

NCAA Men's 1st and 2nd

Rounds: Columbia

Sunday, March 24, 2019

Columbia, South Carolina



Mike Krzyzewski

R.J. Barrett

Zion Williamson

Duke Blue Devils

Duke - 77, UCF - 76

THE MODERATOR: Duke University head coach Mike Krzyzewski with student-athletes Zion Williamson and R.J. Barrett.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Obviously, Johnny's team was magnificent. They were so well prepared. That's as high a level of any team that we've played against all year. They were men. Aubrey wasn't outstanding; he was magnificent. Our guys hung in there. We got that seven-point lead. We missed a shot, made a turnover, and they went on that barrage of shooting.

These kids, my guys, hung in there. They hung in there because just the momentum of the tournament, what's going on, you could be defeated right there, and instead, they hung in there. We waited forever about the call for the shot clock violation, and during that -- it was 2:09 left, and we talked about these kids are made for these two minutes. They fought, and Cam hit a huge three.

The will to win of Zion and R.J., you can't measure it. It's just there, and it's -- they're young -- we're a young group, but what they did right at the end of that game in willing us to win was just absolutely sensational.

But, again, congratulations to Johnny and his group. They certainly were deserving of winning, also.

Q. Zion, what was your thoughts on the final drive looking down at a guy who was almost a foot taller than you when you took it to the basket?

ZION WILLIAMSON: You know, it's March Madness. A lot's going through my mind, but like Coach said, at that 2:09 mark when they were reviewing the play -- you know, I consider him the greatest coach of all time. When he looks at you and tells you that you're made for this moment, it's like the most confidence you can be given. So when I went to the basket, I knew it was going in.

Q. R.J., what was going through your mind when you hit that shot at the end off the Zion missed free throw?

R.J. BARRETT: I was just thinking what can we do to win this game? I remember watching March Madness and watching a whole bunch of games and seeing missed free throws, somebody gets a rebound and a putback. So I thought, I'm just going to try to do whatever I can to get this rebound.

Q. This is for Zion and R.J. At what point in the game did you guys see that this guy, Tacko, was going to be a different challenge than you have met offensively and defensively?

ZION WILLIAMSON: Before the game, obviously.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: We didn't overlook him.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Yeah, he's 7'6".

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Or underlook him.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Like Coach said, he's 7'6". He's a big man down there, so you just have to run the right offense for it. You know, he played great. Like, hat's off to him. He played an amazing game, but I think we just hit some big shots, and we were able to get the win.

R.J. BARRETT: It was definitely a different challenge. Never really played against something like that before. Definitely, it was challenging, but we definitely hung in there. So that was great.

Q. R.J., did the way Aubrey Dawkins played today, did that surprise you at all? 32 and looked like he had that last tip.

R.J. BARRETT: No, it didn't surprise me. I knew he was going to come out and try to be aggressive. He really grew up with Duke, so to play against us is probably a dream come true for him. He played his butt off, and he was tough to stop for us tonight.

Q. Zion, when the big man was on you, number 35, it looked like he did not want to come out of the paint to cover you. Did you feel pretty comfortable in your three-point game today?

ZION WILLIAMSON: Yes, sir, and I always feel comfortable with my three-point game because my

teammates and the coaches are always telling me shoot a strong shot, and they trust me to shoot it. So when I saw he was playing off, I was just shooting it with confidence.

Q. Can you talk about their last possession, what Coach told you in the huddle, and kind of how that went down? It looked like they were going to hit that tip. What did it feel like on those last microseconds?

ZION WILLIAMSON: Go out there and play like defense. You've got to play like there's no tomorrow. Tre played great defense and got -- shoot like an off-balance shot. Dawkins came flying in. I mean, when he tipped it, you talk about microseconds, when that ball rolled around the rim, it looked like it was going in, but as Coach K talks a lot about the basketball gods, they had our back tonight.

Q. When you're playing in the backyard, these situations are ones that you really think about and want to really emulate. Now that you've been able to do that, how does it kind of feel in hindsight?

THE MODERATOR: R.J.?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Did you have a backyard?

R.J. BARRETT: Yeah, I used to play with the older guys. I mean, it's a surreal feeling. I can't really describe it at all, but just to be out there on the court, the fans and watching all the games. It's been amazing. So to be in that situation, it's like we know it's win or go home. So we're trying to give everything out there because, if we lose, that's it for us for the season. So just a surreal feeling, and it's great to win.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys. Questions for Coach Krzyzewski?

Q. Coach, you said obviously you don't like playing your guys in games. I guess this is one of the reasons why. A long embrace with Coach Dawkins after the game. If you could share a little bit of what you said.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I love Johnny. I'm going to start crying. That's what I told him. I love Johnny Dawkins, and the moments, the times that we've spent together building the program, ten years on our staff, and the connections that we've had while he was at Stanford and Central Florida. He's a member of -- we're family. I feel bad that they lost. I'm happy -- it's like a yin and a yang here because they were deserving of winning. They were so good, and I'm so proud that those kids played at the level of their coach.

It's hard to describe. That's why I hate -- obviously, we're happy we won because unless you're an idiot

(laughter). Although some of you might say I fill that description. It's a tough moment, and it will take me a little while to get through it, to be quite frank with you.

Same thing with Aubrey. You see him grow up from a little guy. You know, even on our staff, Johnny was kind of like Nolan's father. Nolan's dad died early, and when Johnny was the assistant for us, Nolan really looked to Johnny as a father figure. So Aubrey for him, too, is like a brother. All these connections, they're just hard to explain, but they're all true. That's what makes it very difficult. And especially Aubrey, Aubrey was the best player on the court today. He was magnificent.

So there were so many good things, great things, and it was a great game because both teams played hard. I mean, really, we haven't had a team play any better against us than they did. They were fantastic.

Q. It seemed like, when you made that time-out run at three minutes, when you guys came out, there was more of an emphasis on getting to the basket. It seemed like you guys were trying to get that fifth foul on Fall. Could you just go through that scenario?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: It wasn't so much trying to get the fifth foul because you don't know how the game, the way the game was called, was very physical for both teams around the bucket. So you really -- I think that's over analyzing a moment. If that's what you're going to do, you're going to lose.

Basically, I just tried to get the ball into the hands of my two best players, guys that -- these two guys. And then when Cam came back in and transitioned, Tre found him for the three. Basically, you just try to -- it's not as much coaching as allowing your players to make you look good, and if they don't do it, you have their backs, and our guys know that.

Q. Just curious, with such a talented but young group of freshmen in the biggest moment of their athletic career at this point with two minutes left after the shot clock violation being reviewed, like what did you tell them to try to keep them calm and keep them focused?

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: We had a lot of time, one. It was a long time to do that. And on the court, I said, look, no matter what the decision will be made, there's going to be eight to ten, maybe more possessions in this game. And you guys were made for these two minutes and just be yourselves. And they are.

You know, we had a lot of foul trouble, and we are young, and we're not deep, but we're good. But we had a lot of stuff go on today that was difficult for us, and they were still able -- and the most difficult was the

other team, and we were able to find a way to win. These kids are that -- they have it. They have it. Hopefully, we can continue to advance, but I love who they are, and I have confidence in them. If they didn't come through, then I got their backs, but they did come through.

By the way, just thank you for the City of Columbia; wow. What a beautiful city. Everything about it, the arena and especially the state troopers. The state troopers are the best. I know some of you probably don't like them (laughter). They're really a classy -- so classy in everything that was going on. So a thank you to all those people. Thank you.