

March 14, 2008



OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

CHARLIE FISS: Coach, your thought on today's game?

COACH SEAN SUTTON: We lost again to another great basketball team and we played Texas three times. All three games were very close, even in the last minute, two minutes of the game.

They found a way to make plays down the stretch and that's what great teams do. And I thought a big key today was we let Damion James really get going from the three-point line, and then we had a hard time ever getting him under control. Finishes with 23 points and 11 rebounds.

He hit back-to-back 3s against our zone when Marcus Dove was out of the game. I thought that was a big point in the game to get his confidence going because Terrel was matched up on that side of the court in the zone with him, and Damion is just 4 inches taller. He is able to shoot over the top of him and I thought that really fed his confidence and the way that we start the second half, we didn't come out with the same energy level and they took it to us right off the bat on that 12-0 run and playing uphill the rest of the way.

They made the plays once we got down to 3. James made a great play to push it back to 5. And then I think it was a 5-point game again, he blocked Terrel Harris's shot in the corner that looked like he would get a wide-open look with the possibility to cut it to 2 points. I thought he came up huge. Augustin played a great team as well.

CHARLIE FISS: Thank you, Coach. Let's go to questions for the student athletes.

Q. Ibrahima, can you discuss the start difference for you between the first half and the second half? Scoring?

IBRAHIMA THOMAS: The first half, I just do what the coaches ask me to do. I mean, like

make a couple shots, took a couple shots from the three-point line.

In the second half, we just didn't come out with the same intensity we came out in the first half and make a good run.

Q. Obi, what happened in the second half? You guys went in with all the momentum, Terrel hit a three-pointer. You come out and you guys just seemed not to be able to score. What happened?

OBI MUONELO: We just -- we went flat. I felt like in the second half, we came out, like Thomas said, with no intensity. Defensively, we didn't have the intensity we showed the first half and let them get off to an easy start, making two quick buckets. I guess they went on a 12-0 run. That's what they said in the locker room, and I think that really hurt us.

Q. Ibrahima, what got into you in the first four minutes of that game; I think you scored 16 of the first 21 points including 10 straight?

IBRAHIMA THOMAS: Just like I said, I just do what the coaches asked me to do. I mean, the lane was open and I just -- the shots was going in, we were playing well.

Q. Obi, if this is the last game of this season for you guys, just how would you sum up the season for you, how would you characterize this year?

OBI MUONELO: Some of the season -- this is a team that never really showed what they can really do. All of us know that we're capable of more than this, all my teammates, the coaches, we know we're better than our record shows. That's really how I sum up the season.

CHARLIE FISS: We'll let you return to your locker room with. We'll keep Coach here for a little while. Now we'll take questions for Coach Sutton.

Q. Sean, what are the prospects of

post-season tournament for the Cowboys? Have you thought about that yet? And maybe sum up the season as well.

COACH SEAN SUTTON: I haven't because our whole focus and concentration was on winning this tournament. I felt like the way we were playing, I knew we would have to play well today to beat Texas, but I thought we were capable and really thought we'd win the game. So I've not given it much thought on terms of the season.

I told our guys afterwards that I was really proud of them. They've grown up a lot. We started with not much experience and they've proven over the last four to five weeks that we're a good basketball team. It is too bad that some of these younger players maybe didn't develop a little bit quicker early in the conference. We lost a lot of close games right off the bat. They kept fighting through the course of the season and made a lot of improvements.

I'm disappointed that we're not going to be in the NCAA tournament, but I'm certainly not disappointed in their effort. They worked their tails off. And the guys we have coming back, I think that team has a chance to have a heck of a season.

Q. I had heard your athletic director said CBI is out. It is NIT or nothing; is that correct?

COACH SEAN SUTTON: I think so, yes.

Q. Also, during the game where you guys hit I believe 4 out of 7 straight 3s and really got it back within a three-point game, it seemed like Texas was content for a little while to trade baskets and run with you. Was the key of the game when they decided, no, they won't match and James went inside?

COACH SEAN SUTTON: Well, he called time out and they designed the play that really overloaded the zone. And James Anderson did not cross the floor. He basically had four guys on one side. And he was over here in his normal position, and he didn't rotate over to take James and let a lay-up and pushed it up to 5 at that point.

And we came down, that's when James blocked Terrel's shot that would have cut it to it. I thought Terrel was about to get a great look in the corner, and James just made a spectacular play and blocked the shot. And then they came back.

Mason drove it in there late in the shot clock and got to the glass.

So they made two consecutive plays to push it back up to 7. That's what great teams do.

As I've said, there's nobody that I respect any more than Rick Barnes and his staff. I think that their team, because of the personnel they have, they could play multiple styles. They can play fast. They can play slow. They can really shoot the basketball and they also have an inside presence with James and some of their younger post players.

I think they have the ingredients to make a run and get to the Final Four. They'll have to play well. You can't have an off game in NCAA tournament. But they're certainly a really, really fine basketball team.

Q. I know Byron only sat for a minute and a half after the fourth. Did having four fouls take something away from him?

COACH SEAN SUTTON: I thought he came in and played well. It was a 12-point game and 10:30 to go. And I felt like there is no use saving him over here. If we are going to get back in the game, he is going to have to get back in the action and play a part of it.

While he did score a lot, he had nine assists and one turnover. I thought he penetrated well during that stretch that we got back into it and got Terrel Harris and Obi and some of those guys some open looks.

He just wasn't quite himself at the offensive end. He couldn't knock down some shots, but he made some great plays for his teammates. And probably limited him a little bit defensively the last ten minutes because of being in foul trouble. I didn't think it affected his offensive game.

Q. Sean, your program has always prided itself on defense. Can you just talk about moving forward without one of the greatest defensive players this program has ever had in Marcus Dove?

COACH SEAN SUTTON: Well, I mean -- he epitomizes, I think, what our program stands for. He has got great character. He's got a lot of pride and passion for Oklahoma State. He's somebody that was not a heavily recruited player, yet, made himself into a very good college basketball player.

I would put him as maybe the best defender that we've ever had in our program. We've always taken a lot of pride in defense, and most years have had a defensive stopper. And Marcus embraced that role early and having the luxury of going up against Tony Allen and Joey Graham and John Lucas. But to win back-to-back defensive player of the year in this league, I think says what a great defender he is.

Because of that, he's put himself in position to be able to play in the NBA. I think he'll get a lot of looks and at some point, I'll be shocked if he is not in a NBA team. He is so versatile. At that level, he will be able to guard three different positions. At college level, he can guard five. The way he has improved his offense, he would make the NBA just solely because he is such a great defender.

Always worked hard. Always played hard, very popular with his teammates and certainly going to miss not having him around.

CHARLIE FISS: Coach, thank you.

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