

NCAA Men's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Washington D.C.

Saturday, March 30, 2019
Washington D.C.



Mike Krzyzewski Tre Jones RJ Barrett Zion Williamson Duke Blue Devils

Duke - 75, Virginia Tech - 73

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Duke head coach Mike Krzyzewski and student-athletes Tre Jones, RJ Barrett and Zion Williamson.

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: What a game. Huge, great game. And we beat an outstanding team that I thought they played great. They're so difficult to defend. And in the second half our guys did a really good job of that. Tre was magnificent, not good, in running our team. And not just in scoring, but eight assists, no turnovers. Good D.

And he ran the team to get the ball to RJ and Zion in the second half. And we were able to do that. And then these guys, once they get the ball, they make you look good. So these three guys kind of orchestrated the whole thing.

And, again, congratulations to Buzz and his team and their program. They're terrific. And we feel very -- we feel great about winning this game, because we had to play outstanding basketball in order to win.

Q. What did you see on the last inbounds play?

ZION WILLIAMSON: You know, Hill kind of did a loop, and I'm not even going to lie to you, when he caught it, I said, ah, we're about to go to overtime. I mean I don't know what happened. Like just kind of went our way with that play.

RJ BARRETT: He missed.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Ignore him. He just missed it.

Q. Talk about defending that 1-5 switch. They tried to put you in some inopportune situations, but you

play well against a 6'10", 6'9" guy.

TRE JONES: Like Coach said, it's tough defending them. They have four really good shooters, and Blackshear on the inside who is -- he's an outstanding big. So sometimes we had to get caught up in the switch, and I just had to battle as much as I can to try to get us a win.

Q. Any of the three of you, having been through a number of games, I think this is the fourth time now in the last eight that you've played a one-possession game at the end, is there a level of confidence that you have going into those final minutes in a game like this that because you've done it enough times already?

RJ BARRETT: I mean, now that it's March Madness, every game is kind of going to be like this, close, hard fought games. And we somehow find a way to keep winning at the end. And it's great. And we're not surprised by it, but we've just got to keep it up.

Q. Anything to add about the experience down the stretch in these late games?

TRE JONES: No.

Q. RJ, talk about your second half, your emergence after your slow start. What did you do -- what adjustments did you do mentally and within the game to be able to make that impact in the second half?

RJ BARRETT: Really played it the same way. First half really taking my drive away, and Tre was able to knock shots down and it was great. And then second half, Coach really made adjustments on the offense and I was able to get open.

Q. Tre and Zion, on the alley-oop pass, Tre, looked like the pass was about two feet above the rim. How did you see that unfold? And Zion what was it like catching that pass and dunking it?

TRE JONES: I know how high Zion can jump, and that's a momentum play for us. Being able to put it up there, I know he's going to go get it.

ZION WILLIAMSON: Before I even get to my part, Tre made a great defensive play. He made an incredible steal and I was running the passing lane -- I mean running the lane, and he threw it up there, so I went

and got it.

Q. Tre, how was the challenge, obviously Justin Robinson was not in the game last time you played Virginia Tech, and then you have to take the challenge of guarding one of the best point guards in the conference and in the country, how was that challenge tonight? And how did it feel to, early on you were hitting shots, I think you hit your first three of four to start the game from 3. How does it feel to have a hot start?

TRE JONES: He's a really tough guard. I mean, with that being my first time going against him he's a good player. But we've gone against a lot of really good guards this year. So with all those guards we've gone against, that was able to prepare me for a game like this.

But these guys believed in me all year, especially after last game with me struggling from 3. They kept believing in me. Coach kept telling me to take the shots and these guys kept telling me take my shots, and they were able to fall tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. What happened with Cam? What was the issue and what's his status?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Right before the game -- we didn't know until right before the game that he was not going to be able to play. He went out. He just had something wrong with his knee. He was limping. But we didn't find out until right before the game.

So that's another thing for our guys to be able to overcome, that adversity because we've prepared all week with that lineup. And then, boom, right before the start of the game he can't play.

And Alex did a tremendous job. I mean, he led us in defensive rebounding and showed a tremendous poise. He didn't hit his shot, but -- and our guys were really good with him in the locker room, on the court. And he responded. He responded really well.

Q. Talk about a late tournament game, that familiarity against a conference opponent, and the intensity of that and how both teams really know each other. Talk --

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I don't know how much we know each other because we didn't play until the end of the year, and then we didn't have -- neither team had their full complement of players. So you really don't -- just like the question was asked by Tre, too, there -- and I'll call him Tre One, just so we get it straight -- can I be Tre Three? Holy crap, this is unbelievable. I didn't know Saturday would be like this. (Laughter).

We didn't know each other that well, because Justin adds a different dimension to their team, and certainly Zion. So all we knew is we were playing -- they have four kids who are in their fifth year. I mean they're old. And they're old together.

Buzz has done a great job of building his program. And those kids, year after year, have gotten better to where this year they're terrific. They're one of the top 10 teams in the country. And so that's the team we beat tonight. And we gotta have a quick turnaround now. This is a hell of a thing for our team. But quick turnaround to play a great Michigan State team.

Q. I'll ask you the same question that Zion got. What did you see in that last 1.1 seconds?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Yeah, I saw a miss. I saw a miss.

Q. How do you usually defend that?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Better. And the thing is there's a lot of pressure when you throw it up that high to complete it. Our guys play great defense to put us in a position where they have to make that play. In other words, we played two good defensive exchanges before that, with 29 seconds to go, then with 5.8 seconds to go and that. So you can elaborate on the last one. I'll elaborate on the three. And all three proved to be successful for us.

I forget, sometimes the old thing -- the operation was a success, but the patient died. And their play was a success but it didn't work. But the three in a row for us, that's a hell of a thing for our team. We got a bunch of young guys, man. And Alex hasn't played. It's a hell of a win for us. It's a great win. Our kids were terrific tonight. They were so damn good to coach. They rose to the occasion. And with that adversity. I'm so darned proud of them.

Q. The Zion alley-oop, people immediately were comparing it to Grant Hill's alley-oop as a freshman years ago, just in terms of the leaping and the ability and going up for a ball. Could you compare them at all?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: No, I'm not going to compare those things. You compare them. They both went in, right? That other one didn't go in.

Zion can do amazing things. He can actually jump higher than Grant. But on that play that Grant did with Bobby, he was, I think, the highest he's ever jumped. And when you're playing with a great point guard, sometimes they lead you and put you in a position where you extend and you pass the limit you already had, because they have such confidence in you. And

they have confidence in you. So that's a great play. But Zion and Tre have made plays like that during the year.

Q. First off, do you have any idea on Cam's future availability for the rest of the week?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: No.

Q. And secondly, I think maybe casual observers of the team look at how much talent you have and say how much adversity might they actually have gone through. It's been a lot for you this year. Can you, given your history and how long you've been doing this, put it in perspective particularly with four freshmen how much they've overcome?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Since midseason we've had injuries throughout. So we don't have continuity. Even this week, we had continuity, and all of a sudden Cam's not there. And, like, our starting five is very talented when we have Cam in there.

But we're a young, not a deep team. So we have kids that, all these kids are really good now. They're going to be really good, unbelievable later. But they're doing a great job while they're 18. And two of these guys are 18. Do you remember 18? It's hard for me to remember 18.

But so I'm proud of them. And they've never backed down -- they've never been afraid the whole year. And we played this amazing schedule. And the spotlight's on these kids from day one to now. So to have that on them and still respond the way they do, it's really terrific for these kids. And again they've been such a joy to coach.

Q. Going through the last two games the way you have as a coach, do you get a greater sense of appreciation now than you did 15, 20 years ago? And also do you look at it, like, as destiny, fate, when you have balls rolling off the rim and a shot like that, do you think maybe it's meant to be?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Well, I hope that's the case. But I don't really believe that. I believe that we just play hard and you stay resilient and play until the end. We've had balls roll off, too. We got eliminated from the Final Four last year with that.

So the game is a great game. And it has amazing endings. And the last two endings for us have been for us. But our guys hung in there until the very end in both of them. And I don't think you're going to have an ending that's favorable if you don't hang in there until the end. So I don't think -- it's exciting.

I'm so happy for them because this is my 44th year as a head coach, and it's probably -- I've probably

coached over 125 NCAA Tournament games. So to be in this with them and see their joy and their grit and their resilience, really good. Really good. I'm a lucky guy. Lucky guy.

Q. Talk about your comfort and willingness in switching 1 through 5. And is that something you picked up working with the professionals in USA Basketball?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: You bring up a good point. I picked up a lot of things working for 11 years with the U.S. team. But we really weren't -- we didn't switch automatically with necessity. And we tried to switch flat instead of stepping in so they wouldn't get as many angles.

And Robinson, especially, in this game -- again, it's his third game back, right? So in the first two back, he didn't use the ball screen as tight. And so we thought we could get over without stepping in.

And tonight he was back who he is, which is a great guard. But our guys have good foot movements. Our big guys did a good job. And then when we had to switch off, overall we did okay against Blackshear. He's 5-for-14. We tried to front him.

But they're difficult to defend, man. They're really a good team. Buzz is really an outstanding coach. And these kids are tough and good basketball players. We beat a really good basketball team tonight.

Q. I think a lot of people in the brackets came out, thought we were going to see a Duke-Michigan State matchup here. Just your early thoughts on facing them and Coach Izzo with a chance to go to the Final Four?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I've watched them a little bit during -- I've not -- Virginia Tech, I don't know if we could get past Virginia Tech. So totally on them.

Obviously I know Cassius Winston is maybe the best point guard in the country. He's MVP of the Big Ten. And Tom's program -- their program of great offensive rebounding, toughness, togetherness, you know, we'll try to put something together.

But we'll have to rebound against them. I know that. And how do you try to figure out how to guard Cassius? And Tom's done a great job with this team because they've had injuries. And he's one of the great coaches and a good friend. So it will be an honor to be in -- first of all, it's an honor to be in the Elite Eight. And it will be a heck of a game. Do we already know a time?

Q. 5:05.

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: See, I'm getting information.
Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.