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NO. 1 VIRGINIA 51, NO. 5 PITT 48

Virginia Coach Tony Bennett
Joe Harris
Akil Mitchell

COACH BENNETT: Obviously, hard fought game. It was physical. We went through a bad a long scoring drought at the end until I think Joe hit that nice layup on the wrap. But we knew that coming in, it would be like that from that first game with them. It was trying to stand and last and fight. Three games in a row. Hopefully our depth and having that bye was significant in that game.

MODERATOR: First question, front row.

Q. Tony, Anthony has not always been automatic at the line, but given the way he's been playing in this tournament, were you confident when he went up for the one on one?

COACH BENNETT: When he made both, you're saying, yeah. Because the last game, he was 5 of what was the last game? Didn't he make them all at the line? Or 5 of 6, yeah. And we've been shooting a ton of them. He had his rhythm and we had a little there's 0.5, and should he make it or miss. I told him to miss it and then I caught myself and said, "Just make it." Either way it worked out. Those were big free throws for sure.

Q. Akil, on the late layup by Patterson, looked like you had contact with him. Were you surprised you didn't hear a whistle?

AKIL MITCHELL: A little bit. I wanted to contest it as best as I could. I definitely didn't want to foul. But, you know, they let it go.

Q. Hi, Tony. You've talked about your team taking advantage of opportunities. Talk about the opportunity you have in front of you tomorrow.

COACH BENNETT: Well, it's certainly a great opportunity. You know, to advance into the championship game and, you know, this is what it's about. We're fortunate to win an ACC regular season championship. I don't know if we call it that in this league, but we won that and this is a huge opportunity. Such a prestigious event.

To play for that, again, preparation for the NCAA Tournament, all those things are huge. It's been a while. There's only one, right? You can ask our writers that we've won, and I get reminded of that quite a bit. So it's a chance to add a second one to it.

Q. Tony, you had given the two fouls on Pitt's last possession. Did you consider fouling again since you were up three and then what about Justin's defense to block the shot?

COACH BENNETT: Made a big block. No, we didn't. Did you watch the Maryland game? So it's just the studies have been done on that. I just felt comfortable making him hit a tough, contested shot. That's kind of what we try to build our defense on.

It doesn't mean I wouldn't ever consider doing it. I felt with them not having any time outs and not being set, they'd have to shoot or make a tough shot.

You saw Justin unfold on that shot and that was obviously a great play. We made some big defensive plays where they got in the lane on us defensively. Whether it was blocks or just big plays that we had to come up with, you need to do that. You need to make plays on offense. You need to make plays defensively when it's one of those kinds of games.

Q. For the players, seemed like each of the blocks that you and your teammates had seemed to kill Pitt's momentum. Did it feel that way on the floor?

AKIL MITCHELL: I felt like every possession we wanted to try to gather momentum. Whether if it was a turnover or just solid defense. That was our mindset the whole game. So, you know, the blocks just help. But I guess

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we tried to stay in position the whole game.

MODERATOR: Joe?

JOE HARRIS: Oh, yeah, just go off what Akil said. I don't know. I guess those plays really do help. The blocks are a huge momentum boost. The fans get into it and they seem to give you a surge there a little bit. From that perspective, the blocks do help from momentum.

COACH BENNETT: Joe doesn't block a lot of shots so he doesn't know how to answer that question.

Q. Coach talked about Justin's key block at the end. What was going through your mind? Given how well you've played defense throughout the year and today, how confident were you on the last possession you could make a stop?

JOE HARRIS: I would say I was very confident in our ability to get a stop there at the end. We pride ourselves in getting stops and being a defensive minded team. When the last possession comes down to getting a stop, I would say that man for man on our team, we would feel confident we would be able to do that.

Q. For Joe and Akil, just watching Justin's block, how much do you guys and your team, your fan base feed off his energy and his emotion while you guys are out there?

AKIL MITCHELL: It's definitely necessary to have a guy like that just because he gives us so much energy and if anybody's dead or anybody is kind of flat footed. He gets us going. Gets on our nerves every once in a while, but it's definitely necessary.

Q. Tony, what went into the decision for your dad to come to the tournament? We know he's not famous for attending your games.

COACH BENNETT: Well, first he said, "If you win your first game, I'll come to the second game in the tournament." I said, "Okay. Are you going to watch the first game?" He said, "Yeah." I called him after the Florida State game. I said, "Did you watch?" He said, "No." I said, "Okay, are you coming then because we won?" He said, "No." He said, "If you make it to the championship, I'll come." I said, "Fine." But he said, "I'm coming to the NCAA Tournament."

He showed up at 9:00 this morning and I laughed because he delivered a message. He said, "This is going to be" he called it a "blue collar knuckle buster." That was his term. We talked about it before the game.

It truly was in terms of how physical. It was a blue collar game. The "blue collar knuckle buster" is what he said. I'm glad he was there. Obviously, he's had a huge influence on me. He has a good relationship with the guys, especially Joe and Akil, who came in. I'm glad he got to see it. I don't know if he'll be here tomorrow or not. This is 50/50.

Q. Coach, you mentioned earlier that in your time at UVA, you're going to be asked about 1976 enough times over 60 years with that being the ACC title for the Cavaliers. Have you become like an unofficial authority on Wally Walker and those guys, given all of those mentions to you over the years?

COACH BENNETT: Yeah, it's been a while so it's good we're having this conversation right now. Obviously, what they did was special. Because of how special the ACC tournament is. But it would be great to obviously put another banner or have that to share with them.

He said actually, I got a text before we came. He said, "We want some company." Wally sent me a text. "We want some company, being that only group."

Q. For Joe, the basket you scored at the end when you made the cut that Coach Bennett was talking about, would you walk us through that play? What did you read on that? What did you see shaping up?

JOE HARRIS: It's our sides motion. I got a flair screen. I think it was was it from you?

AKIL MITCHELL: It wasn't from me.

JOE HARRIS: Anthony set the screen up with the high post and I wrapped it. That's just, traditionally, that's



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what you do, wrap it to the block and then if it's open if it's not open, you come back off on the rescreen, and I happened to be open coming off of the flair. And London made a great pass and I was quick to get it to the glass.

Q. For the players, is it fun to play a blue collar knuckle buster? Is there a joy in that? And, Coach, is it hard to attract players to want to play that?

AKIL MITCHELL: I think it's fun. I love it. We're winning. It's fun to impose your will and get after it, especially against a team like Pitt that's so tough. In four years, we've been bred to enjoy those games and really enjoy playing the knuckle busting style of defense. I enjoy it and I know the rest of my guys do too.

COACH BENNETT: Yeah, I mean, just you're not going to break Pitt down quick and, hopefully, you're not going to break us down.

So our last game was like this and it's just hard to get a good look. It's our best way to be successful. We're having a chance to play for a championship and that's significant. And that's the beauty of college basketball. There are so many ways to do it.

I think this team has versatility, but we have things we hang our hat on. The soundness and the toughness and getting good shots. We do it collectively. The right guys want to play that way and it's fun to win.

Q. Joe and Akil, talk about the journey that you've had starting out at UVA, rebuilding the program and the synergy you've developed on the court and how it's all sort of come together here this weekend.

AKIL MITCHELL: You can answer that one.

JOE HARRIS: Well, I would say that when we first came in and Coach Bennett's first recruiting class at Virginia, he said, "We might have to learn to lose together before we win together. It won't be easy but we'll go through tough times." He believed in us and believed we could have an opportunity to change this thing around. That's the reason why Akil and I and our class decided we wanted to come here.

Our first year it was tough. We experienced some bumps along the way. Over time we gradually have just gotten used to what Coach wants out of us, his philosophy, mindset. It's been ingrained in us.

As Akil was saying earlier, a knuckle buster type game and how we enjoy it, that's genuine. That's the way we think. We're a defensive minded team and that's how we believe we'll win games and that's what we've come to believe over time. I think that's why we've had success and why we've gained success over the last couple years.

Q. Tony, I think there was a point in the second half when the team was shooting better than 50 percent from the floor. Then you had the six minute stretch without any points. Why did the offense bog down? Did Pitt's defense just pick up?

COACH BENNETT: They did. I think we got fatigued and we got stagnant. It came down to us trying to make some plays, and we just got a few good looks in that, but pretty stagnant and I probably could have maybe given them some better sets to get them moving a little more.

There were some tired guys out there, and I didn't think we ran our offense as hard, or when we had a set, we kind of got thwarted by Pitt's "D". They got physical. It was obvious, they weren't going to give you anything easy and everybody knew it was kind of hanging on a possession. Our guys knew that in our timeouts.

We were saying one more stop, everything you got, leave it on the floor. They were doing the same thing. When the defense has that mindset, it's hard to score. I think we were very stagnant in that stretch. That maybe hurt us a little bit.

Q. Tony, have you had a conversation with Terry Holland since you've been down here?

COACH BENNETT: Been here, no. But he's been great, like, throughout the year. He came, talked to our team. I mentioned that before. He and Coach Carlisle did and then came to our shootaround before we played Duke. Sends an encouraging text or email. He's been wonderful and, obviously, he's such a legend as a coach and what he did for Virginia basketball.

So hopefully, we can try to get this done tomorrow and make those guys proud.

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Pitt Coach Jamie Dixon
Lamar Patterson

COACH DIXON: We'll get started here. Obviously, congratulations, Virginia. We're extremely disappointed. We thought we had our chances to win the game and thought our guys played well. Did a lot of great things. Obviously came down to a lot of plays at the end of the game and they were able to pull away. But obviously, one possession game could have gone either way.

I'm proud of how our guys played. We got better this week. We're healthy and playing our best basketball. I told our guys we have to continue to improve this week and be ready for next week.

Q. Jamie, did you see on the last layup you guys had, looked like there was clearly

COACH DIXON: We just saw it on video. What can you do? What can you do? Just watched it. Everybody saw it.

Q. Coach, about 15, 20 seconds left, Robinson had a great steal, very good defensive possession. Back to a one point game. Talk us through the play and kind of what the mindset was and how good that was for momentum in getting it back to a one point game.

COACH DIXON: That was the play he just asked about. Obviously, I can't comment about anything else besides that. I mean, great. We just watched it on the video. Great steal by James. Played great defense in front of him. All ball, take it away, go the other way.

Can't state the obvious.

Q. Lamar, after scoring over 80 points the last two games and this one today, what is it about Virginia's defense that makes it so tough, not just on you but other teams, to keep them in the 50s?

LAMAR PATTERSON: They're a solid team. They don't make very many mistakes, and they just stick together and they're real solid. They sat into the paint and they're a good team. That's why they won the conference.

We expected that coming in, so we were ready for it.

Q. Coach, every coach has at least a goal of having his team playing its best going to the NCAA Tournament. Can you say that even in defeat about your guys right now?

COACH DIXON: I think so. We didn't shoot well. I think our offense wasn't exactly what we needed to do, but we battled. We did some good things. When it got down to the end, we got better defensively and got stops.

It didn't go our way. We had three offensive fouls. We only had eight turnovers, and three were offensive fouls. As far as taking care of the ball, that's pretty good against a good defensive team. That's remarkable, actually, when you think about it.

So again, eight turnovers, three were offensive calls. I think we can improve on our shot selection. That's something we've got to battle and our defense can improve too. Every team can improve too at this point. We improved this past week. That's the encouraging thing.

We're healthy and we're playing our best basketball. We lost to a good team in a one point, one possession game that obviously could have gone either way. So I was proud of how our guys responded. But we're going to get better this week too.

Q. Jamie, Tony Bennett called this a blue collar knuckle buster, some kind of thing like that. The number of fouls being a lot different than yesterday aside, what did you think about how tough and physical the teams played today?

COACH DIXON: I thought it was two good teams, defensive teams. As I said, this conference, there's been so many close games and I think we should not at all be surprised. Obviously, Virginia won the conference, but we felt

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that we were in here to win the game. So we were confident in ourselves and our ability and we just came up short. But I think we learned a lot from it.

Q. Coach, Talib Zanna has really stepped up in the past two games, especially today offensively. Can you talk about how he kept you in it offensively, especially in the first half?

COACH DIXON: They were double teaming him. That's what they do. We were used to that. I thought he played well out of it. We wanted to get the ball into him and make plays out of the double team. We did to a certain degree. I wish we could have done it more. But it's something that he made some great drives. That one layup that somehow came out, I don't know how it came out. That was a big play for us. But a great move by him.

Just he's done a tremendous job on the glass, obviously. He's healthy now, you know. That helps. I watched the film of us against Virginia last year when he turned his ankle and was really ineffective. Two points, three rebounds.

MODERATOR: Any other questions? Thank you.

COACH DIXON: Thank you.

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