

2015 Basketball Championship

Second/Third Rounds - Charlotte, North Carolina

Sunday, March 22

Duke 68 - San Diego 49

San Diego State



2015 BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

DIVISION I MEN'S

SECOND/THIRD ROUNDS

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE, HOST



MODERATOR: We'll be starting with San Diego State.

COACH FISHER: I told our team that I'm disappointed that we couldn't have played better, that we didn't play better, but I'm immensely proud of what the program has become, single out our three fifth-year seniors. We got beat up tonight by a really good team. I thought when we fought back in the second half and cut it to 7, I think we had the ball twice with a chance, maybe, but they didn't let that happen. They're very good and they deserve a No. 1 seed and they played like one. We're better than we played tonight, they had a lot to do with it, but we've got a group of guys that compete, believe in one another. And when it ends, it ends so fast because you don't think it's going to end. But the end is here for us. But we represented San Diego State and ourselves in a fashion that a mom and a dad and the university president and the coach could be proud.

MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Skylar, can you just give us your impressions of Okafor, particularly in the first half when they were able to get the ball inside to him pretty effectively, sometimes on the break?

SKYLAR SPENCER: He's a good player. You know, he's real big and he gets into position. I tried to guard him without fouling him, but I'll take the blame on that one. I allowed a lot of points from him so I feel like I let my team down in that area.

Q. JJ, uncharacteristically we're not used to seeing you guys kind of not look comfortable, they were doing some things to you that most teams don't. What happened early in the game from your perspective?

J.J. O'BRIEN: I think they bothered us with their pressure. They did a good job denying our wings, getting us out of our sets a little bit. So their pressure bothered us early and I think we had some turnovers, some missed shots and they had some runouts and they got some easy buckets. Their pressure bothered us.

Q. Is that just a matter of them being extremely talented, that that happened, because again that doesn't usually happen with you guys?

J.J. O'BRIEN: Well, not a lot of teams pressure like

them, so it's a lot to do with their coaching, a lot to do with their players, but that's just their style. We haven't faced a style like that.

Q. Skylar, this question is for you: You're the only guy sitting up there that's coming back next year. I know it's pretty early to think about things like this, but how much does a game like this make you want to get going right away?

SKYLAR SPENCER: Yeah, it leaves a bad taste in your mouth. I want to get back, I wish the season started tomorrow. I'll think about this L, go back in the gym, work hard in the off season and hopefully we meet them again next year.

Q. AQ, you guys seemed real tentative early, very uncharacteristic of you guys, and then once you guys were behind, you seemed to relax a little bit. Just talk about that a little bit and how were you guys able to get back into it?

AQEEL QUINN: Their pressure bothered us a lot. That's all I can say, their pressure bothered us.

Q. For Skylar, you said Okafor was big and he got positioning, but can you describe what it's like to go up against him?

SKYLAR SPENCER: I played against big players before but I haven't played against anybody that big, with that skill set. It was kind of hard to fight with him and not get called for a foul, so I don't know, I guess I'll come back stronger next year or whatever, but I just tried to bang with him without getting called for a foul.

Q. For Dwayne, you guys obviously hit a bunch of 3s on Friday. What were they doing differently to take those away from you today?

DWAYNE POLEE II: They did a great job denying and pressuring the guards so that it was hard to make certain reads. That's a credit to their defense. And open ones we did get, we weren't able to knock down. All credit to their defense.

MODERATOR: Guys, thank you. Congratulations on a great year. Questions for Coach Fisher?

Q. Steve, I know about the pressure. That's just an extremely talented team and I wonder if that is basically the difference tonight, the depth of their

talent, that they can play defense like that and make shots, and you guys are, it's really 50/50 whether you're going to come out shooting or not?

COACH FISHER: What happened to us was created a lot by Duke, but it could not have been a worst scenario for us to get behind so big, so fast early. And we got rocked back on our heels and I think we became tentative a little bit when that happened rather than being smart-aggressive. But we had some pretty good looks that we didn't get to go down, but a lot of it's a credit to how they guard. They do a nice job of guarding, they don't let you get easy looks. But we got off to a rough start. And all that being said, at halftime I said we can win the game, let's get the first basket, let's win the first TV timeout segment. I think we cut two or three points off of it, 13-10, and all of a sudden Malik hit a couple baskets and we cut it to 7. I think we believed then that we had a chance, but to their credit, I think they went back-to-back-to-back on us and 7 became 13 or 14 again and they expanded on it. We're better than we played. Duke made us play that way to some degree, to a great degree, and when we had our open shots, the ones that went in yesterday didn't go in today for us. And we had some open shots, not as many but we had some open looks that we couldn't get to go in.

Q. Steve, I know it's not the easiest time to do this, but I just wondered if you could reflect back on what your guys accomplished this year and maybe what you see for this program going ahead from here.

COACH FISHER: I told them, you must be disappointed. Disappointment is there when you lose, especially when you lose your last game. But to your point, I said the same thing, reflect back with pride on what you've done to continue to elevate San Diego State basketball. And I singled out the three fifth-year seniors, and where we were when they came and how much improvement we've made. And then I said be determined, be determined the rest of you, that you're going to come back and do a little extra to get a little bit better, and knock on the door again. We will find a way to work our way into Sweet 16, through a Sweet 16 and you can be the group that does it. But they've done a wonderful job all year in representing San Diego State in terms of how they treat and deal with people, to how they go to class, to how they compete as a basketball player. So they've done a wonderful job representing themselves and our university and I'm proud of that. Disappointed that we're losing today, it's there for all of us.

Q. What were your impression of Winslow and Okafor, were they better than you even could tell on film?

COACH FISHER: They've been pretty good on the film

that I've watched. I knew they were good. They've he got a team full of very good players. Okafor is a load, he's hard to guard. I think we gave him two, three, four that were too easy, but he's good. He's very, very talented. And again, he's not the Lone Ranger. Winslow can play. They've got a terrific team and they played like a No. 1 seed today.

Q. Can you talk about how you guys have relied on your defense all year, one of the best in the country but they still were able to come out and shoot in the mid 50s from field goal percentage, and even high from a 3-point range. What were they were able to do that they were able to score almost at will all night?

COACH FISHER: They got it to the rim a little too easy on us with their guards, with their quickness to get by us and get to the rim. That hasn't happened the way it did tonight. We say guard your man, keep him in front of you, be responsible. And when they would get in the gaps, somebody would step over to help a little bit and then they did a great job of finding the 3-point shooters and all the while they're throwing in an Okafor every other time down the floor and he went to work on us. He went to work.

Q. Steve, I just wondered if you could address real quick the news of the illness kind of sweeping through your bunch?

COACH FISHER: Everybody knew that AQ got sick at shootaround on Thursday before we played on Friday. I don't know if it was a bug, they initially thought it might have been food poisoning, but it hit a lot of people from coaches to players to coaches' wives and that's not fun to deal with that, but that had no impact on how we competed, what we did, how we played. That had no bearing on it.

Q. You had a pretty great freshman class at Michigan, and this Duke freshman class is pretty good as well. Can you compare the two a little bit? I know it's a ways back, but can you talk of this Duke freshman class and how good they actually are?

COACH FISHER: They're very, very good. I don't like to compare anything, but they are a talented, well-coached group that compete hard and that's what you have to do, no matter whether you're a freshman or a senior, but they're very, very good.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

COACH FISHER: Thank you.

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COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Well, very first thing, just congratulations to San Diego State, Steve and his kids for a great season, 27 wins and a great program, great people. And they were a very worthy opponent today, a team that was really tough for us to score against and so we beat a really good team. Our guys played outstanding defense. Justise, his defensive rebounding especially in the first half was huge, and his play throughout was huge. And then Jah was, you know, his scoring inside to get that percentage of shots and makes against the San Diego State defense that is one of the best in the country was terrific. My guards handled the ball well and we're going to Houston. So that's a heck of a thing. I'm proud of my team.

MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Jahlil, you don't see a lot of guys as big and dominant physically as you that apparently spent so much time working on your moves and your fakes. Where did that come from? Did somebody influence you at a young age?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: I've been playing basketball my entire life so a lot of the things come natural, I'm just really comfortable playing in the post and I've always been bigger than everybody else my size, so at an earlier age I was always forced to be in the paint because I was taller than everybody else. That's just somewhere I'm very comfortable.

MODERATOR: Question is about the moves, his individual moves.

JAHILIL OKAFOR: Well, I have a trainer that I've been working with since 8th grade and he's been great for me, even when I stepped on the Duke campus, I worked on a lot of moves with Coach Capel and watching the film with coaches, they pointed out things that they'll think will work and it's been effective for me.

Q. For Jahlil, how much did the aggressiveness and the quickness of your guards have to do with putting their defense on their heels and creating openings for you?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: Say that again? I'm sorry.

Q. How much did the quickness of your guards have to do with putting their defense on their heels

and kind of creating some openings for you?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: Our guards, they were phenomenal tonight on both ends of the floor. They found me multiple times to give me easy opportunities to score and they were giving me all the confidence in the world, but I think their quickness did give San Diego State a problem.

Q. Jahlil, what did you learn from Friday night and how did that experience help you tonight?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: Just the game's never over. We had a huge lead with Robert Morris and they cut it down to 10 and we kind of felt the pressure of that game and we learnt that from this game and we never let up, the entire game we stayed together, we kept competing.

Q. Usually winning an ACC tournament leads to NCAA success. What did you guys do to recharge your batteries in the last week to come in here and play the two games like you played and moving forward?

JUSTISE WINSLOW: Really we just took some time off, let our bodies recovery physically. Just the whole week Coach did a great job of getting us mentally prepared. We didn't find out our opponent until Wednesday so throughout that week, there was a lot of focus on us and how we can get better as a team, and once we found our opponent, the coaches did a great job of letting us know the scouting and the game plan. We were just very prepared for both these games so that we could practice really helped us get better.

Q. Jahlil, at one point early in the first half or midway through the first half, you finished off a fast break with a dunk and you turned around and you punched your fists and you were clapping. Kind of emotional. What was going through your head then because you were maybe a little more emotional than I'm used to seeing?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: I had a lot of emotion going through me before the game. Me and my brothers, we really just wanted this game. There was no reason for it, I don't know why I did it, it was just all emotion and I was passionate about the game.

Q. Jahlil, what would it mean to you, you know, to get to the top of the mountain here. Obviously you have a ways to go, but what would that mean to

you to win a national title?

JAHILIL OKAFOR: It would mean the world to me. I've always wanted to win a national title. Me, Justise, Tyus, Grayson, the freshman who are coming in here, we had one big dream of winning the national title. That's what led me to come to Duke was the opportunity to win a national title. That's where all my focus has been the entire season and that's where it still is. We're putting everything on the line and that's our No. 1 goal.

JUSTISE WINSLOW: Like Jah said just as a kid, you grow up wanting to be in that moment and play on that big stage. It's been a long season, we had our ups and downs. For us to finish off in that fashion would be great but we've got a lot of work to be done.

MODERATOR: Thanks, guys. Good job. Questions for Coach?

Q. Mike, you reduced your rotation tonight, dramatically it seems, and at some point in the game you stopped calling set plays and went straight motion offense; is that right, did I see that correctly and why did you do that?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: That's pretty good. Keep going, I'll grade you. What was the first point you made?

Q. The rotation.

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Rotation. It was so good that I'm really pretty good. I don't go into the game thinking about a rotation. Part of it has to do with foul trouble, who they have, and our match-ups, and then conditioning. Jah, especially with these long timeouts, Jah this week is in much better shape than he was the last three and a half weeks of the season. I think he's pretty much over his injury, so he can play longer. If you hit on a group, I would have had Grayson in there a little bit longer but he got in foul trouble, it just kind of hit. In the second half, they're a very good defensive team and they're very tall, they have great length. They're tough to score against. They were prepared to stop some of our sets really well. And so we just said at a timeout, look, let's run motion, you guys attack, follow your instincts. If you can get it to Jah while you're running motion, get it to Jah but be players. And we do that at different times during the season but today it really worked out. It was almost like a good push for them because it translated on defense also. It just kind of worked out. But they're the ones who made -- they were making the plays and they made it happen.

Q. I was asking the players about usually the ACC tournament winners spring boards and certainly Notre Dame has, but how do you deal with not

winning it and still keeping the goals that you obviously have in mind?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I don't necessarily agree with that. I think we've won a national championship and we've won a tournament. I remember losing by 20 points in the championship game and winning. I think the main thing is for any team to put what they've just done behind them and try to get fresh. That's what we've tried to do. When we lost to Notre Dame, it's not like you go back and punish them. They've been too good. But learn from it, get fresh and then you're 0-0 again, that's what we tried to do.

Q. Mike, when Justise has the kind of all-around game that he had today, what does that do for the team especially on the defensive end?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: It just takes us to a whole other level. Those two kids played at a really high level this afternoon. And Justise, a lot, was on their best player, O'Brien, who I think a lot of people feel is the best player in that conference, in the Mountain West. And certainly that point forward, that guy, he's a really good player. Justise won that individual battle, not that he was bad but Justise was so good, and it gave our guys more confidence. Those two kids really played great games this afternoon, big-time games.

Q. Coach, you know what it takes to win a national championship. As you look at this team, do you see all the pieces coming together right now that tell you, you have a shot?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Yeah, you know, we have a shot because we can still play. You know, there will be 16 teams that will have a shot. A couple things, one, we're healthy, hopefully we stay healthy. We weren't healthy the last couple weeks of the regular season, completely. We have great attitudes. The guys aren't ready for this to be -- in other words, they're not mentally tired, they're not physically tired. They're together. We have talent, we're getting older by experience, and so we just -- like we got better here, these two games. Our defense was really good here. We shared the ball well again tonight, 16 and 9, really good. So we got better. If we can -- we've got to play Friday night. Hopefully we get better then and get a chance to play Sunday. It's a young group of kids that have really had a great season and they still want to get better. So you've got a chance, we've got a chance.

Q. When they cut it to 7, they came down and Tyus fed Quinn in the corner for 3, and you called an immediate timeout even though there was a TV timeout coming up the next dead ball. What did you tell them because y'all went on a 13 run after that?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I thought like we had lost

control of the game, they were in more control, the momentum of the game was theirs, and we had just seized it with that 3. And I wanted to make sure, I just wanted to be the point guard for the timeout and say, look, we need stops, we're going to go motion, let's change this right now. I've done that more this year with this group at different times, to call some timeouts when it's not in the book to call them or whatever, but just more by feel. I think they needed a blow, they needed a blow so they would be fresh defensively.

Q. Coach, you obviously have learned a lot about your freshmen throughout this season but did you learn something else about them this weekend in their first tournament action? And talk about that growth of them from beginning to now.

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Well, sure, thank you. This is their first time. And even for the upperclassmen, most of the questions for the upperclassmen was what you did last year. So there wasn't a lot of positive vibe about us being in the tournament, it was like can you get over this and then it's a new thing for you. That's just the way it is. I thought our guys had fun this week. We didn't pay attention to anything like that, we just played. And they're such a good, close group. They're really a close group. And they responded in both games when it got down to 10 against Robert Morris and it got down to 7 this afternoon, they responded to like their best play, which that's the thing you can't teach, you don't know if they're going to do it and they did, and so I'm proud of them for doing that. This tournament, I call it tournament pressure, and they handled it really well twice.

Q. Steve Fisher was talking about how you guys offensively were able to do things that teams haven't been able to do against them all year, like getting to the rim, finding an open 3, then pounding it down low to Okafor. Is this maybe the most versatile offense you've had in quite a while? Because it seems like you have got four guys, whether it's the wing players, the guards or down low that you're able to score almost at will against anybody at any time?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Well, it's a very complimentary group of guys because you have, I think, the best low post scorer in the country in Jah, we have good shooters and we have guys who can drive. And so that's why we've been one of the best offensive teams in the country because we have those components. But it starts with Jah because you get -- you don't just get penetration with a dribble, you get penetration with a pass and then you get results. And so you move the defense in and out, and Jah overall has done a really good job with the double team. So it's been a really good off -- I mean, one of the very good offensive teams I've had. We've been a good defensive team

most of the year and we just had a couple games where we weren't good, but overall we've been a very good defensive team and we were really good here for these two games.

Q. Coach, the other night with Jah with the dunk, do you think that was a learning lesson for him and how do you think that impacted how well he played today?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: I think all of them are learning lessons. He shouldn't have done that, and he knows it, he takes responsibility for it, and just like you should take responsibility for playing great tonight and why did that happen, why did that happen? Were you a little bit more mentally prepared tonight, did you show emotion, did you put more into it, and did you play through tired? I didn't think, like in that situation it was the end of a four-minute period, I thought he was tired and he did -- he made a mistake. Tonight, this afternoon, when he got tired, he played through it and made really good plays. And that's part of becoming a really good player is to be tired. A team needs to beat it and a player needs to beat it because all these kids get tired.

Q. What adjustments do you have to make heading into Houston against Utah and their 3-point shooting team?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: You know, I haven't watched anybody. I wish -- I'll handle Utah questions -- nothing against them, I just haven't watched them. I didn't know we would be going to Houston until about an hour ago and in between I haven't watched any of their tape or whatever. I'll be happy on our press conferences before the game to talk in detail about Utah, but I just know they're coached by a guy with an amazing background, I think in the history of the game, I don't know how many times two Polish coaches will go against one another, where both of us are called Coach K, but he's a good friend. I had him on my Sirius XM show about a month ago and, boy, was he -- he was really good, really good. And his background is amazing. I know they play with great character and they come from a great conference but I'll study them more and I'll be more apt to give a good answer as to how we'll defend them and attack them.

Q. Mike, have you been able to -- were you aware of how well the conference has played?

COACH KRZYZEWSKI: Yeah, yeah. Unbelievable. How about the triangle region, it's not bad. But the whole tournament has had incredible games, just incredible games. Our hearts and our thoughts and prayers go out to Mike and his family. For him to coach that game without anyone knowing that his mom had passed away. She was an Olympic -- she was, like Mike said, she was way ahead of her time. She just was like a great, great lady. For his team and for the

basketball gods to make that happen was so good. I'm so happy and I hope they're doing all right.

MODERATOR: Thank you.