

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

Sunday, March 31, 2019
Washington D.C.



Mike Krzyzewski RJ Barrett Zion Williamson Duke Blue Devils

Michigan State - 68, Duke - 67

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

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: All these Elite Eight games, I thought Winston was a difference-maker. And whenever we did get a three-, four-point lead or it was close, it was close all the time. But he made big plays, either scoring or assisting. He's the best guard we've played against. Ten assists and one turnover.

They played their hearts out all year. These guys have been an incredible group for me to coach, especially at this time in my career to be around a group that you love being around every day that have accomplished so much and really have been like have -- had to lead the whole year with the tension and the schedule and everything else, and they've handled things so beautifully.

And I feel bad for them. They're deserving of, like, special things and they have had a special year. But this not going to the Final Four is obviously a huge disappointment for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Zion, can you talk about Michigan State tonight? Did they do anything that you didn't suspect, please?

ZION WILLIAMSON: No, they did everything we expected them to do. Hat's off to them. They're a great team. They played a great game. And Winston, he took over. My hat's off to them. They're a great team.

Q. Can you sum up the emotions? You obviously had two very close calls. With the end coming so

suddenly, could you tell us what is going through your mind right now?

RJ BARRETT: They hit a big shot. And then we came down and we weren't able to score. And we got -- I had two free throws, missed one and that was about it.

ZION WILLIAMSON: A lot is obviously going through our mind right now. I'm very upset, obviously, because we wanted to go to the Final Four. But congrats to Michigan State. They deserve it. They played a hell of a game.

And just look around the locker room and see your teammates, your brothers. And you just think this group probably never will play together.

Q. Most people look at this as tomorrow being the first day of the rest of your lives. How do you look back on what the season has been for all of you guys as a group?

ZION WILLIAMSON: I'm not really looking back at the moment. I'm just -- we just lost the game obviously. So trying to get through that emotion first, obviously. And maybe in a few days I'll probably look back on it and think how great of a season we had.

Q. Could you describe that last seconds when Winston's kind of running away from you, what that felt like? It must have been a pretty helpless feeling?

RJ BARRETT: Just that it's over. Every day we came in, worked our butts off, and we really gave everything that we had all season long, and we had so much success. So to see that happen at the end.

All credit to them. They played a hell of a game. But for it to be over for us is heartbreaking.

Q. Zion, can you elaborate a little bit on the matchup against Xavier Tillman, what he did that was successful against you and how that battle played out on the court in your mind?

ZION WILLIAMSON: Obviously I don't focus on individual battles, but he played great, solid defense. And I think what they did was, I think when I catch it on the post they would bring or two or three defenders, so I wouldn't be able to do spin. And it was great defense obviously. He played great defense.

Q. RJ, could you walk me through the last sequence? It appeared that Henry was trying to foul you before you shot. They didn't call it. And then obviously you go to the line. Were you trying to miss the second free throw and missed that?

RJ BARRETT: We didn't have enough fouls. There wasn't enough time. So I tried to miss the second one and it's funny that it went in.

Q. RJ, they turned you guys over 17 times this evening. What was the most challenging part with the way that Michigan State defended you guys tonight?

RJ BARRETT: They were in the key. They ran at the ball and getting little tips and stuff like that. So they played great defense. It was tough that we weren't able to come out with the win.

Q. Coach, your pedigree speaks for itself as a championship coach. Looking at this Spartan team moving forward, do you believe this team has what it takes to go to Minneapolis and cut down the nets?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: They're going to Minneapolis so they're going to have a chance to cut down the nets. That's the very first step.

Look, Tom has a great program. And they have terrific teams each year. And they're always, just like us, they're always knocking on the championship door. And number of times we've played against one another -- and tonight I think they showed -- with Winston, you have a player that can make the right play at the right time and he has tremendous poise.

And Tre was playing crazy on him, how hard. And I was impressed just with how well he was able to not just handle the pressure but still run his team. Like, he had as good a performance as any player has had against us. And in going forward, with the system that they have, the defense they play, the rebounding and him they have a heck of a chance. They have a heck of a chance to win it all.

Q. Coach, the season has had a lot of injuries and you've seen a lot of different people step up and down the roster. This tournament you saw a lot from Javin, especially in the last game. What do you expect to see from him in the future, in his senior year?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I'd rather not talk about the future right now. Let's just, like Zion said, let's deal with the moment, and also give respect to the moment, the moment of their victory and the moment of our season ending. And I'd rather just deal with that.

Not to brush you off or anything. But it's tough to think

about next year when I'm thinking about how Javin feels right now after a double-double and playing so well, especially in the postseason. But thank you for asking about him.

Q. You mentioned Winston's ability to make the right play at the right time. Is that an experience thing as well as a talent thing? And were there moments in the game when experience showed up?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I think it is an experience thing along with talent. And he is as good a player as we've played against. I mean, he's a big-time player. And I thought they played older than we did, you know. But that's happened to us -- we are young.

So, especially in the first half, I thought we were -- we were not ourselves. And we wanted it too much. I spent most of the first half not Xing and Oing, but just settle down. And just be you. Be you. And I thought in the second half we were. But that's going to happen with young teams if the other team doesn't cooperate. And they didn't cooperate. Shame on them for not cooperating.

But he's really good. He's coached by a heck of a guy in Coach. And he's able to run what Tom is thinking in real time and feel the game and that's -- that really is one of the biggest gifts a player can give a coach. And he has that as well, probably as well as anyone in the country.

Q. You've obviously had great teams for a long time. This is going to be remembered as one of your more talented ones. Could you reflect a little bit on having this group, and they are young, but not being able to get to the Final Four and maybe fulfill what you could have?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: It's a good question. Like for us, we not only set high expectations, but you all set high expectations, which is fine. Like, if we don't win the whole thing. To me it's disappointing. It's not a disappointment year. Like, there's a big difference.

Like, this team put themselves in a position to go for it and had a chance for it. And so it's disappointing that they didn't get there. But I'm proud of them. And with the young group, you would want as much continuity as possible. And the whole second half of the year we were, with injuries, we were never able to establish that.

It started with Tre against Syracuse. And so that's something we battle -- although I will tell you this. I thought that adversity kind of helped make us tougher. So there was some good with that. But you would like the continuity of -- like, even though they've had

injuries, to have Cassius run them the whole year, you hear the same -- you're doing kind of the same thing.

But Tom's done a remarkable job with his group, with some of the injuries. And it was an honor -- I told them, it's an honor to play against you guys. And I'm happy for him. I'm not happy that we lost. But going forward he and his program are a deserving program. They do it the right way. They respect the game. And, so, it's an honor to be in this level of game with them.

Q. You've been in these one-bucket games for three games now. Apart from Winston --

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I've actually in been in them for, like, 44 years.

Q. Before that --

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Just don't make me a rookie on these close ones, all right?

Q. Of course not. Apart from Winston, I guess what else did you see down the stretch --

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: No, no, I can talk for a long time about their entire time. They have poise. They play defense. They're going to run good stuff. I thought our defense in the second half was a lot better.

But they don't beat themselves. And we had one critical possession after a timeout where we didn't really run what we were supposed to run. And we turned it over. And they didn't do that. They didn't do that. But that's what happens.

Q. When did you know that Cam would be ready to go today and how do you think he looked out on the court?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: He did a good job. In warm-ups. We felt -- he thought he would be ready to go. And then he warmed up hard. And we got him in the game in the first couple minutes. He did a good job. Again, he did a good job.

I want to thank Capital One, all the people here. First-class event. We've been treated fabulously.

In regards to my team, I want to thank everyone for the coverage you've given us. It's been a remarkable year for these young men. I'm not sure another group will have it -- a year with all of this.

And my guys were terrific in representing themselves and representing our program and representing our great university. So thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.