

# Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

## Duke Blue Devils

Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

## Mike Krzyzewski

## Paolo Banchemo

## Mark Williams

## A.J. Griffin

### Postgame Press Conference

Duke - 80, Miami - 76

THE MODERATOR: We're joined but now by Duke head coach, Mike Krzyzewski. We're joined by Paolo Banchemo, Mark Williams, and A.J. Griffin.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: That was just a heck of a game.

It was a really good basketball game. Right after, when Jim and I shook hands on the court, we both smiled at one another. We've done this hundreds of times. A good number, a good -- this is a really good game. This is a game where both teams are worthy of winning. Kids are making really good plays. You didn't win because somebody made a mistake or you fumbled into something. Everything was earned tonight.

So I'm proud of my guys. My guys really played well. We started out -- and they almost knocked us out. The plan we had didn't work or wasn't working defensively, and we weren't aggressive in the plan we had, and that's on us, on the coaching staff, on me. Then we changed it and got back to playing our regular stuff, and we were able to tie the game.

A.J. really gave us a 12-point spurt there, and he's done that a number of times this season, and we were able to score right at the end of the half, and it was even although we could have been down even double digits if we kept going.

But we did right the ship, and then the second half was just



back and forth. We hit on a little thing we do and got some multiple looks and got a little bit of a margin.

I thought two of the key plays were the blocks when they had fast breaks. Our guys made magnificent plays on them, but we also turned them into a bucket. So there were two four-point turnarounds during that time, and they were flawless in free throws and execution. So my guys did a great job to beat Jim's guys, who did a great job.

**Q. Paolo, I'm just curious, how much did you put it on your own shoulders coming into this game to set the tone in terms of intensity?**

PAOLO BANCHERO: I don't really think -- I just know that, when I'm intense and up and talking, it just rubs off, and we all are. When we went down early, I just wanted to assert myself and be vocal and get everybody going. We responded great. A.J., like Coach said, scored 12 straight and basically put us in the game single-handedly, and Jeremy went full court at the end, and that gave us a lot of momentum.

Credit to Miami. They didn't fold at all. They had an answer every time, but yeah.

**Q. If I could ask A.J., do you think that Miami is a little bit underrated sometimes because, as you guys have played them, they've been really tough both times. They haven't been ranked at all all season.**

A.J. GRIFFIN: I think they are a tough team. We knew it was going to be a fight, and I give credit to them. We knew it was going to be a fight coming into the game. So, yeah, you could say they're underrated. They're a really talented team. They've got a lot of great players on that team, so yeah.

**Q. A.J., what does it mean for you and the team to get to the ACC final in Coach's final season?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I'm trying to get away from all that. It's really too much. It's their season. So it's all about them. It is. I don't want to be a distraction to them. This is their season, especially now. Especially now. They only



get it once. I've had it numerous times. It's all theirs, and I'm going to try to do my best to help them in their season.

I'm sorry. I just -- it will be both of our questions. It's good teamwork. Thank you.

**Q. A.J., Coach told us you weren't feeling great yesterday, may have eaten something funny. Could you just tell us how you were feeling yesterday. It seems like you're feeling better now. How are you?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: He wasn't feeling well today before the game.

**Q. Could you sort of walk us through that and when you may have started to feel like yourself a little bit more.**

A.J. GRIFFIN: Despite whatever circumstance, I'm just thinking about the game. No matter how my body's feeling, my teammates count on me to do my part. I just want to win. So I put it on the line for everyone. All glory to God too because being able to be -- contending in every single circumstance. Just knowing how much it means to my teammates too, I would not want to miss it and just think of what if or something.

**Q. A.J., even though I'm a Mt. Vernon guy, it really made my heart feel good to see a local guy have a performance like that, coming off the food sickness and not being yourself even today, as Coach said. How's it feel to have a game like that in your backyard?**

A.J. GRIFFIN: I mean, it's a lot of fun, you know. Pretty much doing it in New York, my hometown, just having family here, just doing it in front of them, seeing people who grew up watching me play, it feels great. Just having my teammates out there too just being able to inspire me and be there to pick me up too on the court. Having them be here for me, I appreciate it a lot.

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: And he didn't have his senior year at Stepinac and -- I mean, they have a great -- I know Mt. Vernon does too. They have a great tradition. So that's a heck of a thing for them.

**Q. Paolo, it seemed like you guys needed a spark there early in the first half, you guys were down by eight or so. You stepped up there for a bunch of possessions in a row. What was working for you, and what gave you that edge to just get going there?**

PAOLO BANCHERO: Just trying to establish myself early, just being aggressive. Really that's all it was. I wasn't really -- I was out there playing. Just playing basketball,

but doing it aggressively and with a lot of effort. So I mean, that's really all that was to it. I didn't really have a specific thing I was trying to do. I was trying to go out there and be aggressive and play hard and get the lead.

**Q. Mark, Paolo was asked after the game about who he wants tomorrow night, and he said UNC. You talked after the game last week about disappointment. Would playing them tomorrow night be sort of a big motivation after playing last weekend?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: I'm going to answer. We'll be honored to play either team. You don't pick teams right now. They're getting ready to go to battle right now. I think it would be disrespectful really -- I'm not saying you're disrespectful -- for us to answer that question.

**Q. Mark, this is two games in a row where you guys have made a lot of plays down the stretch, and that's been an issue sometimes this season. What does it mean to do it in back-to-back games like this?**

MARK WILLIAMS: I think it means a lot. I think plays like that show our growth as a team. Those moments where we didn't make those plays or didn't convert, but now later in the season, we're making those plays, making the right decisions or whatever it may be. I think it's just a testament to just our hard work and perseverance throughout the season.

**Q. Mark, Coach had said you guys didn't play very well defensively against Carolina, and then yesterday, early today was kind of a struggle. What flipped the switch for you guys? How did you play so much better the rest of the game to get that win?**

MARK WILLIAMS: I think just keep going at it. I think we never backed down. Obviously, they were making some tough shots throughout the game. Obviously, they're a good team. They're going to make plays. But I think just for us, keep playing, keep battling, and just doing that till the clock hits zero.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much, guys. We're going to dismiss the student-athletes and then take questions for Coach.

**Q. Coach, you guys played here in New York City in November. How has Paolo improved as a player, improved as a person from then till now?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: What's our record? We've played 33 games. So when we played the last time, it was his first game, and he played pretty well in that. I think one of the main things is integrating his talents with the talents of the

other guys and remembering that our -- we have young guys. So the talents that we had in November are different now. Every one of our players is a different player.

Paolo is a different player too. I think he's a stronger player, a tougher player. He's even -- as good a teammate as he was then, he's an amazing teammate. They all have meshed together well.

Paolo has gotten most of the attention during the year because of draft status and that, and really that's never been a problem. There's no jealousy because he's such a good guy and he's such a good teammate.

**Q. Congrats on the win today. You've gotten two great battles so far in this tournament from Syracuse and Miami. You've gotten a lot of good battles from the teams this season, but according to the metrics and according to the bracketologist, this is a very down year for the ACC. What would be your pitch or your argument to kind of reverse that narrative, that there are a lot of good teams in this league?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Any time you do it just numerically, you give weight, and that weight stays. Like it's all numbers, right? It really is. There's no eye test. Like Miami, look, Miami can beat anybody. Miami's going to be in the tournament with some seed. They can play. I mean, they can really play. They have five guys -- and what happens, teams improve, just like kids improve. Like a big thing for Miami is how Miller's playing. The last four or five games, he's been their leading scorer. What did he have, 17 and 13 tonight? And McGusty is a first-team all ACC. You have a center who doesn't play in the center who had seven assists and no turnovers.

They have a pro offense. They're going to be really difficult to defend. Carolina's playing lights out. Virginia Tech, what a turnaround they've had. I still think Wake Forest can beat anybody in our league. They're so big. We have a good league, but because we did not have a good nonconference, those numbers -- you can never change those numbers.

So the numbers playing against each other -- if you get good numbers -- I'm fairly good in math. I'm not good in English. If you get good numbers in your nonconference for conference teams, then playing each other gives you better numbers. Does that make sense? If you do not have good numbers and you play each other, even though those teams are really good, you don't get the good numbers? That's, to me, the fallacy in it. That's my experience in it.

Usually the ACC benefits from that because we usually

have a great -- so you can get nine, ten teams in because like wins, wins against four or five different teams produce good numbers for you. Are you tired of me talking about numbers? Really if you take a look at it that way, you have no way of changing that.

So we're going to only play our conference teams, just like the Big Ten will only play their conference teams. You got to do well in the nonconference, and we didn't do well in the nonconference, and we're paying a price for it. I just wish there was a little bit different way of looking at the whole thing.

**Q. Mike, you mentioned for a lot of these guys they have one shot at this.**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Yeah.

**Q. You used to not be that way. The progression of a kid's career was over 120 games, not over 35.**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Not these guys.

**Q. How has that changed? How did you adjust to that? What's different about it?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, it's hugely different because we have the benefit and the burden of our past. So when we start out, they're expected to be a veteran team, and so they get more -- they get a lot of praise, but they get a lot of criticism in their growth period.

Like John Scheyer, who's going to be the next really good coach for Duke, in his freshman year, we got beat by VCU. We got killed by Villanova his junior year in the NCAA Tournament. They were able to go through things so that, when they were in that year, they had already learned. These guys have to learn along the way while still carrying the banner, and so it's difficult.

Then this year, especially towards the end, it started being my farewell thing, which I don't want it. It comes about. It sells tickets, but I don't want it. I just want them to win because it's my only shot with them.

They're getting better. We have good kids, and they're getting better. I don't know what will happen tomorrow night or whatever, but we should be a real high seed. Then hopefully, especially from these two games -- and we'll learn from tomorrow's game no matter what -- this team really needs that, really needs that because they didn't have it. They didn't have it. But that's how we've tried to adjust.

**Q. Speaking of getting better, Jim said that the biggest**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**difference that he noticed between the first time you guys played and tonight was Jeremy's evolution and the way he's playing right now and A.J. becoming more integrated in the offense. Would you agree with that? I don't want to ask you again the gritty details of A.J. yesterday, but how did you see him respond over the course of 24 hours to be able to do what he did?**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, we're going to get better because they're good kids and they work hard. When we played them the last time too, it was five or six days after we had our stoppage. They weren't -- they were good, but they weren't as good as they are now because they were winning real close games. They're still winning close games because they have people who can do that.

A.J.'s evolution is amazing because he didn't play for two years, and then he got hurt in October and was out a couple weeks. Jeremy, I think, just keeps evolving. He's not that one-and-done guy. He may at some time be early, but I think his is more of a natural growth too.

I credit these guys because they really love one another. They like one another. You know by interviewing them and that. So they're never -- they're not envious of one another, so they have fertile soil to grow because they're never looking around like who's trying to do this or whatever.

A couple weeks ago, I said I wish they would be smarter. The last two games they've been very smart. They've been really smart.

**Q. Coach, what have you noticed in Mark's two years of his defensive development? I don't necessarily mean as a shot blocker, but more so as a big that can play 32 minutes against such a guard-heavy lineup.**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI: Well, because he's going to be a pro and he can do that, that's what those guys -- so lateral movement. His lateral movement has increased tremendously. That's on him and our medical -- our sport -- Nick Potter and Jose, our strength coach. He works all the time. And with Amile and Chris Carrawell -- lateral movement. He's gotten stronger. He's really gotten stronger.

I'm very proud of him. And today he was having a tough time early because we haven't played. Then he -- you can tell when your team's getting better when they can make in-game adjustments, not just Xs and Os, but with how you're playing. You're not playing real well now. Okay. What am I doing wrong? How can I improve? That maturity, he's really become a very mature and tough guy. He's a really good basketball player, and he's going to

keep getting better because he's going to keep getting stronger. He's a good athlete.

Anyway, it's lateral movement. His feet are wider. That's why he can stay in front, just keeping down. He did a good job. And he's rebounding. He's going outside of his area. He did that in the last game of last year when we beat Louisville, and it took him a while to get back to doing that, but he's there.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports