

Darling's driving layup lifts St. John's

SAN DIEGO (AP) Dylan Darling hadn't made a shot all day when he got the ball at midcourt for St. John's with 3.9 seconds left in a tied March Madness thriller.

Darling could have passed. He could have wilted. He could have missed yet again.

Instead, the Red Storm's tenacious point guard ran the play he had called for himself moments earlier — attacking the basket, banking in a perfectly weighted shot and sending himself headlong into St. John's lore.

He also sent the Johnnies back to the Sweet 16 after 27 long years away.

Darling hit a driving layup for his only bucket of the game, and St. John's advanced to the second weekend of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1999 with a 67-65 victory over Kansas in on Sunday.

"I probably don't deserve this," said Darling, who had missed his first four shots badly enough that an exasperated Rick Pitino implored him to stop aiming the ball. "I was pretty bad all night long. But my teammates held it down tonight. Everybody stepped up. Just happy to keep this thing rolling."

St. John's advanced to face No. 1 overall seed Duke in the East Region semifinals in Washington.

Darling's toughness and resilience have immediately impressed his



AP PHOTO

St. John's guard Dylan Darling celebrates after his game-winner helped the Red Storm defeat Kansas in the second round of the NCAA Tournament Sunday in San Diego.

teammates in his first year in Queens after previous stops at Washington State and Idaho State. He even earned the nickname "Big Bells" from Pitino in January because he thought Darling's — let's call it toughness — is as big as church bells.

That's how he coolly won it for St. John's after the Jayhawks (24-11) erased a 58-45 deficit with 7 1/2 minutes to play, making a furious 20-7 run capped by Darryn Peterson's two free throws to tie it with 13.1 seconds left.

The Jayhawks had four fouls to give, and they used all four to wind the

clock down to 3.9 seconds.

"Bells come up to me and says, run 'Power,' which is a high, back-screen pick-and-roll," Pitino said. "So I walk away, and I said, 'Wait a second. He hasn't scored a bucket, and he wants to run a play for himself?' But he's Bells, and not only did he do it, he went with his right hand. I'm real proud of him, because to want the ball when you haven't made a shot is unbelievable."

Indeed, the left-handed shooter scored with his off hand before his teammates tackled him in front of the St. John's band. The

celebration continued in the locker room, where the Johnnies periodically shouted, "Dylan, I love you!" while he spoke to reporters with a sheepish grin.

"I was fully confident in him making a play, a great decision, and he obviously made the best decision possible," said Big East player of the year Zuby Ejiofor, who had 18 points and nine rebounds. "We know who Dylan is. He's a really confident player, a high-level competitor, and he was able to make a big-time bucket."

Bryce Hopkins also scored 18 points for the

fifth-seeded Red Storm (30-6), who have roared back to college basketball prominence in just three seasons under Pitino.

The 73-year-old Pitino and 63-year-old Bill Self coached against each other for only the second time in the Hall of Famers' decades-long careers, meeting for the first time in March Madness. They're two of the three active coaches with multiple national titles — and now Pitino still has a chance to claim his third.

With Kansas transfer Ejiofor leading the way, St. John's has won 21 of its last 22 games since early January, capped by

the Johnnies' second and third NCAA Tournament victories in the past quarter-century this weekend.

St. John's won the Big East regular-season and tournament titles during its surge, and the Red Storm haven't eased up a bit.

Jayhawks heartbreak

Peterson scored 21 points and Melvin Council Jr. had 15 points and nine rebounds for the fourth-seeded Jayhawks, who still haven't returned to the Sweet 16 since they claimed Self's second national title in 2022.

After Kansas ended Arizona's unbeaten season in a landmark victory on Feb. 9, the Jayhawks subsequently lost six of their final 11 games.

"The tournament, one of the things that makes it so great is that it can be great, but it can also be cruel," Self said. "We obviously put ourselves in a position to play from behind the whole game, and then really competed and played great down the stretch. Just didn't finish what we had started down the stretch."

Up next

"I'm hoping we can get Duke at the buzzer next, to make up for that Christian Laettner shot." — Pitino, whose Kentucky Wildcats lost one of the most memorable games in Elite Eight history in 1992 on Laettner's game-winning jumper.

BASKETBALL

NBA Standings

EASTERN CONFERENCE				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	47	24	.662	—
Boston	47	25	.653	1/2
New York	39	31	.557	7 1/2
Toronto	39	32	.549	8
Philadelphia	17	54	.239	30
Brooklyn	17	54	.239	30
SOUTHEAST				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	39	32	.549	—
Orlando	38	32	.543	1/2
Miami	38	33	.535	1
Charlotte	37	34	.521	2
Washington	16	55	.225	23
CENTRAL				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Detroit	51	19	.729	—
Cleveland	44	27	.620	7 1/2
Milwaukee	29	41	.414	22
Chicago	28	42	.400	23
Indiana	15	56	.211	36 1/2
WESTERN CONFERENCE				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
x-San Antonio	53	18	.746	—
Houston	43	27	.614	9 1/2
New Orleans	25	47	.347	28 1/2
Memphis	24	46	.343	28 1/2
Dallas	23	48	.324	30
NORTHWEST				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
y-Oklahoma City	56	15	.789	—
Denver	44	28	.611	12 1/2
Minnesota	44	28	.611	12 1/2
Portland	35	37	.486	21 1/2
Utah	21	50	.296	35
PACIFIC				
Team	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	46	25	.648	—
Phoenix	40	32	.556	6 1/2
L.A. Clippers	35	36	.493	11
Golden State	33	38	.465	13
Sacramento	19	53	.264	27 1/2

Sunday's Games

Denver 128, Portland 112
 Sacramento 126, Brooklyn 122
 New York 145, Washington 113
 Minnesota 102, Boston 92
 Phoenix 120, Toronto 98

Monday's Games

Indiana at Orlando, n
 L.A. Lakers at Detroit, n
 Oklahoma City at Philadelphia, n
 San Antonio at Miami, n
 Memphis at Atlanta, n
 Houston at Chicago, n
 Toronto at Utah, n
 Golden State at Dallas, n
 Brooklyn at Portland, n
 Milwaukee at L.A. Clippers, n

Today's Games

Sacramento at Charlotte, 7 p.m.
 New Orleans at New York, 7:30 p.m.
 Orlando at Cleveland, 8 p.m.
 Denver at Phoenix, 11 p.m.

Wednesday's Games

Atlanta at Detroit, 7 p.m.
 Chicago at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
 L.A. Lakers at Indiana, 7 p.m.
 Miami at Cleveland, 7:30 p.m.
 Oklahoma City at Boston, 7:30 p.m.
 San Antonio at Memphis, 8 p.m.
 Washington at Utah, 9 p.m.
 Houston at Minnesota, 9:30 p.m.
 Brooklyn at Golden State, 10 p.m.
 Dallas at Denver, 10 p.m.
 Milwaukee at Portland, 10 p.m.
 Toronto at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.

Thursday's Games

New Orleans at Detroit, 7 p.m.
 New York at Charlotte, 7 p.m.
 Sacramento at Orlando, 7 p.m.

NCAA Tournament Schedule

FIRST FOUR
 Tuesday, March 17
 At UD Arena
 Dayton, Ohio
 Howard 86, UMB 83

Second Round
 Saturday, March 20
 At Bon Secours Wellness Arena
 Greenville, S.C.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Nebraska vs. Iowa, 7:30 p.m.
 Houston vs. Illinois, 10:05 p.m.

Regional Championship
 Saturday, March 28
 Nebraska-Iowa winner vs. Houston-Illinois winner, TBA

MIDWEST REGIONAL

First Round
 Thursday, March 19
 At UD Arena
 Dayton, Ohio

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At Paycom Center
 Oklahoma City

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Nebraska vs. Iowa, 7:30 p.m.
 Houston vs. Illinois, 10:05 p.m.

Regional Championship
 Saturday, March 28
 Nebraska-Iowa winner vs. Houston-Illinois winner, TBA

WESTERN REGIONAL

First Round
 Thursday, March 19
 At KeyBank Center
 Buffalo, N.Y.

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At KeyBank Center
 Buffalo, N.Y.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Michigan vs. Alabama, 7:35 p.m.
 Iowa vs. Tennessee, 10:10 p.m.

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

WEST REGIONAL

First Round
 Friday, March 20
 At Viejas Arena
 San Diego

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At KeyBank Center
 Buffalo, N.Y.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Michigan vs. Alabama, 7:35 p.m.
 Iowa vs. Tennessee, 10:10 p.m.

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

SOUTH REGIONAL

First Round
 Friday, March 20
 At Benchmark International Arena
 Tampa, Fla.

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At Bon Secours Wellness Arena
 Greenville, S.C.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Florida 114, Prairie View 55
 Iowa 67, Clemson 61

Regional Championship
 Saturday, March 28
 Florida-Iowa winner vs. Iowa-Clemson winner, TBA

First Round
 Thursday, March 19
 At KeyBank Center
 Buffalo, N.Y.

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At Benchmark International Arena
 Tampa, Fla.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Michigan 101, Buffalo 80
 Saint Louis 102, Georgia 77

Friday, March 20
 At Benchmark International Arena
 Tampa, Fla.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Texas Tech 91, Akron 70
 Alabama 90, Hofstra 71

Second Round
 Saturday, March 21
 At Xfinity Mobile Arena
 Philadelphia

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Tennessee 78, Miami (Ohio) 56
 Virginia 82, Wright St. 73

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan 95, Saint Louis 72

At Benchmark International Arena
 Tampa, Fla.

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Alabama 90, Texas Tech 65

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan vs. Alabama, 7:35 p.m.
 Iowa vs. Tennessee, 10:10 p.m.

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Kentucky 89, Santa Clara 84, OT
 Iowa St. 108, Tennessee St. 74

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan 95, Saint Louis 72

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Michigan 95, Saint Louis 72

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Arizona 92, Villanova 58
 Utah St. 86, Villanova 76

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Miami 80, Missouri 66
 Purdue 104, Queens University Royals 71

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan vs. Tennessee, 7:35 p.m.
 Iowa vs. Tennessee, 10:10 p.m.

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 High Point 83, Wisconsin 82
 Arkansas 97, Hawaii 78
 Texas 79, BYU 71
 Gonzaga 73, Kennesaw St. 64

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Arizona 78, Utah St. 66

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

At Enterprise Center
 St. Louis

Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Purdue 79, Miami 69

Regional Championship
 Sunday, March 29
 Michigan-Alabama winner vs. Iowa vs. Tennessee winner, TBA

At Enterprise Center
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Regional Semifinals
 Thursday, March 26
 Arizona 94, High Point 88
 Texas 74, Gonzaga 68

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