

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Virginia Cavaliers

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Coach Tony Bennett

Jayden Gardner

Kihei Clark

Postgame Press Conference



regular game and go out and play Virginia basketball tomorrow.

Q. What did you tell Jayden and Kihei how to guard PJ Hall? He had 19 in the first meeting. Today he was 4 of 12. He did have 13 points, but still what do you tell them to guard him?

TONY BENNETT: A lot of times when he got it, we tried to be there quick on the trap and just make -- I thought our guys did a good job trapping for the most part. And the coverage behind it was good because if he gets a little bit of an angle or leverage, he can make some difficult shots.

For the most part, everything he did was earned. I didn't think he got any easy ones. Maybe missed a couple of -- I don't know how many threes. He took two threes, but just tried to close his looks down and make him feel two guys or really pressure the ball and do a good job when he had it on the perimeter.

Q. Tony, Armaan has become a very productive player around the basket and not just a guy who puts up three-pointers. Did you encourage him to develop that part of his game or is that something he's done on his own?

TONY BENNETT: He's done that on his own. We try to do some different things offensively, and a couple of the actions really get him on the rim in some of those situations where he can do stuff. But even yesterday he was driving the baseline and finishing. I think his finishing has improved as the year has gone on, and he's a strong, physical young man.

I think just that mindset, and I think it helps his game. You've got to be able to be versatile. You always talk about complete offensive players; the pull-up, the three, and then sometimes getting in there and using his physicality.

Q. Tony and Kihei, if you could address the efficiency of the offense today and really in the last couple outings, 18 assists, 50 percent from the field. Seems like you're getting a lot of shots that are close. I knew

Virginia 76, Clemson 56

Q. Tony, how much did last night's game help you figure out how you wanted to use this revamped front court with the rotations there?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, again, like I told you last night, we have nine guys so everyone is going to get an opportunity. And I really thought Taine gave us a good lift coming in. And I know that's not the question about the front court.

But with Jayden, of course, and Francisco and then Kadin and then Ryan and even how we started the second half, I decided they finished so strong at the end of the first half doing some things, let's start the second half with that. And we were mobile and quick, it helped. And again, everybody is engaged and they know they've got to be at their best.

Q. What allowed you guys to dominate in the paint so much today, 40 points inside?

JAYDEN GARDNER: I think just our mentality to be aggressive and be assertive. Clemson is a very physical team and it was coached to try to meet their physicality tonight, and I think we did that.

Q. Kihei, we joked before you got here about the basketball. You've kind of won and done everything. You haven't won this tournament. How special is this run and the chance to do that?

KIHEI CLARK: It would mean a lot. Something I haven't been able to accomplish. Just going to treat it like a



you had a stretch where some of those weren't going down, but tonight very good. What are you seeing in terms of the efficiency of the offense?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I think the guys are taking care of the ball. They're cutting hard. Our screening has improved. Again, just they're doing some things that we don't work on in practice. It's just Kihei has played so much, he and Jayden had a beautiful slip at the rim. They're just seeing things as the game presents, and that's the best to me kind of basketball win.

You give them a structure and then they play the game out of it. You've got a few actions and sets, but you want them to use their instincts and do some things well. And that's what I'm seeing happening. And with Reece and Kihei taking care of the ball, putting pressure on the lane, Jayden's efficiency in his game and the other guys -- we just talked about Armaan -- that's really helped. And then we got some offensive rebounds at crucial times, which is a big part of it.

KIHEI CLARK: I thought for the most part, I think our offense, our size really just wears people down. When you turn it over a couple times, I think we get the looks that we want, and I think that's how we're able to be efficient and just try to wear them down from that.

Q. Kihei, Clemson came out with the press in the last several minutes, yet with more than two minutes to play, they called it off. Did that surprise you, that they basically said game over with still more than two minutes to play?

KIHEI CLARK: Yeah, it shocked me a little bit. I think they were just -- with the offensive foul, I think they kind of just got back. And I think by the time we got it in, it was a little bit too late. But yeah, shocked me a little bit.

Q. Tony, have you allowed yourself even to think for a moment about what's ahead of you the rest of the weekend?

TONY BENNETT: Meaning to play tomorrow against Duke?

Q. Yeah.

TONY BENNETT: Well, excited to get to The Finals. Just like Kihei said, I think we're at our best when we just sort of focus on quality, whether it's a good practice, a good possession, and just all that stuff will take care of itself.

We know Duke is playing very good basketball. I think our guys are too. It'll be for a conference tournament

championship, and we were thankful that we got obviously a share of the regular season. So it's a great opportunity to just keep trying to play that quality.

I don't know if I've -- I didn't think about it too much. It was play a good Carolina team and try to advance.

Q. Tony, you just mentioned how well Duke is playing right now. They're on a roll. How different of a team do you expect to see from them tomorrow than the one you played three weeks ago? Also if the players could kind of address that, as well.

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I know they're defending well and they're running efficient offense. And obviously they have very good players, well-coached, all that, so they're playing at a high clip. Our game was a battle against them at our place, so I haven't watched them like a ton, but we respect everyone and we're going to have to play some good basketball.

JAYDEN GARDNER: Yeah, Duke has been trending in the right direction, and another challenge that we're going to have to answer. So we've got to meet their physicality and play Virginia basketball.

KIHEI CLARK: Yeah, they have been playing really good basketball. I think it's going to be a good matchup tomorrow, just whoever plays their best tomorrow is going to come out victorious.

But hopefully our guys are ready.

Q. Coach, arguably this season the ACC as a whole hasn't gotten the respect that it deserves. What can you say about coming through the gamut of this conference and getting to this final game?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, again, I grew up in the Midwest, so Big Ten, and it was always the regular season. It was the marathon, it was the test of playing. Well, 20 games this year, and you have to be as consistent and good.

I think some of the team's records maybe weren't great, but everybody was capable of beating everybody. Like Kihei just said, it was whoever was at their best, and the record almost didn't matter, and that makes it challenging to try to win it.

I think as always, you always feel the conference doesn't get its respect. Last year it did a great job in the tournament. But some of that stuff is out of our control. But there's good basketball in this league, and maybe we don't have three 1 seeds like we did Kihei's first year, but college basketball, there's so much parity now. And a lot of

it is already -- the die is cast at the start of the season; this league is good, this league is not. And I think leagues evolve, too, as a season goes on, and again, all we can control is what we're doing.

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