17 when you were down a dozen?

MIKE BREY: You know, I think your life is flashing before your eyes. We played a little smaller and really were good. We defended most of the game Saturday against Florida State. We didn't tonight, and I was disappointed in how we started.

But at the 10-minute mark -- actually at the 10-minute mark, I said, fellas, how we finish the game is really going to determine a lot about how we go into next season for you returning guys. So how are you going to play it, seriously? Show me how you're going to play it, because I'm really interested.

You know, we have had kids -- I mean, they respond. They've taken a punch and come back, taken a punch and come back through games in a season, so I'm proud of the response.

Q. So that core that final 10 minutes, what did they show you? What did you learn about these guys?

MIKE BREY: Well, I mean, you know, I think there's a toughness about them, and there's a togetherness about this group, even through everything they've been through. They've had each other's back. But I thought the lineup we had on the floor really defended well together.

I give Cormac a lot of credit because he got the heck knocked out of him and he came back in the game to make a couple really big plays, especially the last one.

Q. You've talked a lot this year about how you throw a Carolina guy into the starting lineup for his first career start against a Carolina team in Duke, but how about the Carolina guy coming home to hit a shot like that in the ACC Tournament? You can't write a script like that.

MIKE BREY: No, when he rose up to take it, I'm like, this could be such an unbelievable story. Charlotte kid, he's never played in the building, he's watched the ACC Tournament in Greensboro and Charlotte growing up his whole life, and his first game he drills one in his home state. I mean, it's just a great story.

Since the Duke game back on December 16th, he's gotten better and better and more comfortable, and he wasn't even supposed to be eligible. You know, I shudder to think if we didn't get him eligible, quite frankly. I've thought about that a lot the last two months.

Q. What kind of redemption was this for Cormac to get the block on the one hand, drive the ball down, and then late-game situation like Carolina, like Georgia Tech, this time he makes the play and you guys move on?

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MIKE BREY: I think for him, he deserves it. He's so hard on himself. Those were two tough plays for him at Carolina and Georgia Tech. But the defensive play to block the J without fouling and the presence of mind to feel the clock and feel where Trey was is just a big-time play. And the kid deserves it because he was so hard on himself for the ending of those other two games. I'm happy for him.

Q. You've talked all year and we've seen before about Cormac's edge, but what does it say about him where he takes that hip shot, comes back in, still looking a little gimpy, and then locks down and delivers that kind of block and pass?

MIKE BREY: You know, we don't have a tougher kid. He's really tough. And because he's so tough, his body gets nicked up, banged up. He gets injuries because he throws himself everywhere. Which I don't know how he got hurt, but it was probably an unbelievable hustle play, how he hurt himself.

There's a great physical toughness about him. You know, I thought he, Wertz -- you know, that lineup that defended down the stretch was really playing well together. You know, Nik's voice switching stuff. Juwan changed shots in the back, we didn't foul. Again, when we dig in, we can guard. We've done it a couple times.

Q. You go from Cormac being in so much pain that the game is stopped for him to get out. What did he say to you to get back into the game? And then I think Trey said on TV post-game he knew as soon as he let the ball go that that final shot was good. When did you think that final shot was good?

MIKE BREY: When Trey let it go, I said, we're going to win, because we swung the momentum and kind of earned it. And I'm thinking, you know, now the momentum has swung all the way back, and he's a confident kid.

No, Cormac, our doctor and trainer here, they went to work on him and got him iced or whatever, and my trainer came to me within a minute and said, he's going to be all right, just give us another minute. And then I heard his voice, like Coach, I'm ready to roll, and we got him back in there quick.

Q. You mentioned that group that defended at the end. Can you get more minutes from Juwan Durham? I know you go to him early and this time he was part of your closing group, and also Prentiss Hubb obviously closing it out for you again. How do you get him rolling because obviously you'll need efforts like that

against North Carolina for more than 20 minutes.

MIKE BREY: Yeah, we'll need everybody. We'll need all seven of those guys. And Matt Zona, another big body who played well at Carolina and played some minutes for us, because they are so big, we have to have him ready to go in there and lean on some of their size. But, you know, the biggest thing is I told them, you've got to Gatorade up and ice down and thankfully we don't play until 9:00 to get our energy back, and we know this building will be a road atmosphere.

Q. I know it's a first-round conference tournament game and you guys have had so many big moments in that building and in this tournament over the years, but I'm curious tonight where does this moment rank for you?

MIKE BREY: You know, what we do in the ACC Tournament is kind of amazing, quite frankly, for somebody who's been in here eight years. That's 11 tournament game wins in eight years.

That probably shouldn't happen for a newcomer, and if you look at the records of people through the years, even some of the original members, you know, it's -- but I think we kind of feel we should play well in this thing, and especially in this building because I think that's 5-1 in this building now.

It's a great win for us, no matter who you play. Any way you can get to the next round in a tournament atmosphere, which we have shown, if you can win the first one, which we've done many times in the ACC, it just kind of gives you hope.

Q. What you can say about obviously the way that this game ended and what this team has been through this season, what we've all been through this season, what that feels like for you to not just have a game-winning shot move you forward, but to go through everything with corona, just the emotions that go through the building, especially having some fans there?

MIKE BREY: Well, there was a great energy in the building, and it was a road atmosphere. The Wake fans really helped their team believe, especially early, and they were a factor in the game when we haven't played them that much. Now, tomorrow night we know we'll have it on steroids with light blue up in those stands. But you know, our kids -- we've got mentally tough guys who really want it bad and are very hard on themselves. I've tried to loosen them up at times, and I told them, I said, look, this will be the fourth time tomorrow night that the BPI said we had a 92 percent chance of losing. Maybe 95, at Kentucky, at Duke, Florida State on Saturday and these guys tomorrow.



We've broken some percentages already, and it's the same thing again, so I think we kind of like the situation. Now, we've got to get some rest.

Q. You touched on it for a minute, but what did Juwan's length there do at the rim that seemingly kind of altered some of those shots and made him kind of throw out the ones even if he didn't get credit for a block on those?

MIKE BREY: No, he was fabulous. He gave us stuff offensively, and then he changed everything back there. He was really good, and they were looking for him the last seven minutes. Our guys were guarding and he really was active. He's had -- Juwan has really had a good year. He committed himself to strength training over the summer, and he's stronger, and I like the year he's had. He delivered for us tonight on both ends, on both ends.

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