

# NCAA Men's Regional Semifinals and Finals: Chicago

Sunday, March 27, 2016

Chicago, Illinois



## Jim Boeheim

## Trevor Cooney

## Michael Gbinije

Syracuse

Syracuse - 68, Virginia - 62

JIM BOEHEIM: I think we came out at halftime. We wanted to try to keep it within 12 or so, and with about 10 minutes try to go with full-court pressure. The full-court press helped, and we got a steal or two, and then Tyler Lydon made a couple good plays on the back of it stop them in a two-on-one situation, and we finally got our offense. We wanted to go to the basket. We finally were able to get to the basket, and I thought Malachi and Trevor made a couple great drives there.

Then Tyler Lydon got a really good look at a three, and once we got the lead, we just wanted to play good defense. We got a couple stops down there.

It was a great comeback, one of the best I've coached in, any team I've had, in terms of you're playing, I think, a great team. Virginia has beaten us 15 points three straight times, and they were 15 points up today. They're a hard team to come back against, and these guys just made some unbelievable plays. They deserved to win this game.

**Q. Michael and Jim, when you put the press on them and they start to speed up, they start to look for two on ones, what do you see happening to them, and are they out of their comfort zone, being that they typically are so deliberate?**

JIM BOEHEIM: No, I don't think so. I think they got what they want. They beat the press and they had two on ones, and I think one time Tyler made a great play, and then he came over Gill and Gill had to walk. It was just a couple plays down there, but they're certainly capable of playing at that speed when they get in the open court. But we wouldn't want to press them the whole game because in reality, they missed some plays that they would normally make, and if we press the whole game, they might miss a couple, but then they would start making lay-ups and also get us in foul trouble, and we can't press for that long with six guys.

No, I think that we were able to get just a couple plays,

but the real key was we started to score. It really was more our offense finally got going, and Malachi had a couple monster threes, and then the two freshmen made three threes in the second half, and I thought that was really -- we hadn't made anything. First half we were 1 for 9 from the three, and a lot of that's their defense. We changed at halftime and stopped doing ball screens. We just started driving to the basket, simple, but it worked a little bit better.

MICHAEL GBINIJÉ: Yeah, I think Coach did a great job explaining. The press definitely gave us life. I think it turned the game around, and we did a great job of just hustling and competing during the press.

**Q. Jim, you put the press on with about 10-minutes to go, but did you talk to any of the team at halftime about it was going to come?**

JIM BOEHEIM: Yeah, we said we're going to wait. We're going to wait five or six possessions and try to get it to where it's 10 or 12. I think it was 14. It was more than we wanted it to be when we started pressing. But we got a couple quick stops and quick turnovers and got right back in it. But we had prepared them that we're going to press because we weren't going to cut a 15-point lead against Virginia down by playing half-court. The best we could hope for is lose the game by seven, six or seven, if we play well, if we play well.

So we knew we would have to do it, and those are the games where they're good against -- they know what they're doing. They attacked it, and if they hit a couple on those right away, it would have been a 20-point game. But you have to take your chance. It doesn't matter whether you lose by 7 or 20; it's still you are going home.

**Q. Jim, given the last eight years for you, the last two years for you, does this feel any different than any others?**

JIM BOEHEIM: You know, it's great to go to the Final Four. It's great for this team because I only look at the basketball side. I mean, I thought we deserved to be in the tournament, but certainly I didn't -- I wasn't planning on getting to the Final Four. We tell the players, it's one game. You play one game, and if you can just win one game, you get another chance. They've done that.

We played good basketball until the first half tonight. We played really good basketball in this. The first half, we made just two mistakes, and it was my -- one of them was all my fault. We were running too many ball screens and we weren't getting to the basket, and the second thing is we didn't guard Perrantes. We had a freshman in there and he's doing some good things, but he didn't get out and guard him, and he's the one guy -- we wanted to stop Brogdon, and then when Brogdon started to miss a couple, we wanted to stop Perrantes, and we just didn't do that in the first half. He got too open, and we had to correct that, and because we were so far down, we knew we were going to have to press at some point.

But any time you can go to the Final Four, for these guys, I think it's great. I'm so happy for them.

At Syracuse, this is about the players. I've be in this 40 years. I'm 71 years old. This is for them. I feel good when we win for them and for our fans. We have great fans and for these guys. I've seen enough things. I'm happy for them.

**Q. Trevor, can you kind of touch on your thoughts on the one game at a time? When you get the bracket and you see this is the road we have to go on, how difficult or easy is it to compartmentalize each round and not let the Final Four get in your head right away?**

TREVOR COONEY: I mean, it's easy to look at the bracket and look down the road, but I mean, you have to take it one game at a time. Dayton was a really good team, and then we were matched up, and that's what you've got to do. You've got to take it one game at a time, one possession at a time, and we did that, and we did that today, too, and it paid off for us.

**Q. Trevor, you were a part of the team that made the Final Four. Mike, you were sitting out your transfer year. What's it mean for both you guys to have the opportunity to go back to the Final Four?**

TREVOR COONEY: It means a lot. I mean, a lot of things have to come into place to get to the Final Four, and I think we learned a lot. I think Mike and I learned a lot that year, and just how a team has to come together. I think now that we're leaders of this team, I think we're kind of teaching the young guys, and it's working for us.

MICHAEL GBINIJE: Yeah, it's just a great experience sitting out that redshirt year. I really wanted to be a part of that, and now I'm fortunate to actually be a part of it, and it just feels great.

**Q. Jim and Mike, have you ever seen a player hit a**

**three-pointer with one shoe on like Tyler did in the first half?**

JIM BOEHEIM: He's about the only guy that would even take it, but the ref was funny; he said, I think he's a little better with his shoe off.

But no, I've never seen that. I saw Mike take his shoe off once, but we won't talk about that.

MICHAEL GBINIJE: Yeah, I have a bad history with my shoes coming off of NCAA Tournament games, but Lydon is the opposite of me, and you still have to keep your shoes on, though.

JIM BOEHEIM: I think Tyler, his defensive play tonight was huge. His five blocks -- he had I think six the other night. What has he had, six twice in this tournament and five tonight? That's pretty good for a skinny guy that can't play center, or so everybody said.

**Q. Coach, how did this group react to the outside noise of the bubble or any of that?**

JIM BOEHEIM: Well, you can ask them, but I don't think they did. I think they just kept playing. I think Mike did a great job in the games I was out. They had a very tough schedule. They lost the same games, if I was coaching, probably. But the first couple games they were not quite in my estimation watching them play. They kind of didn't adjust quickly, and then they did, they played great at Miami, Pittsburgh, Clemson. They played great in those games.

But to go 0 and 4 to start in the ACC, I'm not sure of the history how many teams have done that and come -- I don't think anybody has ever gone to the Final Four that started 0-4 in the league, any league. I just think they deserve a lot of credit, and they should speak to what they felt about the whole year.

TREVOR COONEY: I mean, this has been a very interesting year. I mean, we've obviously been through a lot, and this team has just stayed together. I think we learned a lot about each other throughout the whole entire year, and all those things are paying off now. We're sticking together, believing in each other, and good things happen when you do that.

MICHAEL GBINIJE: Yeah, I think as a team collectively, we've been great teammates to one another, through all the highs and lows. I think it's finally starting to pay off. We've got great chemistry on and off the court, and I think that's what it's all about.

JIM BOEHEIM: I think you have to give credit to these two seniors. They're the guys -- and even in a game like tonight when Mike wasn't shooting well, he kept making plays. He kept getting in the lane and making plays for people and making great defensive plays on

the other end. We had 11 steals against Virginia, and only one of those really was full-court press. The rest were just steals in a half-court defense, and Trevor had four, not quite as good as the other night when he had two and a half or two, goes three, in a minute, but those are tremendous plays. But the two seniors, we have young -- two freshmen, and we have a junior who hasn't played in three years. These two guys have just been there every game. When they don't shoot well, they do something else. They play defense, make a steal.

I just think they deserve a tremendous amount of credit because they've gotten these guys through this. It would have been very easy for that not to happen, not to happen.

**Q. Jim, you called it one of the greatest comebacks if not the greatest comeback. Is it because of the stakes --**

JIM BOEHEIM: Yeah.

**Q. Or is it because of the way the game just flipped?**

JIM BOEHEIM: I think it's a little of both. Obviously the stage, but I think it's also because you're playing Virginia, who's completely dominated us three times. I mean, let's face it; we actually played them best this year at their place. The other two times we played them, they dominated us. We really played great against them. We didn't play that well tonight. Like we played great -- I watched the tape this week of how we played -- we played great down there. We did. And they played great. They shot 56 percent at home to beat us. So I had a little hope based on that.

But when we couldn't get anything going offensively tonight, it was not a good scenario. There was not much positive.

But the thing you have to do in basketball, and I want these guys to do it, where you're at isn't important; it's where you get to. You can be in a great situation or you can be in an awful situation, and you can still get -- you can still overcome that awful situation. It didn't look like we would be able to tonight, but these guys just -- they made hard plays. It's hard to press Virginia. It's really hard. It's hard to press Gonzaga, and they did that, and they willed this game. They made plays that were -- that you would think from a basketball perspective could not be made, and they made them. They deserve all the credit in the world.

**Q. You coached obviously Syracuse the year that the Big East sent three teams to the Final Four. Does this conference, the ACC, is it even stronger? I know it's a different time, but --**

JIM BOEHEIM: Well, you know they want me to say that, but you know, I can't say that. I was in that league 30 years. If I'm in this league 30 years, then I may say that. But no, I mean, that -- this is a great league. There's no question about it. I knew when we came in this league, I said, we're leaving a great league, and we're going to get into a great league.

This year, and last year really, it's been a great league. I mean, the facts are the facts. I mean, it's there. Most of the time, you're comparing, well, they had a great year in their conference, they had a great year in their conference, and you really can't compare. You can't really say, well, we're better than them because you're not playing them every day. When you get in the tournament, you do have a measuring stick as to which leagues are the best. I mean, there is -- you can argue it a little bit, but in the long run, I mean, one team may get a little easier way, but another team might have a harder way to go.

The fact that we got six teams in and we got four teams to today, and we'll get two teams to Houston, I mean, we have a great league. I think in my opinion that the league will get better in the future. I really do. I think there's programs that are on the upswing, and I think obviously the top teams, they're not going anywhere. They're going to be good. I think the league will get better in time.

**Q. Mike and Trevor, what do you attribute how you guys have stuck together for the last two years because it's a pretty easy thing to say, and I imagine it's a much harder thing to do.**

MICHAEL GBINIJE: Yeah, just being part of a team that you enjoy everybody's company, it just makes it a fun environment to like go to practice. We had stretches through the season where we couldn't buy a win, and through that whole session, no one was really getting on each other. Everybody was positive, and just as a teammate, when you have especially me and Trevor doing things like that, it spreads on everybody, and I think we did a great job of just staying positive, and now everybody is happy and rolling.

TREVOR COONEY: Yeah, everyone is just feeding off of that. I mean, Mike and I, I think we're good leaders and I think we lead by example, and these guys are easy. It's easy to be a leader with these guys, talented guys, and also good guys. We all hang out. We're all fun.

JIM BOEHEIM: I think when a team can lose 13 times and they keep going, that's different than if you lose four or five and you keep going. You lose 13 times, you know, it's -- it's not that -- you've got to have great leaders on the team to keep going, you know. And even looking back in the beginning when we lost the

games -- I blew a game against Wisconsin that we should have won, and then we lose to St. John's and Georgetown and start out the league the way we started, I think it's very hard for a team to get it back together and get through that. These guys did it. I think that's something you have to really admire.

It wasn't that we all of a sudden started playing that much better. We played about the same all year, except for those two games. The St. John's and Georgetown games, we didn't play well. But other than that, in all of our losses, we were there. I mean, we had a reasonable chance to win all those games, and I think that gave us the idea that we could get going.

I think the Dayton game really -- Dayton is a good team, and to dominate that game really, I think, gave us a little more belief, and then the same thing with the next game. Once you get by that, every game is going to be a tough game like this. I mean, you're not going to have -- it's going to come down to a play or two here or there. They made them the other day, and then they made them again today.

**Q. Malachi obviously scoring 17 in the final 10 minutes, what was said to him at halftime and how impressed were you with how he responded?**

JIM BOEHEIM: Well, he's averaging probably 16 in the second half this year, not really, but he's done that a lot of times. And I think it's because I really don't start coaching him until -- when it's late, late second half, I start to give him a little coaching.

No, he's been that way. He's been a second-half player. First half I took him out because he passed up a shot. He messed around with the ball, and then he steps out of bounds. He was out of it. I think he was 1 for 6 or something at halftime. He needs to be aggressive. He needs to look for his shot. He can make big shots. He's made them all year.

And then the big difference was he got to the basket. He got to the basket, and that was the thing that got him going and I think got us going. You know, the two freshmen were big in the second half tonight.

**Q. Jim, you just said that it's tough for a team to get it back together when you've lost 13, but doing that, does that then make you guys stronger now that you've already gone through the toughest, that nothing fazes you?**

JIM BOEHEIM: Well, I mean, I think we're a tough group. I think -- I just think it's -- I think my point is it's surprising to me that you can get through that, all that, and still be able to play at this level. That's, I think, a huge credit to these guys. I really do. I don't know how they feel about it. That's kind of the way I look at

it.

**Q. Mike, when you are 0 and 4 in the conference, what can you learn from that that helps you when you're down 15 with nine and a half minutes to go?**

MICHAEL GBINIJE: Win or loss, you can always learn from a game. I think when we were 0 and 4, we just could have competed harder, we could have been smarter offensively and defensively, and you learn. We pressed in some of those games, and we didn't have the turnaround like we did tonight. You just get a feel for the game, and the more you keep trying, the better you get at it.