

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

Pittsburgh Panthers

Coach Jeff Capel

Carlton Carrington

Blake Hinson

Postgame Press Conference



Pitt 81, Wake Forest 69

JEFF CAPEL: First and foremost, I'm really proud of our team. We beat a good basketball team today, I think that I think is an NCAA Tournament team that's very explosive offensively, unbelievable size and well-coached.

I thought our guys fought throughout the whole game. We obviously got off to a very good start. I thought our defense in the first half was outstanding, and we were able to score and move the basketball.

I thought we were really ready to start the second half, and we were able to push that lead and got it up to 19 with about 13 minutes left.

But Wake showed incredible character and why I think they're an NCAA Tournament team, they fought back, and they continued to play. They had guys that made huge plays for them.

We couldn't keep them off the foul line. They were just driving us, getting there. They made some big baskets. But our guys made huge plays down the stretch.

Obviously Ish was outstanding throughout the game. Blake had an unbelievable block as they were making a run. We stepped up and made free throws. Guillermo made a big basket right there around the basket, and we were finally able to get a few stops down the stretch.

Really proud of our team. When you get to this point of the season, you want to have the opportunity to keep playing, and we feel very fortunate we get to play tomorrow.

Q. Blake, how happy are you that Ishmael Leggett decided to go into the transfer portal last summer?

BLAKE HINSON: Super geeked. I'm super geeked about all them new friends and teammates on this team. That's the Sixth Man of the Year, so it shouldn't really hit too many people by surprise, and he played good for us today.

Q. Coach, following up on Ish's performance, you've been coaching for almost 25 years. 30 points, eight boards, five steals, no turnovers off the bench. Have you ever seen a bench performance like that?

JEFF CAPEL: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. He was outstanding this afternoon, and we needed it. I thought he provided just a toughness. Obviously the scoring, but he had five steals, eight rebounds. He was everywhere. He just kept making plays for us when we needed the big basket, we went to him. He stepped up, he made free throws.

I thought he should have had three and-ones. But he played through contact and he played with force, and that's who he's been all year for us. It was awesome for him to be able to step up in a huge way on this stage.

Q. With 3:52 left in the game, you had a three-point lead but then you extended it to five. What was the importance of that play of the game?

JEFF CAPEL: It was huge. It was huge. Wake had a lot of momentum. They were driving us. They went to a smaller lineup so we tried to go to a little bit of a smaller lineup. They were forcing switches, and we were finally able to get some stops, but to step up and just make huge plays offensively. Jalen stepped up and made big free throws. Bub made some big free throws for us, and guys just stepped up and made plays.

Q. Carlton, your shot wasn't necessarily falling today like it normally does, but you found a way to make an impact. What do you think that says about you as a player as just a freshman?

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CARLTON CARRINGTON: Just trying to show people my ability to just be an all-around player. I never wanted to be labeled ever in my basketball career as just a specialist, so to show people that I could do other things, I feel like I can always do that, always prove that to people for sure.

Q. Obviously the last time you saw these guys, it didn't go very well for you. Did that leave a bad taste in your mouth? Did you have extra motivation from that poor showing last month?

CARLTON CARRINGTON: Yeah. That's all preached coming up here. We just kept saying that we owed them one. They got us good, so we owed them one for sure.

BLAKE HINSON: Our motivation is to win the tournament, so every game we play, we're trying to win.

Q. How good does it feel to know that you have a spot in Friday's semifinal game, because obviously since you've come to Pittsburgh that hasn't been the case.

JEFF CAPEL: Yeah, we're very excited. First and foremost, we're honored to have a chance to play in the ACC Tournament. This is the greatest conference tournament in the country historically and right now still is. We're honored to have that. We're fortunate to be able to win a game and advance and to have a chance to be in the semifinals and to play against one of the outstanding programs in the history of college basketball.

We'll be ready to go tomorrow.

Q. Jeff, how has Ish Leggett embraced that sixth man role for you that he's been able to excel in it so well?

JEFF CAPEL: Yeah, well, Ish is a winner, and he's about winning. He hasn't won a lot in his college career. Coming to our place, I think he was attracted to the culture that we created last year where everyone is about winning, everyone wants to be a great teammate, everyone wants to see each other be successful.

Ish is a starter for us that just happens to come off the bench if you look at the amount of minutes that he plays. It's the same as when he started, the first however many games he started.

But Ish was able to accept what this team needed, but I think why he was able to accept that is that he understands his value to the team. Him not starting doesn't mean he's less valuable. In fact, he's become even more valuable for us. He's embraced it. It's a testament to him, to his parents, how he was raised, his high school coach, and the people that he's been around.

We're very fortunate he's an unbelievable kid, and for him to be able to have a performance like this at home. He's from here. Has a lot of family here. It's really cool. We're going to need him to be really good again tomorrow.

Q. For the players, how much do you pay attention to all the bubble stuff that's going on outside of here, outside of your locker room? Jeff, how important is it to leave a positive impression on the committee and do whatever you can here to strengthen your case with the eye test?

BLAKE HINSON: As far as tournament talk, all we know is the more games we win, the more chances we get to get a bid. You get an automatic win if you win the tournament, so that's our only focus.

JEFF CAPEL: For me, I don't know what they look for, so I try not to worry. Like Blake, I just concentrate on each game, where we are right now. I don't understand a lot of it. I don't pay attention to it. People tell me, which makes me probably not understand it even more.

I think we're one of the best 68 teams in the country. I think we've shown that over the last couple of months. We'll see. But as long as we keep winning, then we increase our chances of getting in.

Q. It's not easy to hold Wake to 26 first half points when you guys built your lead. Not easy to hold Hunter Saliss to three points. I Bub on Hunter a lot. I saw Jalen on Hunter a lot. That's a huge responsibility for anyone, much less two freshmen. If you could describe what have you seen in terms of the freshmen's growth between November and now?

JEFF CAPEL: Yeah, well, the first thing is that both of them are very, very competitive. They're really competitive. They're very quick learners. So watching a lot of film -- having played them twice, and obviously he's a really, really good player. He's as good of a guard as we have in this league, which means he's one of the better guards in the country.

But I thought they took the challenge. But we also did a really good job in the first half of being in gaps early. Wake is a team that likes to get to the paint. They like to get to the middle. I thought we did an outstanding job collectively as a group of being in gaps early, not allowing them to see space, and we didn't get knocked back on their drives. They took that challenge and obviously did a good job in the first half.

Saliss got going a little bit in the second half, but we were

able to in the first half -- our team defense was outstanding.

Q. You're like one of the youngest players in NCAA basketball. How did it feel being in your first major tournament, and how did it feel stepping out on the court for the first time?

CARLTON CARRINGTON: I felt amazing. I was just in that spot like two years ago watching people -- watching these games and these tournaments like really saying I want to beat these teams. I want to be here. Then I'm here.

It's amazing feeling for sure, and it's a feeling like I want to embrace it and I want to make the most of it.

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