



## DiVincenzo lifts 'Nova to second national title in three years

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By Eugene Rapay

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SAN ANTONIO--There's just something about Villanova Sixth Men playing in National Championship Games.

**Harold Jensen** stepped into the spotlight with his near-perfect performance to help the Wildcats topple in the favored Georgetown Hoyas in 1985. 31 years later, **Phil Booth** scored a team-high 20 points against North Carolina, leading the Wildcats as a player that came off the bench. On Monday night, it was all about Villanova's unofficial "sixth starter," **Donte DiVincenzo**.

"They're talented basketball players that are willing to be a part of a team and wait until they're needed to be the go-to guys every night," Villanova head coach **Jay Wright** said of these sixth men.

DiVincenzo provided more than just serving as a sparkplug off the bench, that provides energy and valuable minutes, he was the Wildcats' lifeline in their 79-62 title game victory over the Wolverines. Thanks to the 6-foot-5 guard's effort, the Wildcats captured their second national championship in three years.

The sixth man provided a valuable boost off the bench, dominating the game whenever he took the floor. DiVincenzo, who was inactive for the 2016 National Championship run due to a medical redshirt that stemmed from a fractured foot earlier that year, quickly made up for lost time.

"You just want to compete," said DiVincenzo, reflecting back on having to sit out. "You just want to go out there and you want to play as hard as you possibly can. And when you get the chance to, you don't want to back away from that."

Once he was healed of his injury, in 2016, DiVincenzo was a leading member on the scout team, often tasked with simulating an opposing team's best player.

Two years later, he was no longer playing pretend.

"In practice, you could see he was one of the best players and he wasn't on the team--or he wasn't able to play," Wright said. "He knew it too. We were all thrilled for him to be in this game tonight, just to be in it. To play like he did, it was off the charts."

When no other Wildcat seemed to be able to get it going after a record-breaking shooting performance in the previous game against Kansas, DiVincenzo provided the big shots and timely baskets. The redshirt sophomore, who was named the Final Four Most Outstanding Player, had 18 of his 31 points in the first half. DiVincenzo seemed to hit the big shots Villanova needed early, whenever the 'Cats were trailing or needed a basket to break a dry spell against a stingy Michigan defense.

The Wolverines took an early 21-14 lead on 'Nova, who was flustered at the sight of Michigan's hard-nosed defense. The Wolverines were able to disrupt the Wildcats' offensive schemes, never allowing them to get those open looks that just seemed to come so easily against Kansas. Their agile-footed defenders quickly closed on shooters spotting up at the three-point line, and active hands broke up the flow of almost every dribble drive to the basket.

The Wildcats inched back into the game and claimed a 23-21 lead after DiVincenzo nailed a 3-pointer to put them ahead, with 6:08 remaining. Although Michigan would answer back with a layup to tie, the Wildcats would finish the half on a 13-5 run that lasted the final 5:47, taking a 37-28 lead at the break.

Outside of DiVincenzo, Villanova was just 7-of-21 (33.3 percent) overall and an ugly 1-of-10 from long range over the first 20 minutes. The Delaware native was the sparkplug 'Nova needed to stay alive and claim the lead.

After a layup by Michigan's **Moritz Wagner** to start off the second half of play, the Wildcats used a 7-0 run to push their lead into double figures, quickly making it a 44-30 game less than two minutes into the second half. The spark prompted Michigan head coach John Beilein to call time out, but unfortunately for the Wolverines, they wouldn't have an answer for the Wildcats or DiVincenzo--who continued tormenting them down the stretch.

"I did not think that I was going to have this kind of night, because every night I come into a game, I just try to bring energy," DiVincenzo said. "And we start off, we get off to a good start, I try to take the energy to a new level."

The lead became too great for the Wolverines to overcome, as the Wildcats maintained their edge on their foes.

The Wolverines were paced by **Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman**, who paced Michigan with 23 points. Wagner added 16 points and seven rebounds.

As for the Wildcats, they received a sizeable contribution from Mikal Bridges, who finished with 19 points and four rebounds. **Jalen Brunson**, who was the focal point of Michigan's defensive effort, was held to just nine points off 4-of-15 shooting. **Eric Paschall** chipped in six points and eight rebounds.

Aside from DiVincenzo's recognition as the Final Four Most Outstanding Player, Villanova's Bridges, Brunson, and Paschall -- as well as Michigan's Wagner -- were named to the all-tournament team.

For some Villanova players, it's their second national championship. For others, it is their first time experiencing standing atop the college basketball landscape.

Although it didn't have the same dramatic ending as 2016, when the clock hit zero, the feeling was the same.

"Who do I hug first?" said **Omari Spellman**. "I just ran over to Mikal, Donte...it all happened so fast. I was like, 'Wow, we really did it.' It was just so unbelievably amazing."

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