

# NCAA Men's 1st and 2nd

## Rounds: Columbia

Friday, March 22, 2019

Columbia, South Carolina



## Mike Krzyzewski

## R.J. Barrett

## Zion Williamson

Duke Blue Devils

Duke - 85, North Dakota State - 62

THE MODERATOR: From Duke University, head coach Mike Krzyzewski with student-athletes Zion Williamson and R.J. Barrett. First, an opening statement from Coach Krzyzewski.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I thought we beat a really good team today, a championship team. The last month of their season, I thought they were the best team in their league. They lost a heartbreaking game against South Dakota State at home, which they dominated, and really, that knocked them back a couple games, I think. They got it back, and they've been playing beautiful basketball. I've watched at least six of their games.

Extremely well-coached. The kid, Shahid, is a dominant leader, and he played so well today, especially in the first half. They don't turn the ball over. They make you play defense and then multiple shooters, multiple scorers, well-conceived. They're good. They're very good.

I thought we started out just taking jump shots and not working the ball. Once you get behind, there's the confidence level of the other team and the pressure of the game. I thought our defense then picked up for the rest of the game after about ten minutes. In the second half, we played just beautiful basketball for those 12 minutes, and then we subbed, and they subbed.

But it was a good game for us and applaud them. They return, everybody, watch out, man. Watch out. They're going to be that team in their conference. That's my prediction.

THE MODERATOR: Questions to the student-athletes.

**Q. Zion, for you, there's obviously a lot of attention on you. Nothing different there, but to be in your home state, to deal with this, and then to come out the way you guys did in the second half, how did**

**that feel for you?**

ZION WILLIAMSON: Obviously, it's nice to be in my home state, but like I said in our last press conference, I can't put my personal happiness before my teammates. We did start out very sluggish. We weren't playing very well. But I think in the second half we calmed down, and we just started playing Duke basketball.

**Q. This is for both players. Going into the game tonight, it's your first tournament, was there any nerves, excitement? Or how did you feel going into tonight's game?**

R.J. BARRETT: I felt like we were excited, definitely excited to play. We've all been growing up watching the tournament for many years, and we're excited to get out there and just -- we didn't really have as much energy. We weren't really playing as well at the beginning. Thankfully, we were able to pick it up.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Like R.J. said, I think we were very excited because, especially for me, I remember watching March Madness, like live-streaming it in high school and middle school, just watching the intense games and telling myself I was going to be a part of that. So I think last night, when I was sitting in my hotel room, I'm like, wow, I'm actually here. It's very exciting. But you've got to put the excitement aside and just go out there and try to get the win.

**Q. Zion, to start the second half, you were on a stretch where you had a dunk, you had the steal, picked up the loose ball and went down and made the layup. You had quite a stretch there where you kind of almost took the game over by yourself. Can you explain what happened there and what led to that?**

ZION WILLIAMSON: Before that even happened, my teammates were in my ear. They were just like be me, like be myself. My teammates, and obviously coach said the same thing. When they're constantly telling you to be yourself, it just gives you energy, and I just try to bring energy for my team. I think in those situations I just happened to be in the right spot. Like R.J. could have did the same thing.

**Q. For R.J. and Zion, I'm curious, you guys talked -- or Coach K talked the other day about talent helping talent. I wonder if you could talk about**

**what your relationship has been like this year or how each other have helped each other's games throughout the season.**

R.J. BARRETT: It's been great, definitely playing with this team, playing with Zion. Especially for me, we had a little joke that, whenever I'm in trouble, he always bails me out. Every time I get stuck, he always cuts, and I can just throw it anywhere and get it to him. So we definitely bail each other out, and it's been a lot of fun to play with him.

**Q. R.J., can you talk a little bit about Shahid for NDSU's performance, especially in the first half?**

R.J. BARRETT: He was taking it to us. Very dominant leader, like Coach K said. He really got them going, got them on their run. They were pushing it down our throat, but we regrouped at halftime. So it was great to see what we did in the second half.

**Q. Zion, on the missed free throw, were you surprised? It didn't look like anybody got a body on you, and you went ahead and threw down the dunk, and that seemed to turn things. Did anybody try to get out on you at that point?**

ZION WILLIAMSON: Honestly, I just think it was one of those simple mistakes by both teams. They both crashed, and the ball just kind of bounced right over them. But, yeah, like you said, nobody was there to box me out. So I just went and dunked it.

**Q. You guys have a good, strong relationship, good friends, have a lot in common. Is being left-handed -- is that something that just adds to the bond that you guys have?**

R.J. BARRETT: I got it. I mean, it's cool for sure.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Being right-handed is cool, too.

ZION WILLIAMSON: It's not your turn (laughter).

R.J. BARRETT: It's great being left-handed, and we can both use both our hands. So it's amazing to see, you don't really know which way we're kind of going to go in the name.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Yeah, it makes the connection deeper (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys.

**Q. Coach K, in the second half, can you point to something that turned it to let your team get out of the gates quickly and make that big run to open up that lead?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: No, we were just more ourselves. We didn't start the game the way we have played. We started it being jump shooters and just being fast

break. Most of our possessions had no passes, and therefore, we had no rebounds. I think we were outrebounding us about 14-6 because we weren't running good offense. They run very good offense, but they're going to get even more confidence when we take one and miss, and that's it. How do they feel us? They never felt us on the offensive end of the court.

Then we started getting stuff more inside, and then they started to feel us on both ends of the court. But we didn't start the game well, and they did, and that's why they were ahead.

**Q. You said that you all just played some beautiful basketball in the second half. What was your favorite part about that first 12 minutes of the second half?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Just that we're winning, man. It's the most beautiful thing. We're winning, got a double-digit lead, and we're hungry, and we want more. To me, that's beautiful. It's not one play. You're not going to win this with one play, no.

**Q. Coach, Jordan came in with the team down seven and kind of helped spark the defense. Can you just talk about the energy he brings and the improvement he's made to where he's now a household name in the rotation.**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: He's part of our rotation, and he's earned that, starting with the Louisville game. He's a very good athlete, and he plays defense on and off the ball, tough. He does not turn the ball over, makes simple plays, and then he hit a big three. That's added. He's a valuable guy for us right now, but he's earned everything.

And also, what he's earned is the confidence. He has confidence in himself, and he knows that we have confidence in him. So it's a good place.

**Q. Mike, how would you assess the toughness of this job or compare it to others in the past with having as many high level freshmen as you have, but obviously guys who lack experience playing games on this stage?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Nobody thinks I have a tough job, so I'm not going to talk about a tough job. My job being tough? We've been the leader of the pack for about 25 years, so we get everyone's best shot. That's the toughest thing. Our guys need to be ready for that each time. I'm not saying we're the only leader or the only -- but we're one of a handful that does it every year. So getting kids, young kids to understand that. They don't get that in high school. They never play more than two. They hardly play tough games because they're the best players by far. And all of a sudden, every game they play is a T-shirt. They have

blackout day, game day, the most viewed game -- all those things.

Although I do think it prepares us for this moment where everyone thinks is the biggest game. We've played a lot of big games, and I think that's why our kids responded in the second half.

**Q. Coach, you've coached some incredible players throughout the years, but with Zion and everything that's been written and said about his generational ability, do you find even yourself sometimes saying wow to the things he does on the basketball court?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Yeah, but I've had a lot of wow guys. Yeah, he's there, but R.J. is a wow guy. Tre on defense. When Cam comes down and hits those trail threes or fast breaks. Javin makes a block. I get excited for all my guys, and obviously I get excited a lot about him because he's a hell of a player.

**Q. NDSU is a really good three-point shooting team, and you guys shut them down. Was that a point of emphasis coming into the game, to take away the three-point shot?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Obviously. They had to work for their shots. The thing that they did, though, when they missed in the first half, they got their rebounds, and we were not defensive rebounding.

Look, they're a really good team. I watched six of their games, and I told my guys, I said, look, they don't beat themselves. They don't beat themselves. They play solid, really good basketball. And each kid has a confidence in his role. Very, very well-coached team. I'm very impressed with them. We beat a good team today. It's a good win for the Duke Blue Devils today. Thank you.