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# NCAA Tournament: Villanova downs top-seeded Kansas, advances since 2009

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LOUISVILLE -- For nearly 40 minutes, **Ryan Arcidiacono** didn't smile.

Despite being the senior point guard's birthday, he didn't show any semblance of a grin during the Elite Eight contest against top overall seed Kansas.

Even when Villanova took the lead or drained a big shot, he kept his emotions to himself. He had seen many triumphs and disappointments over his four years wearing the blue and white, but he never had one quite like Saturday night.

However, once the final buzzer sounded at the end of the Wildcats' 64-59 victory to punch their ticket to Houston, he fell to the ground appearing exhausted. He was embraced by teammate **Jalen Brunson**, as the dream of making the Final Four was realized.

Arcidiacono finally smiled and jumped up in an exuberant manner, roaring in excitement as he ran to join the rest of his teammates to celebrate as a team.

"I didn't know what to do," Arcidiacono said. "I think I ran in a complete circle. I was freaking out. It was unbelievable and something I'll always remember. It was just -- it's four years of commitment to Villanova and as a program, I think it was just big time for us."

Arcidiacono was one of three Wildcats to share a team-high 13 points, doing so with **Kris Jenkins** and **Josh Hart**.

"My 22nd birthday was better than my 21st," Arcidiacono said, smiling. "It's unbelievable but I don't want to focus anything on me, it was a whole team effort."

The Wildcats have come a long way since being badgered with questions regarding their ability to play in March that surrounded them ever since they were knocked out of the second round of last year's NCAA Tournament. Not only had they shown that they were capable of getting past the first weekend, they were ready to take their journey even further.

Villanova passed its toughest test yet. After winning by double digit margins in the first three tournament games, the Elite Eight clash against the Jayhawks came down to the closing seconds of the contest.

"We have so much confidence in each other on the defensive end that we're going to make plays," Hart said. "**Mikal Bridges** made two huge steals in the last two minutes. His effort is great, that's

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what we feed off of, everyone does that. When a team is up, we're not going to be rattled, we're going to battle to the last second."

After the Jayhawks jumped out to a five-point lead -- Villanova's largest deficit of the Tournament -- the Wildcats responded with a 10-0 run to go up 50-45, Arcidiacono and Hart both hit 3-pointers at the end of the spurt to force a Kansas timeout. The Jayhawks kept it close the rest of the way, lurking right behind the Wildcats.

Kansas had a chance to tie the game as it had the ball down 62-59 with 13.1 seconds left. But as **Frank Mason III** drove, Arcidiacono knocked the ball loose and Bridges dove to the floor. He retrieved the ball and called time out immediately with 4.6 seconds to go.

Villanova had issues inboundng the ball at various points of the game, but it was able to pull through with a clean pass for Brunson.

The freshman guard tuned the raucous chants and noise from Jayhawk fans and put the game out of reach by hitting both free throws on a one-and-one.

"After he made the first one, I looked after at the bench," Arcidiacono said. "I looked over at the walk-ons. I had a little smirk on my face, because I knew how much work we put in as a team."

As a team, Villanova forced 16 Kansas turnovers and maintained a hard-nosed defensive effort all throughout the first half. The Jayhawks were held to just 25 points, their second-lowest first half scoring total of the season.

The Wildcats were also able to contain **Perry Ellis**, Kansas' leading scorer, to just four points and 1-of-5 shooting on the floor.

On the other end of the court, it wasn't so pretty. Villanova was just 4-of-18 (22.2 percent) from beyond the arc, after shooting a collective 33-of-62 (53.2 percent) in the first three NCAA Tournament games.

The Jayhawks used a stingy perimeter defense to run the Wildcats away from their comfort zone. It worked for the most part, but Villanova was able to find success attacking the basket, where it shot 16-of-34 (47.0 percent) from inside the arc.

Kansas was paced by a game-high 17 point performance from **Devonte' Graham**. Mason III and **Wayne Selden Jr.** also pitched in 16 points each in the loss.

Next up for Villanova is a rematch against Oklahoma, who throttled the 'Cats earlier in the season. It was a disaster in paradise for Villanova, who was beaten 78-55 by the Sooners in Hawaii.

"I think through the course of the year, we've grown a lot," Villanova forward **Daniel Ochefu** said. "**Buddy Hield** is an amazing player, Oklahoma is an extremely well-coached team with great players. It's going to be a battle."

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