

# Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

## Virginia Cavaliers

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

## Coach Tony Bennett

## Jayden Gardner

## Kadin Shedrick

### Postgame Press Conference



Virginia 68, North Carolina 59

Tony, the last-minute news about Ben was obviously a blow to the team. How did you address that with them, and how do you think they handled that news?

TONY BENNETT: I think they responded well. This is a close-knit team, and we talk about lifting each other up. Unity is one of our big pillars, and I really thought -- it was one less guy in the front court, and these two guys up here, Jayden did the job, but I thought Kadin really gave us some rim protection, played hard, and Francisco did, as well.

That mattered, and again, we just said, we've got to be true to who we are and kind of double down on it, and I thought the guys played as hard as they could.

Again, losing a guy that's played a lot, that's always tough, but this group rallied around that and each other and came out and played against a team that was playing some hot basketball from the last game.

**Q. Jayden and Kadin, you guys haven't played that much recently together on the court. Tonight, though, you looked like you'd been playing all season together. What happened?**

JAYDEN GARDNER: Just that North Carolina connection, man. We had a whole last year together, and we played frequently this year, but Kadin stayed ready and stayed poised and waited for his moment. I was happy for him that he was able to impact that game like that. But yeah, me and Kadin's connection is strong on the court.

KADIN SHEDRICK: Yeah, I agree. We spent a lot of time

together the last two years on and off the court, so I think what we have we'll never lose, no matter how long one of us isn't playing with the other.

Yeah, it just felt good to be back out there with him and everybody else.

**Q. Kadin had five blocks tonight. What did you like about his defensive performance? Kadin, what allowed you to be so dominant on the defensive end?**

KADIN SHEDRICK: I like to consider myself a shot blocker, so going into games, I'm trying to make sure I'm helping my teammates out because when I'm in the game, they know I'm going to be there to have their backs.

I just can't let them down, and I'm always going to be there for my boys. That's just my job, I feel like, and I'm going to do it to the best of my ability.

TONY BENNETT: I think that adds defensively, and Kadin, his timing was good, and we talk about when to go and when not to, and for the most part I thought he was right on it. They're quick, Carolina, off the dribble, and there's times when either they break you down and you're out of position, and you can -- erase a play like that was significant, and so, again, I didn't realize Kadin had five. That's great.

**Q. Kadin, when you found out about Ben, can you take us through your thought process coming into this game, and then that last sequence where you had that block on R.J. and then the dunk and you let out a huge scream after that to seal it. Take us through that sequence.**

KADIN SHEDRICK: Yeah, finding out about Ben was hard. Nobody expects that to happen. So when you're kind of just thrown back into the action, you've just got to make sure you're ready. I'm here to pick Ben up because I know he's going through a lot right now, and I'm going to try to play as hard as I can, not only for myself and my team but specifically for Ben. Anything I do out there, I'm thinking about him, and he should be out there with us.

That sequence was fun. Brought back some memories. Hopefully we have a few more of those this year.

**Q. Kadin, again, you don't play for three games, and you hadn't played since the previous Carolina game. How did you stay ready, and did your performance tonight -- you were in foul trouble. How did you avoid getting that fifth?**

KADIN SHEDRICK: You know, I know a lot of people are -- I do foul a lot, but I've kind of gotten used to playing with four. I think once I hit that limit, I'm like, all right, it's time to play, I've got to calm down, but maybe I should probably do that earlier.

You know, I was just staying ready. I was treating practices like game days in my mind. I was excited to get out there and play against the starting five and all that. It was great extra reps for me.

You know, just the reps in practice were big for me. I tried to treat it like a game. That was probably the hardest I've practiced in this last month or so. Yeah, probably the hardest I've practiced the last month or so.

**Q. Tony, can you talk about every time North Carolina made a run tonight, you answered with one of your own and just pulled away from them again.**

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I thought we were running good, tough offense. Our guys were screening well, we got some nice drives, and I just thought it was kind of a slugfest in a way as to who was going to be last standing, but you have to answer. They made some big plays. I thought our defense was really good, but you have to answer, and our guys stayed within themselves, took the shots that were there. I don't know how many turnovers we had, six total, but for the most part we were doing a good job, didn't let them get going in transition, and you just could kind of feel that. But I loved how hard our guys worked offensively, and of course I did defensively.

**Q. Coach Bennett, it's the third game in a row you guys have really shut down Caleb Love. What was your game plan defensively to be able to lock him down again?**

TONY BENNETT: Well, make him earn. I thought a couple times they hurt us when they got across the top on a ball screen, but Reece did a terrific job on him and then Kihei did. But our defense is predicated, of course, on individual talent, Kadin's ability to block, Jayden's ability to move with his quick feet and Reece and Kihei and the other guys, but it's really a helping-each-other defense, and when you know you've got guys in the gap, guys helping

on screens, connected covering for each other, I think that really helps, and of course all you can do is make them earn. R.J. got going a little bit, but we just made him earn most of the night and just took the challenge.

**Q. Jayden and Kadin, with you guys being from the triangle and extended area, was there any more juice coming into this game, and is there any more, I guess, satisfaction leaving this game with a victory?**

JAYDEN GARDNER: It's always just when you're playing North Carolina because you know this is the hoops state. It's special to playing this time of year in Greensboro for the first time for me. Growing up, they rolled the TVs out in middle school and high school and it's ACC country, so it's just a special time, and I'm happy I could be part of it.

KADIN SHEDRICK: Of course, like Jayden said, I love being back in North Carolina whenever I can be, so playing here is pretty special, especially on this level where we grew up watching this in school literally all day when March came around, so it's fun to be able to actually reverse roles and now there's kids watching us.

Playing against Carolina schools in general, it's a lot of fuel for us. But you know, we treat every opponent the same, so I'm going to keep this going the rest of the way.

**Q. Jayden and Tony, if you could weigh in on this, because of the number of veterans you have, seniors you have, there was high expectations for this team. Is this the kind of game, especially as it got tight at the end at the free-throw line that veterans kind of rise up in?**

JAYDEN GARDNER: Yeah, I mean, that's what we're predicated on with all the experience we have. We lost BVP tonight, but we have a lot of veteran leadership with Kihei, Reece, myself, Poppy, Kadin, so we have guys that have done it before, and we're going to need our younger guys, as well, so it's just up to us to lead and lead by example tonight.

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I think we needed everyone, we really did. I just, again, it's staying ready. That's the one thing, that's why I was so proud of Kadin. I just told him, stay ready, be a great teammate, and work tremendously hard, and that's one of the beautiful things about sports. He had his number called, and he was ready. That encourages me, and there's nothing better.

One of the hardest things is not being able to play guys as much as you want, but I think these guys know, you always stay ready, and it's going to take all of us. We've got nine guys actually without Ben, there's nine guys. Taine didn't

get in, but he got in the last couple games. But nine guys able to play. Almost treating it like we did in Italy, we'd sit three and play nine, and those nine got to go the distance, and they did a great job.

**Q. Tony, free throws at times have been an adventure for this team. I think you're 9 of 10 in the final two minutes. You said the other day that you were saving them. Is this what you were saving them for?**

TONY BENNETT: That sounds good. Hopefully we'll keep saving some more.

**Q. Coach, some coaches have referred to the regular season as a marathon, and some coaches have referred to tournaments and the NCAA Tournament as a sprint. How do you feel about your team right now as you enter the sprints?**

TONY BENNETT: Well, I think the marathon part, we didn't -- listening to these guys saying how they rolled the TVs in for the ACC Tournament, I was Big Ten country, so it was the regular season, and there's such pride in the regular season over that marathon, so the fact that these guys were able, with a league as balanced as it was, to get a share of the conference regular season was big time, and you come into this, and yeah, I think the guys -- for losing Ben that quick and seeing how these guys responded, that's what we want to see. We don't want to assume anything, we just get as ready as we can. We're grateful, and we talk about not looking to the left or the right. That was the message today. Just be strong and courageous and step forward and trust your teammates and stay united.

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