

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Hubert Davis RJ Davis

Armando Bacot

Postgame Press Conference



North Carolina 92, Florida State 67

HUBERT DAVIS: I was just really proud of the guys. At the beginning we talked about what will allow us to have success against a really good Florida State team, and we needed to get after it defensively. We needed to rebound the basketball, and we also talked about doing a better job of making the easy play and limiting turnovers, because the last time we played them we had 17 turnovers, and I feel like that we definitely checked two of the boxes. Just their effort, energy, attention to detail defensively was good, and for us to dominate the boards on both ends, I thought that was a huge key for us in allowing them to be successful out there on the floor.

Q. Armando, we did not get three and D Armando today, but seemed like a very old-school back-to-basics performance. Was it important for you to set that tone down low, not just because of the opponent, but because of the circumstances?

ARMANDO BACOT: For sure, going into this game, Coach's game plan was to get me the ball and put a lot of pressure on them on the rim. Going into this game I just knew my approach was to get deep and try to score as easy as possible, whether that's posting up or getting offensive rebounds. The guards did a good job of getting it to me.

Q. Jameer Watkins has struggled down in both games he played against you, back a couple weeks ago and now today. What was the game plan going into today trying to stop his powerful offensive play?

HUBERT DAVIS: Well, he's one of the better players in our conference. His ability to attack the basket is real. He's got great size on the wing, athleticism, and when he gets to the cup, he has the ability to finish and also draw fouls and get to the free-throw line. So it was a huge emphasis on us, one, to defend him and make it hard for him just to catch the ball, not allow him to go to spots in space where he feels comfortable offensively, and to be able to do that without fouling him. It's hard to do. It's really a great credit to our wing players, also our bigs just being in position to stop him from getting straight-line drives to the basket. I thought that was a huge part for us, just us protecting the paint and not allowing them to get consistent points in the paint through penetration.

Q. RJ and Armando, when you see Elliott diving on the floor for those loose balls, and he comes up and he's got blood all over his leg sleeve, how much does that fire you up as a teammate to see him going all out like that?

RJ DAVIS: I mean, it's infectious. I think Ellie did a good job of just diving on loose balls, getting the 50/50 balls. At the same time, he made it easier for his teammates. Coach Davis always says, we don't always have to live in the secondary break, we can live in the primary. And I think he did a good job of using speed to get into the lane, making lay-ups, and I think he did a good job of just playing an all-around basketball game today.

ARMANDO BACOT: Yeah, I agree with what RJ said. When he dove on the floor he really got us going. I thought in the first four to six minutes we were kind of not doing our best defensively, then after that we really got it going after that play.

Q. Hubert, obviously Seth was in the running for Sixth Man of the Year. It feels like he's starting to look more like himself coming back from that injury. What have you seen from him the last few games?

HUBERT DAVIS: Yeah, I agree with you. I feel like the last three or four games he's playing the way that he played prior to him getting hurt, the way that he played in the first Duke game where he was using his speed and his

athleticism to be an impact on both ends of the floor. He's attacking the basket and using his athleticism to be able to finish defensively because of his just ability to be able to eat up the ball.

I thought that was really impactful and huge for us. So I agree with you, he's back at that level where he was playing since that first Duke game, and it's much needed. That type of energy and effort coming off the bench, that's a huge benefit for us.

Q. RJ, talking to Harrison in the locker room, he described Armando, not as 3-and-D, but as the quarterback of the defense. Could you just talk about his vocal presence and how important that is for you as a guard, for example, on ball screen defense, things like that?

RJ DAVIS: Yeah, Armando does a good job of just talking early and communicating, not just with myself, but just with the whole team. His presence has been huge for this whole team this whole year. The way he's been defending, I know we switch a lot, so he's able to guard smaller guards and ball at the same time, guard the post. Even with no ball screen coverages he makes my job easier, because I know he has my back and vice versa. That's one of the reasons why he made the defensive team. I definitely agree with Harrison with him being the quarterback of the defense because he's been showing that all year.

Q. Armando, I saw some comments yesterday where you said that you guys are, "desperate to win this event." Why is that, given that you have bigger goals than this?

ARMANDO BACOT: Well, none of us have experience, other than the coaches, and we feel like it's right there for the taking. That's why we've been playing so hard, and we all just want to end the season off right.

Q. Coach, you guys, at the eight-minute mark left in the first half, it was a one-point game and you guys went on a huge eruption. A lot of that were in transition points. I think you scored 22 straight. What were the different variables that helped you guys get that 22-0 run on fast break points?

HUBERT DAVIS: I thought we were at our best defensively during that stretch. We specifically talked about that prior to the game, that what should and needs to ignite us is our effort on the defensive end.

For us to be able to get stops and finish it with a rebound, that is what allows us to get out in transition.

Our pace, that's where I felt like our pace got to where it needed to be with our guards, their ability to push the ball, bigs like Armando running down the middle of the floor. Our pitch-aheads were good. But it starts with defense and rebounding.

Our guys, our team, we understand that, for us to be successful, for us to have a chance to be the best team that we can possibly be, it starts with defense, and it finishes with rebounding. That bleeds into us being efficient, especially in transition on the offensive end.

Q. Coach, you talked about being the best team. If you win this tournament, do you think you'll be a 1 seed next week? And how important is it to you to be a 1 seed next week?

HUBERT DAVIS: That's something we don't think about, and that's something that we don't talk about. One of the things that we do talk about is focusing on what is real, and what is real now is our preparation to prepare us to play either Pitt or Wake Forest.

All year we have focused on the preparation and the process. If we continue to do that, the results will take care of itself. That's been our focus all season and will continue the rest of the season.

Q. RJ, what's it like when you're kind of pulling away the last five or six minutes in that first half? You're doing everything right, getting to the hole, going to the free-throw line, making shots. Collectively as a team what's that feel like?

RJ DAVIS: I mean, it feels great. I think the whole team had a rhythm today, and we came out and set the tone early, but it started on the defensive end. That's what led to us making that run, kind of just reflecting on that energy a little bit. It feels good, especially when you're up big and everyone gets to play and everyone is contributing in so many ways. That's the type of games you want to play.

Q. Armando, what did you make of the rebounding? It was 48-22 in you guys' favor. Also, take us inside some of those sequences late in the first half. I think you had four offensive rebounds there on the final possession, and there was the other possession where you batted it out to Harrison and it ends up with a Cormac three. Can you talk about that.

ARMANDO BACOT: We knew coming into the game that they were 14th in terms of allowing offensive rebounds, and we were No. 1 or 2, one or the other. We knew we had an advantage on the boards, and I think Harry early

on, just how he was on the boards, it really pushed me, J-Wash and all of us to even get more, and you talk about that last play, that was a lot of fun, just all of us getting rebounds and keeping the ball alive. It was a ton of fun.

Q. RJ and Armando, you guys talked about Seth and his impact off the bench, but with him, Jalen Washington, Jae'Lyn Withers, they have different skill sets than you guys in the starting five. How do you see them change games and impact games and really make games different when they're in the game?

RJ DAVIS: I think all three of their impacts help us. Seth was hitting his intensity on the defensive end and his speed and athleticism to get downhill, and then J-Wash with his length, his ability to shoot from the outside floor, and J-Wit, his athleticism and defensive.

I think all three of those guys have made key impacts throughout the whole year, not just in today's game, but that's really what we feed off of. To have guys come in and make an impact and make runs, that's huge for us, and that's winning basketball.

Q. Hubert, you mentioned it starts with defense for you guys. How have you seen Elliott progress as a defender maybe from the time you started recruiting him to now and embrace that part of his game and the importance of it?

HUBERT DAVIS: Yeah, it's a big transition coming from high school and playing at this level. In high school you may play defense when your guy gets the ball, and here it's just not going to work. The guys are just too talented.

One of the things that we talk about all the time is at this level you have to play defense before you play offense. Elliott every day is understanding how important and how good of a defensive player he can be, and that leads to him diving on loose balls and getting extra possessions, climbing into the ball, boxing out, talking on defense. So you just continue to see that growth in him, and it's been fun to watch.

Q. RJ and Armando, you guys were able to play in the Bahamas in November, three games in three days. You're going to have to face probably something similar here. Playing twice in the span of 24 hours, what's that process like and what's the recovery going to be like tonight?

ARMANDO BACOT: It's huge for us because we know we'll be coming in playing one of the other -- Wake Forest or Pitt, and both of those teams are hungry, so it's important for us to get great recovery and then lock in on

the scout.

Q. Hubert, I want to know if you have the data yet on your Oura Ring, how fast your heart rate got up to?

HUBERT DAVIS: I didn't wear it. I forgot to charge it. Thank you for getting me in trouble with my wife.

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