

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

NC State Wolfpack

Kevin Keatts

DJ Horne

Casey Morsell

Postgame Press Conference



going to have some outstanding situations. I'm happy for our guys. We live on. We get a chance to play against a very good Carolina team tomorrow, and excited about our opportunity.

Q. Playing for your first ACC Tournament in nearly 40 years, what would it mean to lift that trophy, bring it back to Raleigh, especially over a rival such as North Carolina?

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I think it means everything. Like we've got great tradition. You think about '74 and '83, and we've honored them and did a great job with them. We looked back I think it was '89 the last time we won a championship. It means a lot. We're proud of it, but it's been a long time.

In order to have the chance to win it, you've got to be able to be in the game, and just the opportunity to be able to play in the game, I think it means a lot to us.

It happens -- I said this in the hallway, everybody expected this to be Carolina and Duke. Well, it's Carolina and NC State. We play pretty good basketball at NC State, too.

Q. Coach, obviously fourth game in four days. You're playing a team that has a style that tries to wear you down, but as it got into the overtime period it felt like you were the ones sort of wearing them down. How much of a concern was fatigue coming in, and what, if anything, did you guys do to combat that?

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, I've never worried about fatigue with our team. I really haven't. I haven't even talked about it.

We're taking this thing one day at a time. We've got a pretty good plan, I think. Every day we've done the same thing, and it's weird. I've eaten the same lunch every day. The only problem is I can't go to the same dinner tonight because it's closed.

We fuel those guys the right way. I've asked them to be gentlemen and take care of themselves and get the proper rest and listen to the nutritionists. They don't like taking

NC State 73, Virginia 65 (OT)

KEVIN KEATTS: Well, I mean, I don't know what to say. What a great game. You're thinking about a semifinal game against a very good Virginia team. Tony has done a tremendous job with the program. It was a back-and-forth game. Kind of last two or three minutes, McKneely hit some shots that were outstanding.

We talked about it in our huddle, just taking one possession at a time. Let's figure out how to chop this down. Let's figure out if we can -- when it got to four or five points, how can we get it down to a one-possession game, stay locked in, and I think these guys did a tremendous job. They gave us a chance.

Michael's shot, man, that's a great shot, and I had a direct view of it. As it went up I was like, man, that shot is going in, it's going in, and then luckily it did and obviously sent us to overtime.

I think DJ Horne and Michael and Casey, our veterans and then DJ Burns, they took us home. What a great win for us.

We talked about -- honestly when we got on that plane to come here on Monday, we talked about being in this situation, and I told them to visualize this. I asked everyone on our team, I said, I want you to bring something with you that's lucky, that's really lucky to you, and I don't know if any of them listened to me.

Did you bring anything? I said bring something that's lucky to you because we're going to have some luck and we're



some of the things that they have to, but they are doing it.

We've got to play the game. Is it an issue? Absolutely. You're playing against a team who's only had to play a couple games, so it poses an issue.

But that's what happens when you're the higher seed. We've done it the untraditional way. We're here. We're a 10 seed, and that's where we want to be. Obviously you tip it up, and anytime you tip it up, you've got a chance to be in the game.

Q. Casey and DJ, this is the first time that NC State is play in the ACC championship since seven. You guys were very young kids then. Has it kicked in how special this run?

DJ HORNE: I don't think it's -- for me at least it hasn't really settled in yet. It's going to be a quick turnaround so definitely enjoy this one but get ready for a tough matchup tomorrow.

But just for me personally just to be able to come back to my hometown, and Coach was just saying this hasn't been done in so long, like you said, we were kids, so to have the opportunity to be able to do this, it means a lot.

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, I agree with what DJ said. It hasn't really sunk in yet just because kind of getting on with just looking forward to the next game, and we kind of created a routine.

Just trying to embrace the moment as much as possible, but also just focusing on the next game.

Q. It sounds impossible to go from losing seven of your last nine regular-season games to having a chance of to be the first team in the history of this league to win five games in five days. How have you made the impossible possible with your guys?

KEVIN KEATTS: You know, we've looked at every game, and I think I told these guys we probably had 16 games that were one or two-possession games. What we've been able to do at this tournament is limit our mistakes, and in those games that we lost, I thought it wasn't so much what the other team did as what we didn't do.

It means a lot. You have to keep faith, and you've got to believe as a team, and guys have to listen to the coaches and understand that there are going to be some highs and lows throughout the season, but when you stick together and play together -- we're in a team sport, and so if it was individual, it would be different, but we all need each other to be successful.

I've got 100 percent buy-in, and those guys are buying in and they're working. I'm coaching them, but they're doing all the heavy lifting.

All the credit goes to the guys in the locker room. They put us in this situation.

Q. Coach, you guys went ahead and started off in the first round on Tuesday, and you played four games in four days, now five games in five days. Talk about your mental fortitude, toughness and grit of this team.

KEVIN KEATTS: Yeah, once again, these guys are locked in. I've got some maturity in that locker room that understands how to do it and how to lock in and understand that we've got an opportunity, and now every game we go into, one of the things I preach is take advantage of your opportunity.

I think I got another Quad 1 win today. Nobody has asked me about the NET, but I think we got a Quad 1 win today. I think we're up to three.

Q. Casey and DJ, you're down five, about four and a half minutes to go against a team known for its defense, playing four games in four days. Can you describe how you guys dig deep and find that energy, that gear to pull this off?

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, I mean, just focusing on the next play. Even though they are a team that likes to kind of wear you out and drain the clock, we just kept the mindset that it wasn't over and we were never really out of it.

We just had to lock in on the defensive end, and that's what we did down the stretch.

DJ HORNE: I'll just piggyback off Casey. We just had to lock in. Coach did a good job reeling us back in and everything, keeping the emotions under control, and we just knew that we weren't going to stop fighting until we seen the zeros across the board and everything, so that's what we did.

Q. Everybody is talking about fatigue, but Virginia is a physical team. They're very tough defenders. How are you handling that going forward? Is that going to play a part in the preparation or rehab going forward?

KEVIN KEATTS: You're meaning Virginia or Carolina? We're going to show up and compete. Obviously I've said this a couple times, we're going to do our routine and we're going to lock in and we're going to show up and we're going to compete.

Look, we've got an opportunity and you've got a chance obviously to be a champion and play at the biggest stage and playing in the ACC championship. I grew up as a small kid in Lynchburg, Virginia and watched so many of those championships, and now I get a chance to coach in it and these guys get the opportunity to play in it. We'll be excited. We will. We understand that our journey has been different, but we do have the opportunity to be there.

Q. Coach, talk about the play of Ben Middlebrooks tonight and the minutes that he provided in helping guys like DJ Burns and Mohammad Diarra in overtime.

KEVIN KEATTS: I thought in the first half Ben was our best interior player, scoring the ball and set some great picks. We got him on some naked pick-and-rolls. These guys did a good job of getting him the ball.

But that front line that we have, and I thought our front line completely carried us in the first half. When I went to halftime we talked about it. They did a really good job on our guards. Beekman, I voted for him as the defensive Player of the Year. He's a really good defensive player.

And they do a good job as a team, but we knew our post guys had to carry us early on and then I think our guards made some plays down the stretch. But Ben was good. Ben was solid. He played great defense. He rebounded the basketball, and he scored for us.

Q. In regards to the way you guys stepped up during this tournament, what else were you playing for besides the jersey and trying to play for an ACC championship? What else was the motivation for you guys to come out and play the best ball you guys have played the entire season?

DJ HORNE: I would say just playing for the guy next to you. We came into this tournament and we had a couple meetings and I just felt like we got really close with each other and we really understood things, what we were going to do coming into this tournament.

So just having that understanding throughout the whole team, and then just knowing that this is do or die. It's not like you lose a game, you've got another game next week. You lose, you go home.

For Casey and me and the other seniors on this team, we didn't really think that our season should be over right now, so we're going out here and just leaving it all on the court.

CASEY MORSELL: Yeah, what Horne said. Just playing for the guy next to you. Even through the ups and downs

of the season, we all love each other. We put too much work in to let a tough time be the end. That's pretty much our mindset is whatever happens, we're battle tested. Move on to the next one and have a short memory.

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