

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 10, 2022

Virginia Tech Hokies

Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

Mike Young

Keve Aluma

Justyn Mutts

Postgame Press Conference



Virginia Tech 87, Notre Dame 80

MIKE YOUNG: I'm not going to do an opening statement. You guys don't want to hear from me. Go ahead.

Q. You got off to a hot start and even though Notre Dame was able to narrow the gap as the game went on, you never really lost that edge. What went into that hot start and what did it do for you throughout the course of the game?

MIKE YOUNG: You know, I don't know if this had anything to do with it, the bye is great. We had one yesterday. I've always been concerned -- you wouldn't trade it for the world, I've always been concerned, that other team has been on that floor. They've shot. They've competed. You're sitting there yesterday watching that. Their teeth are sharp. Not that Notre Dame's wasn't, and Notre Dame is so good and had such a good -- has had such a good season.

We just had such a great look about us, and we gotta Aluma started in the first possession of the game. Justyn was awfully, awfully good throughout, got a couple of shots down, and I thought put Notre Dame on their heels a little bit, which is very unusual. Now, in the second half, they are a machine offensively. Their passing, their spacing, what they can do with all those guys gives you a lot of heartburn and keeps you up at night.

I don't know any other way to explain it to you than that. I don't have a real succinct answer.

Q. Justyn, your defense today, you guys forced 12

turnovers. You held Dane Goodwin scoreless in that first half. Especially down the stretch, what did you like about the physicality and the way you guys willed yourselves defensively to the win?

JUSTYN MUTTS: I thought we did a great job, stayed connected, all five guys on the floor. And at any given point in time I was able to go do what I had to do and trust that my teammates were going to be there for me. And I felt that they were also in the same position where they can just play hard and trust that I'm going to be there for them.

Q. Coach, this is the fourth time I've covered you playing here at Barclays Center. By far you and your team's best performance here. Your comments on your team's tenacity, both sides of the ball, I thought they were tenacious. The other thing is your rotation and even the free throws at the end and Justyn's block and the ensuing rebound seemed to be the play of the game.

MIKE YOUNG: I've got really good players. It took us a time to get to this rotation, and maybe I can be faulted for that. But we're getting really good play from Maddox and Pedulla and David N'Guessan. These two guys are just a load in the front court. Such a masterful pass -- a pass rate, five assists and zero turnovers. We've got a lot on the line, man. We've got a lot on the line. To get to 21 wins, to advance to the semifinal of this great tournament. Look forward to coming back over and strapping it on again and seeing them compete. It's a lot of fun.

Q. Keve, how much did what happened last night kind of get you more to dig in at the end of the game to close it out this time when Notre Dame got within five?

KEVE ALUMA: Definitely. They came back, and that was something we kept saying on the bench. We just wanted to keep them at a good distance, so we did that.

Q. First time in 11 years Tech is in the ACC semifinals. What does that mean to you guys to make it this far now, and also how significant do you feel it is that you picked up another quality win for the resume?

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MIKE YOUNG: It's great. It's great. I'll let you guys talk. Those guys were riding a Big Wheel 11 years ago back in Berlin, Maryland, and New Jersey. I was flopping around down in South Carolina. I wasn't aware of that. It's significant. We're proud.

We talk about a little box over there, and we'll open that box at the end of the year and be happy for one another. We still have work to do, and again, an opportunity to come back tomorrow and compete again against Virginia or North Carolina.

That's where our focus lies at the present.

JUSTYN MUTTS: It's huge. One more day of life. Just trying to make the most out of it. That's all we really can do at this point.

Q. Mike, just to follow up on the previous question, do you feel like you guys have enough of a resume to make a cogent argument to the committee --

MIKE YOUNG: I don't mean to be curt. I'm not going to get into it. I've got an opportunity to bring a really good team over tomorrow. We haven't talked about it. We haven't talked about it. We know we put ourselves in a tough spot, but I'm not -- I'm going to worry about tomorrow and playing a really good opponent in a wonderful postseason tournament representing Virginia Tech and the Atlantic Coast Conference. That's where our focus is today, where it needs to be today, and we'll let that stuff shake out as we move along.

Q. What was the key to containing Blake Wesley? You did such a good job taking him out of the game tonight.

MIKE YOUNG: You know, we so admire Blake. He's unbelievable. I don't think he had a very good day. I think Hunter Cattoor did a good job with him. Now, we've got a lot of bodies on him because we want to switch and we want to keep a body on a body. I thought Blake pressed a little bit. I thought he took a couple of shots there, maybe ill-advised. I don't know the answer to that. He's a whale of a basketball player, didn't shoot it great today. I don't know the answer.

Q. Justyn and Keve, when Storm is hitting those two threes and the ball is swirling and swirling around the basket, what's going through your head, and what's that connection with you guys? You're upperclassmen but relatively new to the program.

KEVE ALUMA: What's going through my head when the ball is going around the basket? Well, one of them, I could

have got the O board, so I was kind of hoping it popped out, but once he made it, I was like, yes. So that's what went through my head.

JUSTYN MUTTS: I couldn't believe that he double pumped it. I'm standing to the side and he did. I was just surprised that it went in. I'm in awe. It was a great shot.

Q. Coach, you guys have a lot of momentum right now. It seems like a big thing. You shot over 60 percent in the second half, and now you're going up against UNC or UVA and you're combined 1-3 against those guys. Are there any mindset changes going into the next game or are you going to stick with what you've got?

MIKE YOUNG: We're going to just hang in there. We played a good ball game against Virginia at home three weeks ago, a month ago. We've won 11 of 13, I think it is. We had it all teed up and we're playing really good basketball, and we've got North Carolina at home at 6:00 two weeks ago. We were so prepared, and now these guys are so excited. I was excited to coach them. The castle is bursting at the seams, and we stunk. We didn't play very well.

Nobody's fault. They had the want-to. North Carolina had something to do with that. They outplayed us.

But whoever it is, I'm bringing a good team back over. We're going to play another good ball game against a really good opponent, and I'm going to take my chances with those guys in Hokie uniforms.

Q. Keve, can you speak to your consistency that you've played with down the stretch the past two nights? Do you attribute that to things you're doing off the court or is that more just really understanding the moment and the pressure that goes into the tournament?

KEVE ALUMA: I think off the court work. Always being in the gym. But also my teammates trust me, so they give me the ball in areas where I can work.

Q. Keve and Justyn, we hear so much about you guys playing five AAU games in a day and all that stuff. You've played two games in two days. How much does it wear on you to play a third game in a third day?

JUSTYN MUTTS: I'm ready to play tomorrow right now. That's how I feel. At this point I'm just so excited just to even be here and have the opportunity that we have. I'm not too much thinking about how my body is feeling. I'm not that old yet. I'm just excited to have the opportunity

right now.

Q. For the players, how important was it to take charge at the beginning and get that big lead early?

KEVE ALUMA: I mean, that was big. Some games we've started off slow and they've kind of punched us in the mouth, but this game we were able to take the fight to them, and that really helped us.

Q. You shot 59 percent from the field against Notre Dame in January. Tonight you shot 57 percent from the field. What is it about this matchup with Notre Dame that you're able to click so much on offense against them?

JUSTYN MUTTS: I think our offensive scheme, not only against them but everybody, and just so happens I think against Notre Dame shots are falling. I think we do a good job of attacking inside, but that's usually our game plan against most teams. I don't think we switch up anything too much, maybe we just had a pretty good game against them both times.

Q. Coach Young, you guys came out particularly aggressive. You had nine free throw attempts in the first nine minutes of the game and then 24 on the day. You shoot 13 free throws a game. Was that kind of a focal point to get to the line today, be aggressive down low?

MIKE YOUNG: Not a big emphasis. We want to drive the ball. We want to put the ball into Aluma. It's been a real sore spot for me. We don't have a real downhill driver. We've got these two guys. We need to get fouled more.

We were able to do that tonight. Unfortunately we turned that around and they were 19 of 22.

We always want to get fouled more. We always want to get up there more, and these guys do a really nice job of shooting them. Just want to be aggressive all over. Great ball pressure, electric gaps, just both ends of the floor.

Q. I know we've seen it before, but there was a stretch in the second half where Keve scored or assisted on 13 straight points. Just on this stage with these stakes, how impressive is that?

MIKE YOUNG: Very, very. Talented people -- and because of what they were doing. They were really spread out now to Alleyne and Cattoor and Storm, and we had to work through these two guys, maybe put it back on the perimeter and run into a ball screen and try to loosen Notre Dame up. We were able to -- I think Coach Brey went

back man at about the five-minute mark if I recall correctly, but they are both really, really talented people, unselfish, and they're really smart players, also.

Q. Mike, I asked you back in November, how do you maintain a positive attitude. It almost seemed Ted Lasso-like. How do you still maintain that positive attitude?

MIKE YOUNG: These guys have no idea who Ted Lasso -- I'm dealing with young people. It's the greatest job in the world. It's hard. I get to drive on a college campus every day, man. I'm the luckiest dude alive. Virginia Tech, really? Are you kidding me? It's the best. It's the best.

To see these guys on a daily basis, count me in. I have a lot of fun.

Thanks, everybody.

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