

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 10, 2021
Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

NC State Wolfpack

Kevin Keatts

Postgame Press Conference



Syracuse 89, NC State 68

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, just like everyone else, all my team, very disappointed that we lost. But I'm not disappointed at the fight that these guys have shown the entire year, obviously leading up to this tournament.

Give Syracuse a lot of credit. We played against a good basketball team that makes a lot of shots, and as we talked about, I told those guys, if you're playing against anybody, it's hard to beat a team, especially when they make 14 threes. We have seven guys that's playing, and we have such a small room for error, and if we don't have one or two of our main guys play well, then it puts us in a tough situation to win the game.

I thought in the first half the guys who played well were Braxton, Manny Bates, and Seabron. We had some other guys in the second half, but we dug ourselves in a hole. We had some untimely turnovers. Our young guys had a chance for the first time to experience postseason play in the ACC. They'll learn from the good that they did in the game and obviously the bad.

I'm proud of these guys. It's hard for me to get mad at a bunch of guys because of one game in the ACC Tournament, the way they've played and the way they've responded to me the entire year, especially with all the adversity that we've had. I'll take questions.

Q. It seemed like all things considered being down five at halftime was a pretty good spot for you guys. What did you tell your team at halftime and what do you think led to the Syracuse run at the beginning of the second half?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, we talked about, hey, how hard we scrapped. I thought in the first half, they completely outplayed us for 13 minutes. And seven

minutes left in the half, we kind of turned things around. And we talked about defending Buddy Boeheim. He was really, really good. He did a tremendous job, especially in the first half, and I thought that was the difference and the reason why they had a lead, even by five.

Second half, I thought we came out of the locker room with a lot of energy, but we had two bad turnovers at the beginning of the second half and never really -- we kind of played catch-up from that point. Never really got a flow of the game. I think the first media, they had scored 14 points and we had scored four in the second half, and that's not a good formula.

And so give them credit. These guys made shots. They were a good team. They would have beat a lot of people today, and unfortunately we were the team that they had to play against.

Q. As a big-picture follow-up, I know the margin for error was very slim for an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament, but if you were to get a bid to the NIT, is that something you guys would accept?

KEVIN KEATTS: That would be something we would talk about. I have no idea how that even works these days. I have no idea if it's an invite tournament. I don't know how it works. I do know that there are going to be 16 teams. I will tell you this: Whatever we decide to do will be in the best interest of our team moving forward, safety protocols, what it looks like, is it an invite tournament. I don't know how to works.

I hate to think about that, but certainly that's a good question to ask.

Q. Did you guys lose some of your mojo by not playing Virginia Tech, or was Syracuse just a bad matchup for you guys?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, I don't know if we lost mojo, but it's a tough team to play against for us with their zone, losing Devon Daniels and Thomas Allen. If you look at the last game that we played, Thomas Allen scored and made

some shots behind the three-point line. Our really legitimate three-point shooters, Braxton Beverly -- and everybody else is good shooters, capable of making shots. And so most zones is not as good as theirs, though. They play zone for as many years as he's been at Syracuse, they do a great job.

So the mojo part, I don't think so. I do think the fact that obviously we had to play against their zone for 40 minutes, it's a tough situation for us.

Q. How about defensively? Because you really kind of struggled to stop them, especially from the perimeter, and you guys had some problems with them, at least the meeting in Raleigh, as well.

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, look, when you go back and you look at it -- and I'll go back and do the same thing -- we surely had some breakdowns, but they made some tough shots. I mean, two or three of them were when the shot clock went down. Buddy Boeheim was just raising up making shots, and give that kid credit.

I thought when I looked at the first team, second team, and third team, I didn't know if he was going to make it. But certainly no one picked him as honorable mention, and I'm sure that kid played with a little juice and energy because of that. He's the No. 6 scorer in this league and didn't get on the all-honorable mention team.

Give them credit. I told the team before the game, these guys take tough shots and they make tough shots, and they did today.

Q. I know tonight was a little disappointing, but the last five games you guys have been solid and on a roll. Not thinking about the experts, do you feel like you've done enough to get that at-large bid?

KEVIN KEATTS: I have no idea how the committee will look at things this year. I will say this: In my opinion, I think we got the best win in the league. We were able to go on the road and beat the No. 1 seed at their place.

Now, as you guys know, committees do exactly whatever they want to do. They'll look at all the numbers. I have no idea. I couldn't even begin to tell you. I couldn't even begin to guess on that. I will say this: I hope this year or the near future that everybody starts recognizing how good of a league the ACC is. Because my fourth year here, very rarely have we got at least 50 percent of our teams in, and that's tough because I think we were doing that before we went to a 15-team league, and right now we haven't.

It's a lot of teams out here that are deserving to go, and if

we're fortunate enough to get selected, we'll go, and if not, then we'll figure everything else out.

Q. I know you really stress limiting the attempts from the three-point line of the other team, and I think the first two match-ups they had less than 20, 29 today. Was it something you saw that led to that high increase for them this game relative to the first two?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, I just think they got hot. I'm sure you guys were looking at the game, and we had some breakdowns, as I talked about, but they made some really tough shots.

But the crazy thing, that's not anything that's surprising. Once you see the ball go in the hole as guys who can make shots, they're going to continue to take those shots. We fouled a three-point shooter. A couple times we were there on the catch and they made shots. It was just their night.

I told you, 14 threes is a lot, and it's hard to overcome that.

Q. Your team was here to play basketball this week. The National Guardsmen were staying in the hotel that you guys were at to help with the mass vaccination site across the parking lot. When you got to the Coliseum, some people were coming here for basketball, some were coming to get vaccines. What perspective have you found in this environment this week and certainly looking back to where we were a year ago at this time?

KEVIN KEATTS: I'm proud of all of the National Guard, and I got a chance to see it a different way because I walked around the mall -- probably did about 10 laps around the mall just obviously trying to get some exercise -- and the operation that they were running was unbelievable. They did a tremendous job of vaccinating as many people as they could get through.

The perspective is pretty simple. We're moving in the right direction. I am even glad -- you know, this year after we played last year, after we played our first game, we didn't get an opportunity to play our second one. But I think the way we've responded as a country and trying to get as many people vaccinated as we can with the National Guard and everybody, the front line helpers, that's been tremendous.

We compete as basketball teams as we should, but I think right now you're seeing a group of Americans who are coming together to make sure that we help everything get back to normal.

I'm proud of that, and I'll continue to be proud of that. I've done some -- a couple videos to send out and talking about what's important about getting the vaccine, and I'll continue to do that because I want things to get back normal.

Q. You mentioned earlier the fact that you guys were able to finish the season strong and finish with those five straight wins. When you look back at this end of the season, obviously this game is kind of a bad footnote on it all, but how proud are you of your team for developing and getting to the point where they've been at these last several games?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, even this game we lost, I'm not going to take away from the effort that these kids have given me over the last month or so and really over the entire year. We had just about as much adversity as anybody else could have had. We may not have even been in this situation. If these guys would have put their head down, we would have played a game yesterday and probably would have lost a game yesterday, but we didn't.

So I'm happy with them. I told them after the game, I'm not going to define your season because of this game. I'm going to define your season how hard you worked with the adversity, turning things around, and told everybody I love them and I'm proud of them, and I am.

We win together, we lose together, and that's the entire staff and our players. We're building. Our young guys got so much unbelievable experience, and I wanted our seniors -- guys like Braxton Beverly and D.J. Funderburk -- if this was their last ACC Tournament, I wanted those guys to experience it, and I'm glad they did.

Q. If you did get a shot at the NIT, how much would that be able to help in terms of continuing that development and giving the seniors an opportunity to play one more game?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I think it's great. We would have to find out a lot more information about it. I don't want our kids to have just an experience of saying we're going to postseason play if it's not a first-class experience. So as you guys know, I would love the opportunity to play in the NCAA and not have to talk about the NIT.

But if the NIT is ran the way it has been in the past and it's a first-class experience for our guys, I think it's a great thing. But if it's not, I just don't want to go to a tournament just to say we're going.

Q. Right as your team was walking on the floor, your last message to them, you looked at your guys and you said, "energy, energy." At what point did you feel

the shift, that Syracuse had a little bit more energy and they went on that run?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, I don't think the energy necessarily changed. We just had some guys that didn't play well. When you're playing seven guys and you get -- like I told you before, we've got to have -- out of those seven, we've got to have at least four guys that play really good basketball to put us in a great situation to win. And I'm sure when you look at the stat sheet, you're going to be like, he didn't play well or he didn't play well, and this guy played well.

So I thought we played hard. We didn't always play smart, but when you're down to a limited roster you have to have everything clicking for at least four out of the five guys that you have.

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