

March 13, 2011



Championship Final – Game 11
Richmond – 67
Dayton – 54

An Interview With:

**RICHMOND
COACH CHRIS MOONEY
KEVIN ANDERSON
JUSTIN HARPER**

COACH MOONEY: Thank you very much. Well, we're, of course, thrilled with winning the Championship. I thought we really we played extremely well defensively, and they say defense wins Championship. And of course today and in this tournament for us, that turned out to be true.

Aside from how well we shot in the first half from the 3-point range, really our key was our defense. And you know, I couldn't be more proud of our players and our program and, you know, to win a conference championship of this conference's magnitude is really, really special. And my players deserve all the accolades and just all the accolades they get. So we're extremely happy.

Q. Justin, what distinguished Richmond's defense this weekend compared to the regular season?

JUSTIN HARPER: I would probably have to say just our heart and determination. You know, all of us, you know, from the coaches staff all the way down to the managers and all the players, we knew what was at stake and we knew what we wanted to accomplish coming here to Atlantic City, and it was really evident in our hard work and how we played each and every night.

Q. Kevin, to get this far and now punch your ticket in, and that was an automatic bid

and then get named the outstanding player, how nice is this for you to go out like this?

KEVIN ANDERSON: Very fortunate for the team, very fortunate for our seniors to go out as champions in this tough conference. I just think we all the came together at the right moment or defense was spectacular this whole tournament, our energy was spectacular this whole tournament. And it just all came together at the right moment, from the coaches to our managers, like Justin said, to the players. We were all just one collective will out there and it came together at the right moment for us.

Q. Guys, can you talk about your experience coming down the net, what you were feeling at that moment?

JUSTIN HARPER: Just an unbelievable feeling. When you get to the top of that ladder and just see everybody up there cheering for you out in the audience, all your family and friends and everybody who's been with you the whole way, it is an unbelievable feeling. I'm at a loss for words.

KEVIN ANDERSON: Yeah. I didn't know how to celebrate. All I needed to do was just to smile. I was so happy, at a loss for words, didn't know how to celebrate. I seen my mom and my stepdad in the stands and just made me feel proud just to know that they're there. Same with all the other fans. They wish the best for all the players. They're traveling all the way from Richmond here. That's commitment, and that means a lot to us on the court and the coaches. It just means a lot, man. And to know that they love us, it means a lot to us.

Q. Last year, you were here, you lost in the Championship game but you made the tournament now. You're going back to the tournament with the automatic bid. I'd like to ask Kevin and Justin, you have senior leadership on this team, you're playing well. How much of a run can you guys make now in the NCAA?

KEVIN ANDERSON: As long as we keep it together, keep the energy up, keep the defense the way it was tonight, the way it was this whole tournament, stay together as a team and then work hard, don't take a break, we're at the top right now, the champions, but we've done something but we haven't done enough. Whether or not we're satisfied with this, I mean, we want more, really. So we got to continue to work hard and do what we did to be deemed champion today.

JUSTIN HARPER: We know what we're capable of and we're just proud to have accomplished this. And at this point in time, we can kind of bask in it until we realize what our match-up is in the tournament and just getting prepared for that mentally and physically, and we're all just going to work hard and get ready to play.

Q. You guys had the big early lead, 15 points, and then Dayton cuts it to five early in the second half. What was your thought process then? What did you guys accomplish to kind of get it back on track?

KEVIN ANDERSON: We just wanted it to calm down. Basketball is a game of runs. Each team is going to make a run, especially a talented team like Dayton. Temple made a run on us the previous game and Rhode Island made a run on us the previously game, so we've been in situations like this before.

We just wanted to calm down, and I thought we did a good job of doing that. Stay together, calm down, go over the next play, think about the next play, trying to get the next stop, keeping grinding it out because it's going to be a grind out there. Dayton is so physical, so I mean, that run was going to come. But we stayed together. We did a good job weathering the storm.

Q. For either player, did you guys after last year feel like you had unfinished business here? I mean, was the championship the end-all?

JUSTIN HARPER: Yeah, definitely. And you know, just having all these same guys who played together in the Championship last year returning and playing in the championship this year, it means that much more for us to come out here and leave it all on the court because we've been here before, we know what it takes, and we know we can do even more than that, and that's what happened tonight.

Q. Kevin, you've played at least 38 minutes past three games, and they have been tough physical minutes. How much would you have preferred to get the Friday game for another day of rest?

KEVIN ANDERSON: That would be great, but I wouldn't mind a Thursday game. I mean, this is -- this is the best time of the season right here. We're just champions right now. We're emotionally on the high right now. The tournament, it's the best thing. If you're a competitor, man, and you love basketball like I do, like the team does, you're ready to play whenever. So I'm ready to play right now. I could go again right now. If the tournament started in 20 minutes, I can go again. So I'm ready to play.

Q. Chris, I just kind of wondered what you thought defensively what you needed to do against Dayton, what was the challenges that they posed?

COACH MOONEY: Well, we thought that Dayton is extremely potent in transition and on the offensive backboard. Those two areas they excel where it's very difficult to stop them if they're out and running and that much more difficult if they're controlling the offensive backboard. And we thought if we could control those, if we could do a solid job on those two areas, that our half-court defense could step up and defend them. And I thought we were good.

They had a couple of runs where they were moving the ball up the court fast, but for the most part, I thought we played good transition defense and outstanding half-court defense. I thought that was really the key.

Q. Coach, congratulations. You touched upon it a little bit in that last answer, but can you share your feelings about the rebounding effort that you guys gave this week? Out rebounded Temple yesterday and then another excellent team with an athletic front court today.

COACH MOONEY: Yeah, that was -- that's something that is normally not a tremendous strength of ours. But where we did it -- we've done it well in different games, but this tournament was probably the most consistent we've ever rebounded.

And part of it is when Darrius (Garrett) is in the game, we go from being a fairly average

rebounding team to above-average to good rebounding team and a good defensive team to a great defensive team. I think it was something that we're very much focused on. We want to improve.

About two years ago we looked at our stats from the season and it was very, very good, good percentages across the board, very high assists, low turnovers. And we thought if we could get to the point where we shot more foul shots than our opponent and were even or a bit better on rebounding, it would really, really good.

And we have shot more foul shots and our rebounding numbers, we're inching closer to even. So when we do that, I think we're tough to beat.

Q. Coach, it seems like Dayton cut the lead to 5 or 6 numerous times, but your squad would just come right back and put it to 10, to 12. Can you just talk a little bit about the resiliency of your ball club and how important that is moving forward in the NCAA tournament.

COACH MOONEY: Yes. You know, it starts out this year with Kevin and having so many seniors on the floor, guys who have been there before not being rattled, you know. The expression on their faces don't change. Certainly there's an urgency to what we're trying to do in those situations, but there's no panic.

And I think for us, you know, scoring doesn't come easily to us, but it comes more easily than it does to some teams. And so it's not something that we're always worried about. And I think our guys know that and know that we have the ability to be a very good offensive team, so we don't get too down.

Q. Coach, to go in as a conference champion, how is that different from an at-large? I mean, it's sort of a silly question, I realize, but for a program, how has that changed for you guys?

COACH MOONEY: I think really it means we go in having won our last game. And, you know, we're going in, we feel like we're playing well, we feel like we're playing great defensively.

But it really means that we've won our last game and beat three very good A-10 teams to be champions. I don't know if it changed our mindset as much as the match-up is going to impact us, whoever we play. But I think as far as how we feel about our team and ourselves right now, it's very, very positive.

Q. Chris, with 30 seconds to go you took Kevin out of the game and you had this big hug. What did you say to him? It seemed that during the game, every big shot you needed, he made. Can you talk about both things?

COACH MOONEY: Sure. Well, as far as him winning every big shot we need, that's a little bit of a broken record in Richmond. He's hit so many big shots for us and has made so many big plays for us during the course of his career. I could not overstate how much he has meant to our program.

And as far as such a special moment, not only -- you know, it's hard to win championships and to have enough of a lead where you can take him out of the game. We got him 30 seconds of rest there, so he appreciates that.

And I just told him how much he has meant to me personally and our program and how proud I am of him and everything that he's been able to accomplish.

Q. Coach, what does it mean for you to see Dan Geriot be able to cut down the net? He battled back from the injury. He started you guys off with the 3-pointer today to get you started and chipped in, as he does, with the rebounds and assists. What was that like in comparison to even the other seniors?

COACH MOONEY: You guys are trying to get me to cry up here. I can feel it.

It was great. Dan came in -- Dan's a fifth-year senior and came in -- in his freshman year we won eight games. When we were recruiting Dan, he had committed to us the previous year, and we lost to Saint Joe's by about 150.

And he was at the game, and, you know, we talked briefly about how important it was for him to be ready to go when we got there.

And he went through that eight-win season, which is difficult. We were very, very young, and it was -- there were a lot of challenges. Every night we were playing a team that was stronger, better, more talented. And then for us to take that, you know, and Dan has essentially been here since from the beginning, and to improve as much as we have and get to the point where he's cutting down the net as a major contributor and a leader is just great.

It just -- not only has he done all of that on

the floor, but he's overcome injuries and surgeries to put himself in the position to be a great player on a championship team.

Q. Coach, back to Kevin, there's a lot of great guards in the country. Where do you think he ranks. I mean, we've watched him two years now in Atlantic City. He's been phenomenal. I just think he's got to be in the top quarter.

COACH MOONEY: Yeah, I would say so. He's one of the best and certainly one of the most valuable players in the country.

I don't get to watch as many guys and evaluate them, but I wouldn't take anybody over him. I can tell you that. And he has a tremendous knack to make big plays without forcing the issue. I don't know that I've ever seen it from a player before.

But he has just an incredible ability to make the big play. And when you look back over his career, you have to try to make those big plays, but he has rarely or never made just a horrendous play. And so it's just this ability without forcing anything to make a big play. It's amazing.

Q. Brackets are going to be released soon. Do you have any idea of where you may be?

COACH MOONEY: No, I don't. I know we won't be in Dayton. I don't. And I don't even know the cities, to be honest with. You my sister is from Charlotte. She said that's one of the sites, so that would be nice. But I don't really know the cities.

You know, when you're living and dying with this bracket talk, I think that's one of the most impressive things our team has done. We've been on this bubble here for about a month.

And, you know, because it's studied so closely, you end up picking apart all of these teams who are in the middle of these great seasons and you're not celebrating these teams for having 22, 23, 24 wins, and they're just picking apart the losses that you have in the different parts of the media. And it's impossible to escape at this point with the internet and with all the television.

So I think that's impressive for our guys, how well we've played in the face of that. I don't think we've had too many moments of panic or feeling overwhelmed at all that we're up against all that. So I'm really proud that they've handled themselves in that manner that well.