

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 23, 2016

Roy Williams Kennedy Meeks

Joel Berry

North Carolina Tar Heels

North Carolina - 71, Wisconsin - 56

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Williams and Joel Berry and Kennedy Meeks. We'll start with an opening statement.

COACH WILLIAMS: We're very happy to win Maui Invitational. It's a tournament that I love. I always tell them I don't leave the island until they let me sign a contract to come back in four years. And they really like to get rid of me so they let me sign a contract before I get out of here.

I do. It's my favorite tournament. It's my favorite place I go. I told everybody tomorrow, if they fire me tomorrow I can't get back here in 24 hours, but I will be back in 48. I do love the place.

Early in the game it was both teams trying really, really hard and nobody could put the ball in the basket.

For us, Joel was our offense the first six or eight minutes, the only offense we had.

Then we sort of got into a rhythm a little bit better. I've always said I like to win games in the 80s or 90s but to be a really good team you've got to be able to win in the 50s and 60s.

And I think we did get settled down. We shot the ball much better in the second half. Justin Jackson finally made a 3. It was about frustrating to death.

But I thought two players tonight were just off the charts. And they're the two guys up here with me. I thought Joel Berry was just sensational. He didn't play well last Friday over in Honolulu, and that's the only game this year he hasn't played super. But I thought tonight he was maybe better than anytime I've seen him, doing everything.

He was trying to do a great job on Bronson, which is really hard. He shot the ball and he drove the ball to the basket. He kept us going.



And I also thought Kennedy Meeks to me may have played the best ballgame since he's been at North Carolina, and I've been really tough on Kennedy. It has been well deserved, but I have been really, really tough on him. I was really proud of the way he played tonight. On the defensive end, some of the steals that he came up with, the way he bothered people inside. I just thought he was good.

And you have to give credit to everybody. We had four guys in double figures, but these two guys up here with me were really good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Joel, Coach kind of mentioned the game at Hawaii a few days ago. Can you just speak to what clicked for you since that time or what maybe turned around for you?

JOEL BERRY: I think, honestly, just being more involved in the game. Over in Honolulu, I didn't even feel like myself on the defensive end. And usually that's what gets me going.

And so I tried to do a great job on Bronson tonight. That was my key. I wasn't worried about anything else but playing defense on him and trying to stop him because he was their best player.

And if we stop him, you know the points couldn't come from him. So I tried my best on that. And once I get myself going on the defensive end, I just feel like everything in my game clicks. So that's what I did this whole tournament and it helped me out a lot.

Q. For both of you, I know the point of emphasis yesterday was matching Oklahoma State's toughness and tenacity. What did Coach emphasize with you guys going into this one today?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I think the thing was him preaching that it's a grown man's game. I think we took that seriously. I think we definitely went back to our hotel rooms with the right mindset. We prepared ourselves. We did an exceptional job of coming together, rallying together when we really need to.

That was at the first, the beginning of the first half and the beginning of the second half, we were really -- we

really took a stand that we were going to win that game. I think we did a great job defensively.

JOEL BERRY: Yeah, I think we've done a great job the last two games of coming out and just being -- attacking the other team instead of being attacked.

We did a great job of that against Oklahoma State. And I think it was a little slow in the first half for us, but I think we came out with a good mindset in the second half that continued to stay on top, continued to get it on the defensive end. And I think they were coming in averaging a lot of offensive rebounds, and I think we limited them to four of them tonight.

So I think that helped us out a lot.

Q. Kennedy, you started off pretty strong. I think you had four points and four rebounds before the first media timeout and played good defense as well. How key is that kind of start for you confidence wise?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I don't know any player that doesn't want to start out that way. I think I was engaged the entire time. I think I was locked from the beginning of the game. I was locked at the hotel room, pregame meal, knowing my guy and knowing the personnel and those players.

I think the main thing for me was focusing and letting the game come to me instead of forcing shots. And I know I missed a couple of them that were easy, but I finally gathered myself together and took my time.

Q. Kennedy, along those same lines, you had 12 of the team's 23 rebounds in the first half. Does the rebound game kind of get you going?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I think so. Like Coach said, that changes possessions, and I think when we get more possessions, the tournaments -- who wins the game most of the time. I think that's the most important part of the game, I think, when we do a great job rebounding. But like he said, when he plays full court defense that gets him going. When I get a lot of rebounds that gets me going. I'm going to try to get to the boards as much as I can as often as I can.

Q. Things aren't going to get easier for you guys. You have two tough opponents coming up with Indiana and Kentucky. What does a win like this do for you guys going into those matchups?

JOEL BERRY: I think it gives us a lot of confidence going in, especially the way we got after it on the defensive end. Indiana and Kentucky have some pretty good guys that can score on the ball. So I think if we continue to get better on the defensive end and just stick with that, I think we'll be really good the next two

games and later down the road. But just going in we're going to have a lot of confidence, and I think that's something good for us.

COACH WILLIAMS: Is that our next two games? Yeah. It's not the next two games.

KENNEDY MEEKS: Well, I think that we definitely have to have a great couple of practices coming up, leading up to Indiana, as you said it's a hostile environment. They're a great team, have a great coach. So do we. I don't see why we can't go in there and really try hard on the defensive end and come out with a win.

But I think we have to have a great couple of days of practice.

Q. Joel, you mentioned the importance of slowing down Bronson. What did you try to do with him to limit his good looks?

JOEL BERRY: I just tried to, when he gave the ball up, I tried to deny him so he wouldn't get it back. And that makes it easier on me. He gets the ball, I don't have to sit down and guard him.

So I just try to do my best to try to deny him the ball, and then when he did get it, I just tried to stay in front, get over the top of the screens. And when he tried to pull up, I just tried to contest it as best as I could. And I think that kind of bothered him a little bit.

But I just like to get after it. And I knew that he was a good player for them. And I just tried to do my best. I mean, he only had two points. I think I did my job.

COACH WILLIAMS: And also the big guys really did a nice job of screening the ball on top and flattening it out so he couldn't turn the corner, and Joel was going over every screen and got there. And the big guys really helped.

And Bronson is a heck of a player, and tonight he didn't have as good a night as he normally has, probably not Joel either. It's basketball. Joel didn't have a great night last Friday night. But I think our guys defensively really did a nice job.

Q. Joel, you had a strong ACC Tournament and now an MVP performance here on Maui. Do you think you have a knack for playing day after day in a tournament setting?

JOEL BERRY: I don't think so. I'm just trying to do whatever I can to help this team win. That's honestly the one thing that I love doing is just winning. And I mean if I would have got MVP and we would have lost, I probably wouldn't have been happy at all.

But, like I said, I'm just getting lost in the game. I'm trying to do whatever it takes to help this team, and if this, getting the MVP of tournaments, I mean that's all good, but at the end of the day I just want to win and get better as a team.

Q. Both of you, do you guys anticipate starting the season this well, so crisply, and playing so well? And is it farfetched to suggest that you guys may be even better than you were last year?

KENNEDY MEEKS: I really honestly and truly don't think we're focused on that. We lost two great players, three great players including Joel. So I think this team is definitely more focused coming off a loss in the national championship game. I think our minds together, coming together, and practice every day is trying to get better and not get through practice, just trying to get better for the entire -- however long we practice.

And I think that Joel, Justin, me and Nate do a great job of leading everybody, trying to get everybody rallied up, from playing defense, from my rebounding, from Justin scoring, whatever it may be, I think we all have something to give for the team.

JOEL BERRY: Just going off what he said, I think that since we have such a veteran team that went on that run last year, I think we all know what it takes to be able to get back to that spot. And so that's one thing, we have a chip on our shoulder and we're going to continue to get better as a team as the year goes on.

We're playing good right now, but I think we still can get better.

COACH WILLIAMS: We need to get Theo back also so I can get him out of my dadgum way on the bench [laughter].

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Can you talk about your team's rebounding?

COACH WILLIAMS: You know, in the preseason exhibition game, we were terrible boxing out. And guys have shot pretty bad percentages against us. So there's a lot of opportunities to get offensive rebounds. But that's been a focus of ours since the first day of practice, even before the exhibition game, and after the exhibition game it's continued to be a focus.

And they're getting better at it. There's no question. I thought early in the Oklahoma State game they were a little more aggressive and had more intensity than we did. After we settled down I thought we had it good there as well.

But no, I felt like the rebounding, if I had to pick one

thing I'd say rebounding is the most important part of the game, with the quality of my shot has to be better than the quality of your shot. Of course, that's pretty simple to understand, but we do focus on rebounding quite a bit.

Q. What's the main thing you think you learned about your team that you didn't know before during the past three days?

COACH WILLIAMS: How you play three days in a row without a lot of preparation specific to that team. Believe in your defensive principles, not having to know what they're running on offense. But we work on our defensive principles all the time. So I think they have more belief in that.

I think they now have more belief how important the backboards are. We talked about its emphasis all year last year, all season. Now it's the name on the front of the jersey, and I think the kids have bought into that willing to make sacrifices. When Justin Jackson made that, I guess, the only 3 he made tonight, everybody on our team was as happy as they could possibly be for him and our team.

But I think playing in these kind of games helps us. Playing Oklahoma State last night which was full court and, as I said, hand-to-hand combat, fast tempo, a lot of guys going in and out. It was much different tonight than a grind-it-out game. So for two nights in a row we've shown we can play two different styles.

But, again, I'm going to enjoy this one until we get back in the main land. And then we understand what our next game is. I really did not know if that was our next two games but I didn't think it was back to back. But I know Indiana is our next game. The last time we went and played at Bloomington they beat us by 4,000 points. So I remember that.

So I'm going to enjoy this one until we get back to the mainland.

Q. The last time you guys won this -- the last two times you guys won this tournament, you went on to win the NCAA title. Does this team have that kind of potential?

COACH WILLIAMS: It remains to be seen. There's probably, pick a number, 15 to 20 teams that have the potential to do it. You've got to stay healthy. You've got to get lucky and you've got to improve. If this is the best basketball that we play the entire season, then, no, we're not good enough. But I feel we can improve. I was aware we won it in '04, and '05 seasons, we were the national champions. I was aware we won it in '08 -- '08-'09 we were the national champions. I'm corny as all get out -- we talk about getting better and better

every single day.

Q. You lost obviously two great players. James was an important part of last year, too. How do you explain the success so quickly despite --

COACH WILLIAMS: Let's not jump on the dadgum victory celebration yet. We played a team last night and a team tonight that I think would be ranked in the top 50 to 75. We haven't played murderer's row yet. Talk to me after we play Indiana at Indiana and Kentucky and Monmouth and all those people. But I'm not going to go out and make my reservations for the Final Four. I don't even know where the hell it is. I thought everything was in Phoenix. Isn't that where the Super Bowl is, too? I'm serious. I'm not jumping on any boat trying to figure out how great we are. We can stink it up with the rest of them. We've just got to get better every day. I've never seen a national championship won the day before Thanksgiving. It's usually won that first Monday night in April.