

# Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

**Pittsburgh Panthers**

**Coach Jeff Capel**

**Jaland Lowe**

**Carlton Carrington**

Postgame Press Conference



North Carolina 72, Pitt 65

JEFF CAPEL: Well, first and foremost, congrats to North Carolina. They're really, really a good team. We wish them luck tomorrow and throughout the NCAA Tournament. They'll be a great representation for the ACC in the NCAA Tournament.

I'm really proud of our guys. We fought for 40 minutes and we put ourselves in a position to win. We had an unbelievable defensive effort to hold that team to 69 points. I think over the last four or five games, they were averaging about 85, and I think if I'm correct, I think they lead our league in scoring.

I thought we did a really, really good job defensively.

The Player of the Year stepped up and made plays. You have to tip your hat to him. He made a deep three, a 28-footer, some pull-ups. He just made plays. Then Bacot, their two older guys, experienced guys, stepped up and made plays.

We still had some opportunities. We just weren't able to cash in.

But I'm really proud of my team. We fought. We came here with a great spirit, a great attitude, and we put ourselves in a position where I think we helped ourselves, but really, really proud of our effort.

**Q. Blake and Ish were scoreless in the first half but you guys were able to establish a lead. What led to that early effort to get your scoring going without**

**those two guys?**

JEFF CAPEL: These two guys beside me, these two guys were terrific. Guillermo came in and gave us a punch offensively in the first half, Zach made a three. But these two guys with the ball in their hands, creating stuff for themselves and others.

**Q. You had two freshmen do a brunt worth in scoring today. Can you talk to me about what that means for the future of this program?**

JEFF CAPEL: Well, these guys have been outstanding all year. They have. It's been really cool to watch them grow up. They're two guys that -- it's not a knock, but they weren't, like, these highly recruited guys like some of the guys we played against today. They weren't McDonald's guys.

No, they were highly recruited by me. I knew how good they were. I knew that the people that do those rankings, I knew they were wrong. I thought these two guys were as good as any two guards that I saw last year on the circuit or in high school.

I think you've seen them grow up. You've seen them mature. You've seen them continue to get better. They've gotten better because they're gym rats. They're highly competitive, and they're both extremely, extremely smart. They're able to pick things up pretty quickly, they were able to learn pretty quickly, they're students of the game, and for us, it's been a joy to be around them every day. It's been really, really refreshing.

**Q. What do the next two days look like for you and your team leading up to Selection Sunday?**

JEFF CAPEL: Yeah, we'll be off tomorrow. We'll travel back tomorrow. We'll be off Sunday, and we'll see if we're in.

**Q. You guys overall played a very fundamentally sound game today but there was a run halfway through the second half where UNC scored eight in a row and the crowd really got into it. How much do you**



**think those three turnovers in that period, as well, affected the rest of the second half?**

JEFF CAPEL: Well, we know that turning the basketball over against them hurts you because they're dynamic in transition, and we talked about being strong with the ball. I thought for the most part, we were.

But during that stretch, those three turnovers that you talked about -- I give our guys credit. We drove. It's amazing we only shot six free throws. It wasn't like we just shot jumpers. We attacked the basket.

I wish we could have gotten to the line a little bit more. We were 6 for 6. Wish we could have gotten there.

But again, you can't turn the basketball over against them, and you have to rebound. We went through a stretch there where we struggled to rebound, as well, against them, and they're relentless. They're relentless, they're old, they're good, and they beat us today.

**Q. Jaland and Bub, you got it tied at 62-62 with three, four minutes to go, and then that 7-0 spurt there. What did you notice over the last couple minutes? Was it shot making? What did you see and what can you learn from the last few minutes?**

JALAND LOWE: Just in those moments you got to play stronger, take care of the ball. You see how they converted off turnovers. That's a really good team. Give them all the credit.

But yeah, we know that we've got to take care of the ball, so that really sprouted it.

CARLTON CARRINGTON: Yeah, what he said. You can't make mistakes against a really good team because they're going to make you pay for it. We did that. We did that for a stretch, and they made us pay for it.

**Q. Jaland and Bub, what's difference about you guys compared to the last time you played UNC? What have you noticed about the way you were able to tackle this game versus that game?**

JALAND LOWE: We grew up. First time we weren't ready, as ready as we are now. Just knowing that they didn't get our best shot at first really motivated us to come into this game tonight and really show them that we really wanted to show them and give them our best shot.

CARLTON CARRINGTON: That's all it was. We just weren't ready the first time we played them, and it showed. I feel like today it showed we grew up a little bit, we just fell

a little short. That's it.

**Q. If you do not hear your name called on Sunday, do you think it will be due to your non-conference strength of schedule, and if so, will you change your scheduling approach next year?**

JEFF CAPEL: Interesting question. If you look at a lot of the Big 12 teams, they have a lot worse schedules than us. If you look at some of the Big Ten teams that they have projected, their strength of schedule is where ours is or less.

Again, coming into this game, us and North Carolina were 12-3 over the last 15 games since January 20th, so I think that shows that we were the two best teams in this league over that stretch when we figured things out.

Before tonight we had won our last four or five games by an average of 15 points, so if you -- it's interesting, I look at the -- I don't look at them, people tell me. Our metrics are better than they were last year. Our NET, the Ken Pom stuff, whatever that stuff means, it's better than it was last year.

I think our league is better than it was last year. Last year the thing that we heard was that North Carolina and Duke weren't North Carolina and Duke. Well, you're talking about a team today in North Carolina that probably is going to be a 1 seed, and Duke will be a 2 or a 3 seed. Those teams were top 10 for the majority of the season.

So I don't understand all of it. I don't think it will be because of that. But I don't know. I'm not a bracketologist. I'm not an expert. I'm a basketball coach. I try to worry about my team. I know we've gotten better. I know if you look over the past -- since January 20th, I think we've played as well as anyone in college basketball.

Last year I remember hearing, well, the early stuff doesn't count, because we had an unbelievable win last year against Northwestern at Northwestern. We beat them by 28 points on the road. They ended up second in the Big Ten, so that's a quad one win.

We heard, well, that was November or December so it doesn't matter. Now all I'm hearing is our Missouri loss. That was early December.

Again, we thought we had a really good schedule. We didn't know West Virginia would turn out like they were. They were picked high in the Big 12. We didn't know that Missouri wouldn't win a game. When we played them, they were pretty good. We didn't know they wouldn't win a game in the SEC.

We'll schedule the way we feel like will put us in the best position to win and to get to the NCAA Tournament just like we did this year.

**Q. Since you guys advanced to the final of the NCAA Tournament, how will you use this as momentum for the NCAA Tournament?**

JEFF CAPEL: Well, again, I like our chances if we're able to get in. I think we have become a really good basketball team, and hopefully you look at the whole body of work, and I think we could be a team that could be dangerous in the tournament.

Again, we'll travel back tomorrow. We'll be off tomorrow. We'll be off Sunday. We'll figure out where we're playing, and we'll go from there.

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