

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Tony Bennett

Isaac McKneely

Reece Beekman

Postgame Press Conference



Again, we were in that spot. We didn't have to be. Obviously we had some chances to win it, but that was the thought process. We were going to stop them with their defense, we're going to get it done, we're going to knock them it down at the line, and make it a two-possession game.

Q. This has not been a great free-throw shooting team all season. You made a little joke about it last night, but were you worried that at some point this season it would come back and bite you?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I think it did, obviously, tonight. Nobody gets up there, we're not trying to miss them. It's not like we don't work at them. You step to the line, and that's what it is.

Certainly we played well enough, and that hurt us, and hopefully we get a chance to keep playing, and we'll knock them down when the next opportunity comes.

Q. You mentioned not doubling DJ. What was your thinking there?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, when we played him there, he catches it so far off, and he's one of the best passing bigs. He catches it a lot of times at 18, 20 feet, and that's a tough double. They sort of shredded us there.

But we were trying to trap if he caught it in a certain spot, and a couple times we just didn't go, and then at times we said -- like we had enough of a lead if he scores a tough shot we'll give him two, and we thought we were in a good enough spot with the lead down the stretch.

I think we only got one trap. A couple times we didn't go when we should have, and a couple times we just decided not to, and he made some tough shots. It was physical. Jordan certainly was working his tail off.

Q. Coach, Issac had, I think, 15 of his 23 after halftime. What were you guys able to get him set with? What were you able to take advantage of?

TONY BENNETT: He just made some great plays. Reece

NC State 73, Virginia 65 (OT)

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, obviously a terrific, hard-fought game. We felt like we had it. These two guys up here with me on the podium played their hearts out. Man, did they battle. They fought. Made tough plays, guarded hard, did things.

They threw in a tough shot. There's a lot of things in your mind saying could we have doubled Burns. That thought goes through your mind. Obviously we didn't make some free throws, had our opportunities. Certainly had that.

But the effort was there, and we played certainly well enough to get that, and certainly did not, but I'll tell them not to hang their head, and we'll learn from it as always.

Q. You're up three, you only have three team fouls, so you have fouls to give on their last two possessions. What was the thinking in not using those fouls?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, well, the three they hit, that was a tough shot that he hit. We couldn't foul him in the backcourt. They got momentum because we missed the free throw and they were coming down, and once they got down we did not want to foul in the act of shooting. We just were worried about that. We were worried about maybe if they make a free throw and then a miss with Burns and those guys on the free throw rebounding.

But we just decided let's make them earn on that stuff. Again, we fouled a three-point shooter before, and that hurt in a couple of those live ball turnovers.



got him open, our screeners got him open, Issac made a couple tough shots, but he was just relentless the way he moved and was hunting, and that's kind of a lot of the stuff we try to do.

I was so proud of the way these guys responded, the way they responded in overtime last night and then to feel that and try to do it again -- did we hit our first three in overtime again? But I thought the guys got him great looks, and he stepped up and made them and made some tough plays.

Q. For the players, that's two nights in a row that a team has hit pretty improbable shots to force overtime. What is the emotional toll that takes on you when you feel like you've played pretty well and that ball still finds a way in?

REECE BEEKMAN: Yeah, it's a change of emotions pretty quickly. Like Coach Bennett said, we thought we had it, and then we got to play another five minutes. It's just a quick turnaround for the mindset, trying to get back in to play another five minutes. It's tough, but yeah.

ISAAC MCKNEELY: Yeah, kind of takes the breath out of you. It's hard to think you have the game won, especially I'm at the free-throw line, have a chance to win it, and I couldn't do it.

I'll look back on it, get back in the lab, get back on the free-throw line and hopefully we'll get a chance to ice a game some other times. Hopefully I can do it.

But, yeah, it takes the breath out of you. It's hard to come back and bounce back in overtime and play after that.

Q. Tony, if you had an audience with the NCAA selection committee, what would you tell them about your team?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I think they showed their body of work over the course. This league is good, but no amount of politicking, no amount of stuff, they're going to get behind closed doors and you trust that they'll look at it and see the eye test and all those things.

There's so much talk going on out there, it's too much. So get behind closed doors, make the right decision, and these guys I think represented themselves well.

And Issac said it about the free-throw line. The way these two guys played today, we wouldn't have been in that game. They put us in that spot. Again, that's good. You look at that, see what you can do, and they'll get to work. No question, I think over 20 games and league play, very proud of them. They did a lot. That's maybe the first game

we lost that was close this year, quite honestly. That says a lot about these guys.

Q. For the players, you had that run about four or five minutes to go where you got up five against a team playing its fourth game in four days. Did you feel like they were wearing them down and how surprised were you that they had gas left in the tank to do what they did?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: Yeah, we went up I think it was like five like you said. I thought we were going to? Pull away there, but DJ Burns got going a little bit, and yeah, they kept fighting. Respect to them for that.

Fourth game of the week, and they just kept fighting, so got to give them credit where credit is due. But I thought we were going to pull away, but they just kept fighting, so credit to them.

Q. Tony, three games against the Wolfpack this year; two went into overtime. What made NC State such a tough matchup for you guys?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, Kevin has done a good job. They're athletic. They guard hard. They have inside-outside attack. When Burns is going he puts a lot of pressure on you, but yet they guarded. They made these guys work.

I thought we did a really good job, we had 19 assists, nine turnovers, one unfortunate one that was there.

But I think they played both ends, and the margin of separation in most leagues across the country is not much. You're seeing that as you just look around at scores in those games.

Happy for Kevin because I respect him, but this one -- I felt like we were going to get a chance again at Carolina, but we'll move on.

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