

NCAA Men's 1st and 2nd

Rounds: Greenville

Sunday, March 19, 2017

Greenville, South Carolina



Roy Williams

Kennedy Meeks

Joel Berry II

North Carolina Tar Heels

North Carolina - 72, Arkansas - 65

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by North Carolina.

COACH WILLIAMS: We feel very fortunate. I even told Mike that we were awfully lucky. I think we were. I thought the moon and the stars weren't aligned properly, the shot clock was winding down and they make a 3 over a good defense.

But inside the four-minute TV timeout, I think, it was 3:47 to play, I told our guys we hadn't won one like this all year long. That would be great for us. We've got to be tough. It's gotta be with our brain and our heart both. We've gotta get stops and we've got to get shots.

And Joel got fouled when it was 55-60 and made two free throws, cut it 55-62 and then we got a stop. And then we come down and C.B. McGrath, one of my assistants, had made a suggestion earlier, and I'd remembered what he said. So when we had a stoppage of play for something I told him, next time we run secondary -- run secondary break slip, and that's when Isaiah got the basket made it 65-64.

Then we get a stop down there and Isaiah gets fouled, and goes to the free-throw line with a 1-1 and makes two big free throws. And then we get another stop and we come down and I thought Joel got fouled. I'm sure Mike thought that Joel fouled. But he throws -- gets it up on the board and Kennedy tips it in, and that gave us 3 and then we got another stop, and I think Isaiah made a couple of free throws again to make it five.

We had some fouls to waste. The last play of the game, we were actually trying to foul when we came up with the steal when Justin got the layup there.

But two things enter my mind. One, what I just talked about, is how tough and how focused we were to go 12-0. And I don't mind saying, too, we were awfully lucky. But I thought we were very unlucky there in a stretch. But to go 12-0 -- and the other thing is the little

rascal over there.

I wasn't sure when I went to bed last night that he would play today. And the first thing I thought of when I woke up this morning was wondering how he felt. You can look at his stat sheet. It doesn't look great when you're 2-for-13, but he's a tough little nut out there today and helped us in every way possible. The ball didn't go in the basket for him. But I thought he was something.

And Kennedy with 11 rebounds, and I think -- that said in the locker room that gave him over a thousand rebounds for a career, can't say anything negative about anybody on my team. I love the way they competed and feels awfully nice right now. And I don't mind saying I feel a little lucky. Every now and then I knock in a long putt, too.

Q. Kennedy, would you ask Coach Williams --

COACH WILLIAMS: I'm doing this for a reason. Seriously. I've known you a hundred years, but think of this; they're sweaty and smelly. They need to get in there and shower. I'm not showering. I'll remember your question, too.

Q. Joel, you talked a lot about getting back to the championship game getting redemption. During a large stretch of that second half where it looked like you guys might not get out of here, what clicked in those last four minutes, especially defensively? What changed this game?

JOEL BERRY II: Well, you know when Coach is talking, I try to do my best to try to remember what he says. And I remember, if I'm not mistaken, we had our scout and our meeting room. He told us what we're going to do is we're going to get a stop and then we're going to go down and score, and get a stop and go down and score, and we're going to get a stop and go down and score.

That's what we did that last three minutes. We went 12-0 and that's exactly what he said. And I just told my teammates to believe, and believe that we were going to win the game. That's why I got it tattooed on the inside of my arm, that's what you gotta do is believe. Coach said the same thing. That's what we did the last four minutes.

Sometimes you need games like that. And that's what Coach said -- we haven't had a game like that in a while. Now we know that we can win a game when we're down five, with three minutes to go.

Q. Both of you guys, Daryl Macon obviously was big off the bench, 19 points, then he cramped up. What did you think of his play? When he had to leave there for several minutes how do you think that impacted Arkansas?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I think he did a great job getting his shot off. I know he drew a couple fouls from the 3-point line, and kind of got him going. And Coach mentioned he had scored like 10 points in three and a half minutes or something like that.

So he was definitely one of the guys we wanted to contain the best way we could. And when he got out of the game I think they kind of didn't have that 3-point threat, I guess, you could say. Because he does great creating the shot like that. So I think together for us as Carolina, we came together at the end of the game, and we really did a great job of getting stops.

JOEL BERRY II: Just picking up what he said, we just did a great job at the end of defending. He came back in. And I think we did a good job of containing him. One time he came off a ball screen and Kennedy got up, and just had a hand up. And he ended up shooting an air ball.

So I think towards the end we dug in and we knew that he was hot and that he was capable of hitting the 3. So we just tried to take away that. And the easiest thing is just deny him the ball, to not let him get it. And I think we did a good job of that.

Q. Either of you guys, the last 2:56, I think, it was you guys went on a 12-0 run. It appeared that happened at the same time that the Tar Heel fans in the crowd woke up. Did you feel any extra energy from the crowd in the last three minutes of the game?

JOEL BERRY II: Our crowd got into it, but it's because we changed our play, and they saw us digging in on the defensive end. They were just behind us. They've done a great job of supporting us this year. Even though we're in South Carolina, you know, they all came out. And I think once they saw us digging in on the defensive end and playing better, I mean, they got involved.

I mean, it's hard to get involved when the team's not playing well. So, like Coach said, we played better and they got involved and it helped us out and it pushed us through.

Q. Either of the players, Coach used the word fortune and lucky a few times. Do you guys feel fortunate and lucky to still be alive?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I definitely think we feel blessed because of how hard we worked. I think Coach pushes us every day in practice, especially on the defensive end to get better and better each time. And we have a drill. I mean, 86-80, we're down three points and you gotta find a way to -- yeah, three minutes and you're down six. What did I say?

COACH WILLIAMS: You said 86-80, down three. He's better in math than that. It's 86-80, we're down with three minutes to play.

KENNEDY MEEKS: So I think that's what definitely came into play today and we did a tremendous job of remembering the things that we do in practice to capitalize on those opportunities.

COACH WILLIAMS: The last seven possessions we scored six times. The last seven possessions they didn't score. So that's some toughness there, too. I'll still say I feel lucky. But you know what? Luck is -- what's that old saying -- preparation meets opportunity. And the guys stepped up and made some plays too.

THE MODERATOR: Do you have anything to add to that?

JOEL BERRY II: No ma'am.

Q. Joel, just a quick question here. The last few games have not been your best shooting performances of the season. Are you thinking about doing anything differently in preparation for the Sweet 16?

JOEL BERRY II: Definitely not. I mean, sometimes the ball doesn't go in. Sometimes it does. And I felt like I started out the game, I mean, I hit two 3s in the first half but it just wasn't falling for me. But way back early in the season when I had that bad game at Miami, you know, Coach told me, don't let the ball going in dictate how you're playing.

So I just tried to help my team out in different ways. I mean, I had assists. I was trying to dig in on the defensive end, and I just took that lesson and I just, I learned from it. And that's what I'm trying to do.

And it helped us today. I mean, it just wasn't falling for me, but I felt like for myself I helped my team out in a different way.

Q. The two players, your defense changed dramatically in the last four minutes. Is it the fact of looking at the scoreboard saying, hey, this

doesn't change our season any? How do you explain the defense going from what it was for large sections of that game to the way you played in the last three and a half minutes?

JOEL BERRY II: I think we just dictated what we wanted them to do instead of letting them attack us and doing what they want them to do. I think in those three minutes we forced them into bad shots. The shot clock got down late. And they just took bad shots.

And, I mean, we're capable of playing great defense like that. But sometimes we just take plays off. But this isn't the time to do that. But that last three or four minutes we did a good job of just digging in and just realizing, you know, winner stays and the loser goes home.

KENNEDY MEEKS: Do I have anything to add? No, ma'am, I do not. (Laughter).

COACH WILLIAMS: Isn't life great when you win?

Q. Kennedy and Joel, can you both describe whatever that was that, Joel, it was your shot, and then Kennedy's tip-in that was key there, late?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I think Joel showed a great deal of savvy for trying to get the ball to the goal, because he knew me and Isaiah would be on the offensive glass. I just so happened to be in the right position. And Coach always tells us, when the shot goes up to try to get in front of the defender and you have an easier rebound. So that's what I did. And the ball just fell in my hands.

JOEL BERRY II: Yeah, it was a horrible shot on my part, but I just tried my best to get it up on the backboard and just so happened Kennedy was there to make up for it, so I've got to thank him for that.

COACH WILLIAMS: Joel said he meant to pass it that way. They didn't give him the assist, though.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Roy, Theo was saying in the locker room that the team learned that it can win this type of game and hadn't been in a game like that where it needed to do that. What are those lessons that you learn from your team when you win a game like that?

COACH WILLIAMS: Well, I think it gives you confidence, first. I think it also teaches you to play every single possession. I told them don't look at the score, just play every possession. Let's get the best shot we can get. Let's get a stop on the defensive end and let's do it again.

And I did, I pushed a little bit. I was a little fired up

about being involved. You lose yourself in the game. There's so much time to play. And, again, I think it was 3:47, you guys may have a play-by-play, I think it was 3:47 on the clock when we had the timeout. But I think you gain so much from that because the more you focus, the more you concentrate, the harder you play, good things are going to happen to you.

And then, again, we got good shots except for that one possession. And we work on tips every other practice. We've done it 46 times this year because we've had 92 practices.

And Kennedy could have caught it with both hands. It would have made me feel a heck of a lot better if he hadn't just tipped it with his left hand but it went in.

Q. We hear a lot about Joel Berry and Justin Jackson and their leadership on this team. But Kennedy Meeks has come up big. Can you talk about his leadership and his role on this squad as a leader and senior?

COACH WILLIAMS: Kennedy does see the big picture. He's very, very bright. I was very upset with him at half because he had all kinds of shots around the basket and he was hurrying his shot like he was being intimidated, missing the easy ones around. So and I jumped him a little bit at that time.

But I thought he did do a better job and was much better defensively for us in the second half, particularly the last three or four minutes. But when you think about it having over a thousand rebounds in your career, he's been a big-time player for us for a long time.

Q. I was wondering what you thought of Macon's play. I guess he cramped up and had to leave for several minutes. Maybe how you think that impacted the game when he had to go out?

COACH WILLIAMS: The guys said it well. He was hurting us. He made ten points in three possessions. He made the 3 right in front of me. He got fouled because we didn't get him picked up. We had a mistake on the matchups. Then Kennedy fouled him and he made three. And then Kennedy didn't get up to him and he made three. So he scored ten points on three possessions.

So we talked at halftime, he had 12 points but we gave 10 of them on three possessions. We needed to get up to him, and you can't allow somebody to jump up and shoot it in your face. And you can't foul if a guy is shooting a 3-point shot.

I noticed he was out at that point. I didn't know he was cramping up or anything like that. But I think that --

early I think he made two or three baskets, the first four or five minutes of the second half, too. So late he didn't make much. And that was probably because of his legs.

And for us I can't worry about somebody else's problems, because I was worried about Joel Berry going 2-for-13 because he didn't have his legs under him either. But it was big for us that he got hurt.

Q. In the first half you shot 43 percent from the 3 and second 14.3 percent. What led to that change?

COACH WILLIAMS: Neither one of them are very good. 4-for-10 is not what we say -- if we could do that and make it 8-for-20, I'd take it. But you've got to credit Arkansas' defense. I think they were the dominating factor until the last four minutes of the game. To me I think their defense was stronger than their offense. They got us rushing shots.

We had a couple of wide open there. I thought Justin missed a wide-open one from the corner. Then they go down and make a 3 immediately. So we missed some but we made some too. As a matter of fact I was looking, it says that Nate Britt was 0-for-2. I thought he made a 3 from the far corner, but I guess it was a 2.

Q. The defense the last three and a half minutes, what did you see as kind of what changed your defense? Was it just because you guys finally realized the season was on the line?

COACH WILLIAMS: No we were more active. We did a better job of screen on the ball. The big guy was getting up there. We did a better job getting over the screen. Mike knows this better than I do because I don't coach his team. Maybe they got a little conservative and then when the shot clock's winding down, then all of a sudden the shots get to be more difficult.

And we did have -- I don't think anybody had a wide-open shot in the last four minutes. Every shot they took was challenged. I thought they went to the monitor to see if we had partially blocked that when it went out, but Kennedy said he didn't touch it and it went out. Okay. Guys, thank you.