

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

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Spectrum Center

Duke Blue Devils

Jon Scheyer

Kon Knueppel

Khaman Maluach

Postgame Press Conference



to share with guys that you've been working hard with for a full season now almost. It's really, really special.

KHAMAN MALUACH: I mean, I'll just say, it's fun, and it's special, especially doing it with the guys you love, the guys you've been -- we've been through hard stuff together, and doing it with them makes more fun and more special.

Q. Kon, what kind of statement does this run make, considering that you not only won this thing, but you won it without two very important players and you came back from five down at halftime against a good team today?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, we're a very good team. We knew we had to step up with Maliq and Cooper, who were out, who are, obviously, super, super important players for us. But I thought everybody contributed and everybody pitched in, and we didn't need any Superman performances or anything like that. Everybody just stepped up and added to the team.

Q. This is for both players. Guys, in the first half, Louisville shooting on all cylinders. Second half, it was like y'all created a wall inside the paint. They couldn't get through. Can you walk me through that scheme?

KHAMAN MALUACH: Man, we just came out and played Duke defense. We went into the locker room at halftime. We regrouped. We regrouped together, and we came back out, and we knew we had to get stops and rebounds, and that's what we did.

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, I thought we gave up too many offensive rebounds for sure in the first half. I thought we were a little soft on that end, especially inside. So just clearing that up and Coach was telling us that. We were aware of it, but cleaning that up, and that led to the run in the second half.

Q. Kon, on this stage you stated two down, one to go. What needs to happen in order to make that reality?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, we've just got to stay together,

Duke 73, Louisville 62

JON SCHEYER: First, sorry for the delay. It's these guys. Great game. Really proud of our team to win this ACC championship. To win an outright regular season and then to win in the tournament is special. A ton of credit to Pat and his team and Louisville. They're tough. They played both ends of the ball. They're disciplined. They're experienced. Give Edwards a ton of credit for the shots that he was making tonight and to weather that storm.

I don't know if it's necessarily bad defense on a lot of those. I just thought we came out in the second half and were just so tough, played together, and really for us to be tested the last three games the way that we have, I think we're going to learn a ton from it, and it gives us extra motivation and lessons to move forward.

But I'm just proud of these guys. They deserve it. Both of the guys to my left have done a great job. Obviously, Kon won MVP. He, throughout the entire tournament, was so solid, made so many winning plays, and then Khaman, the way he protects, rebounds, and then his scoring punch has been a great addition, as well.

Really proud of both these guys.

Q. Khaman, when you go to Duke, you expect to cut down Nets, you expect to celebrate, do you say water on top of each other. How do expectations meet reality when that's what you hope to do coming to this school? How does it feel to cut down nets?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, it's awesome, especially getting



... when all is said, we're done.®

keep working hard, keep listening to what this guy over here says, and being tough and resilient.

Q. Kon, everybody in America thought a freshman player for Duke would be the MVP this weekend, and you didn't let them down. Can you talk a little bit about your game and how you turned it up a notch, and how you felt like you played this weekend?

KON KNUEPPEL: You know, I didn't really feel like I tried to turn it up a notch or anything. I just tried to make the right play. With Cooper being out, I knew some of the burden, especially the minutes. I had to play a lot more. It was just trying to be sharp, nothing spectacular, not trying to do anything crazy.

Q. You've been shooting 40 percent or better from three all year. Tonight it wasn't going down. Did you make a conscious effort to get to the hole, to get to the basket? Can you kind of try and change things up, and was that their defense, what they were giving you, and you took what they were giving you?

KON KNUEPPEL: Yeah, I just missed some open ones tonight. It happens. But really giving up the baseline drive, so I knew I'd have come of that, and getting two feet shot fake and trying to get to the foul line there, as well.

Q. Coach Scheyer talks about the last three games being an opportunity for you to learn some lessons you can move forward with. What have you learned about your team over the last three days that you didn't know beforehand?

KHAMAN MALUACH: Man, it says a lot, having two guys down, especially with Maliq and Coop being out. It says a lot about our team and our toughness and says a lot about other guys stepping up in big moments, especially like Pat, how he stepped up this tournament.

Q. For both the players, Cooper has really gotten a lot of attention all season. You guys have been really good all season, but do you feel like the last couple of days, the last three days, you have showed the nation, showed the college basketball world, how good you guys really are and maybe opened some eyes?

KON KNUEPPEL: I mean, maybe. Obviously, Cooper is a great player. But this is a great team. I think we've showed that, and we've really banded together.

KHAMAN MALUACH: I mean, as Kon said, we just did what we do normally, and we didn't do nothing much. We were just us.

Q. Khaman, there was a play in the second half where you were on an island with Terrence Edwards. He takes it to the basket and you swat it away. Can you take me through that play and then, generally, you also made a commentary about Duke defense. What does Duke defense mean?

KHAMAN MALUACH: I mean, that's what Duke defense means, us getting stops and us stepping up in such moments, especially in such isos, because I knew Terrence Edwards had it going in the first half, so I knew I had to step up for my teammates and step up for my team and get that stop.

Q. Coach, you referenced this in your statement. How did the two games earlier this week in a tournament, lose or go home, this format, help your team keep its composure when Louisville made that run, and what was the mood in the locker room at halftime?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I just challenged our guys at halftime because I didn't think we had the necessary toughness you need to win a championship. Our guys responded. They knew it. I thought they came out with just a different edge to them in the start of the second half.

I think the thing we've learned in some of these games, just the value of every possession. Postseason is different now. So one turnover, I think if you look at the Carolina game, one turnover can totally change the momentum of how the game is going.

Tonight, the value of just getting a rebound is huge, and we got rebounds in the second half. They got a bunch, too, looking at it now. I haven't had a chance to see the box, but still, we got loose balls.

I think that's something we had to go through to really understand postseason basketball is different.

Q. In the spirit of some of the guys saying, one more to go, winning a National Championship, a year removed from you guys making the Elite 8, being No. 1 in the country right now, winning the regular season, winning the ACC Tournament, do you think it's possible to quantify at this success for this group with anything shorter than a trip to San Antonio?

JON SCHEYER: I mean, look, that's obviously the goal. There's no question about it. But I don't think -- I just don't think of it that way. I just think about it -- I'm not running from that, either, and don't get me wrong, that's what we want to do. But just for us, we've approached this whole year, finish what's right in front of you, and that's the same thing.



For us, what was right in front of us was tonight's game. We'll find out where we're going tomorrow. Obviously excited to see that and figure that out. Then we'll finish the next game and then go from there.

But I don't want to make any proclamations of what's success or not. For me, success is making sure we're connected, we're tough, we do everything we possibly can to put ourselves in that position, and I can say that we are.

Q. It was 15 years ago, you were a senior, you won the ACC Tournament --

JON SCHEYER: It's that long ago, huh?

Q. Yes. Do you see any similarities from that team to this team? Also, will traveling to the Lenovo Center in Raleigh make things easier in terms of Flagg and Maliq's injury?

JON SCHEYER: Well, one, I can tell you what's not similar is we have athletic big guys on our team this year, and I didn't play with athletic big guys. Brian Zoubek -- you guys, come on, Brian Zoubek, athlete? Come on, you guys know what I'm talking about.

I love Zoubs, but anytime I can give him a shout-out, that's my guy. And it helped Gerald Henderson leaving early where I could actually touch the ball senior year.

But I think the only thing I could draw that's similar is, we're incredibly connected. That's different. We had five guys that played over 100 games together, and we were tough. Really, you have to have -- to me, that's a winning recipe for March. As far as easier, absolutely not.

I think, again, we'll see if it is Raleigh, and if it is, is it nice you don't have to get on a flight? Sure. We've lost there a bunch. You can't assume wherever you are that's going to be any easier at all. We're not going to approach it that way.

But more time for Coop, and we'll see about Maliq. That will be important.

Travel-wise, obviously, if you didn't have to get on a flight, that's nice. And that, no question, I think would help.

Q. It seemed like in that second half on defense, you were changing some coverages, blitzing some screens, trying some different things there. Could you just talk through what you saw there and what your team particularly changed on that end of the floor?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I think I screwed us up a little bit in the first half. I thought our defense was actually pretty good, and they hit tough shots, and I probably overreacted, and we went zone and it was awful.

I saw Coach Boeheim over there, thought we should go zone, and it didn't work at all. I couldn't get out of it quick enough.

In the second half, we did what we do, and again, that doesn't mean we don't change ball screen coverages. Edwards really had it going, so we stayed with him a little bit more when, typically, we like to get back, and Khaman does a great job protecting our rim.

But to me, that was the only option for us, and we did a great job. They shoot so many threes, but we felt they're a paint team, so protecting the paint was a big key tonight, and I thought we did a pretty good job of that.

Q. I wanted to ask you about a Kaizen methodology. What made you pick that as a message or a theme to the team in the beginning of the year, and do you think you guys have implemented it successfully so far? I know it never really stops?

JON SCHEYER: For me, March 31st last year was a terrible feeling. In my life, I can remember the first time, even in high school, I missed a game winning shot to go to a state Finals, and that led to so much growth. For me, last year was the same thing. So April 1 hit, and I wanted to make sure I could be the best I could for these guys, and it started with learning, reading, and I read -- came across something where -- just a philosophy about Kaizen, this Japanese philosophy basically talking about getting better every day, not getting caught up in results but being caught up in the process and what you're doing every day to get better.

I told our team right away, I believe if we approach it the right way, one day at a time, when we have opportunities to win a championship like this, we'll be ready for it. Not to put up day one San Antonio or ACC regular season championship or ACC Tournament championship.

Our guys have taken it to heart. We said the entire preseason and the first day of practice, I broke our huddle with something else, and they said, no, no, no. Kaizen. So we've kept that, and that's been something we say every day.

Q. I don't think the players understood the question I asked, so I'm going to ask you. Cooper casts such a very large shadow that maybe Kon and Khaman and some of the other guys don't really get the attention



that they probably deserve as well as they've played. Do you feel like the last three days has given them maybe a platform to show the world of college basketball how good they really are?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I sure hope so. First of all, I do understand your question. I think it's probably hard for me to answer because I see it every day, and I know how valuable they are.

But I think to see them, you do have to step up to do more. Cooper, he just does so much for us. To see Kon, he's really been our go-to guy, without him, to see the versatility of other guys stepping up, Khaman.

I think the thing I told them, though, you don't have to try to do anything special, you just have to do the simple things really well and then those special plays will naturally happen. I thought that's exactly what happened for Khaman and Kon and some of our other guys tonight.

Q. Last night, Pat Kelsey talked about how you called him after you won ACC Coach of the Year. How would you describe y'all's relationship and what he's done for the league in year one there?

JON SCHEYER: Well, I've known Pat for some time. He got into coaching at a young age, and as I was -- I don't know where I was at the time, finishing as a player or something. Pat, obviously, has done an incredible job. The difference in a year.

I remember going to play them the first game -- it's ironic we're playing them now. We played them the first game of the ACC season. I think people were doubting them a lot because they had lost some games, and I remember prepping for them, and I told our staff, these guys are going to be as good as anybody in our league.

I think it's been really important for the ACC. Pat has done a great job. They have a tough group. They're incredibly connected. For us, it's an honor to go against him tonight, and just want to congratulate him because coaches, you need to be for each other. I respect what Pat has done and just want to wish him well.

Q. As you're going through the recruiting process with Kon, I just wondered, was there a game or a play or something he did during when he was playing high school ball or AAU ball that stood out to you and you're like, I need this guy? What was that?

JON SCHEYER: I remember hearing about Kon earlier in high school, and then I got to see him in person in AAU, but then I really -- I told our staff after I saw him at the NBA

camp. The NBA camp, you're playing with different players. It's a different environment. I just saw his ability to create shots for himself, and then I saw his ability to really guard.

Most importantly, I saw what a competitor he was. I left and I just said, all right, I don't care, man, he belongs at Duke. Our staff from that point on, it was just all-out to do whatever to get him to come to Duke. I'm sure glad he chose Duke. I can tell you that much.

Q. Jon, the last two games have been big for Patrick Ngongba, especially with Maliq Brown's injury. I know he hasn't played as much throughout the season, but the last two weeks, he's gotten into a rhythm. How big is it for you to have Patrick really get into a rhythm right before the tournament starts?

JON SCHEYER: Man, I could talk all day about Pat and the process that he's going through. He came this summer, and he couldn't even practice because he had pain in his feet. I just want to give our medical team a shout-out because they've done an incredible job.

We put the brakes on with him to make sure -- it wasn't purposeful to do anything basketball-wise if he couldn't feel no pain and to move properly, so we worked on his body. Pat really just worked like crazy to get back healthy. He didn't play as much. We had a good thing going. Then he just slowly progressed. He works his butt off every day. He's Coach Will Stevens' best friend. He's Khaman's best friend. I think both of those guys, it would be easy to look at each other like competition for playing time or whatever. They've embraced making each other better every day. Anytime you see Khaman off the court, you know Pat is around there somewhere. Anytime you see Pat off the floor, Khaman's somewhere, too, and they're best friends.

To see them push each other, and then to have Pat ready, he's given us huge minutes. He's great feel. He's tough. He's got great defensive instincts to protect the rim and guard in pick-and-roll. And his skill set is going to continue to blossom and be a really special guy for us going forward.

Q. I guess the news was out earlier, NCAA suggested that you guys told them that Cooper would be okay for the tournament. Can you give us an update on what you expect from Cooper for the NCAA Tournament?

JON SCHEYER: Yeah, I don't know who said that. I did not say that directly, but I can tell you that that's exactly my intention. It's the same thing. I think it's trending in a great way where Cooper will be ready to go right away in the NCAA Tournament. So yeah.



Q. Other than the two teams that were out here tonight, if you believe that the pundits who put this together, there would be one ACC team in the tournament. You've just won this league in the regular season and the tournament. Does that make sense to you? Does that feel reasonable to you?

JON SCHEYER: Sorry, what are you saying?

Q. Three ACC teams total in the NCAA Tournament. Does that seem like a reasonable number to you, given what you guys have gone through all season?

JON SCHEYER: Look, obviously, when you go through your own schedule, you feel it's always tough. I know some of the margins we won by this year were a lot, but this league, it's disappointing if that was to be the case. But I've tried to really not get into anything other than being laser focused on what we have to do. I do know the teams we played in the tournament -- Carolina, I think for any of you guys watching, did that not feel like an NCAA Tournament game? For me it did. Obviously, Louisville, with their -- their thing is set.

But I'm not going to try to predict or say who should be in or who shouldn't just because I've tried to really focus on ourselves and what we can do.

But obviously, look, for our league going forward, we need more than three teams in. We need more than four teams in. That's something we have to continue to figure out and work on.

Q. Did you feel like going into the last eight minutes tonight that your pressure defense and your depth was starting to wear them down mentally and physically, and they weren't as sharp going down that stretch?

JON SCHEYER: Well, we do believe that we can wear on you, and obviously, we want to start off fast and get the lead and keep it, but the most important thing is to have that belief that at some point you're going to break through. That's what we had tonight.

I thought our guys did a great job of just being really disciplined. I thought we made it hard for them with our size, just putting bodies on them and going straight up. I thought our talk was really on point in that second half with all the movement that their team does.

Q. You're a two-time ACC champion and this is the 23rd championship for the program. What kind of impact has Duke and its community had on your career as a coach?

JON SCHEYER: Well, for me, Duke has meant everything. It's not just the school. Obviously, I went here and I have a lot of great experiences, but it's the people. It's the people that have supported you in key moments along the way.

I think back to my playing days, and obviously, that's Coach K and the coaching staff and my teammates. I think back to coming on staff here and this transition, which has been crazy. Nina King and her support for just understanding what this program needs and the vision going forward. Then we have the best fans in the world. Every place we play, there's Duke shirts in the stands. Tonight was awesome with the crowd, and we're going to the game and people are waiting for us.

Just the support from Duke fans all over the world showing up for us means a lot, and then supporting us, understanding we're building something special.

I think you can see that with this group, but for me, it's about the people at Duke that have supported us along the way.

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