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Kansas State – 75

An Interview With:

**COLORADO
COACH TAD BOYLE
LEVI KNUTSON
CORY HIGGINS
ALEC BURKS**

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Colorado Buffaloes coach Tad Boyle and student-athletes Levi Knutson, Cory Higgins and Alec Burks. Coach, opening comments.

COACH BOYLE: I think the word that comes to my mind after this game is just pride. Pride in Colorado basketball. Pride in what we represent, and most importantly pride in these young men, because they battled tonight.

And K-State's a good team. They're playing as well as anybody in the country. And for us to beat them on a neutral floor at this time of the year is just a testament to them and their toughness. Because that's what it takes in games like this to win, is toughness.

And we showed it. We talked about the rebounding battle before the game began. And there were bodies flying out there. It's a physical game. These guys, they came up with it more often than K-State did, and I think that's why we won the game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Cory, Colorado's never made it this far in this tournament. What does it mean to you to come here and perform like this?

CORY HIGGINS: I mean, it means everything. We came here with a goal to win the tournament, and to do it with the guys around me,

especially the ones that have been through it all the past four years, it means a lot to me, personally.

Q. Cory, they pretty well shut down Alec in the second half but you took over.

CORY HIGGINS: I mean, I think me and Alec really feed off of each other. I mean, throughout the year we talked to each other during the game. And, I mean, it's hard for teams to shut down both of us, so we just tried to pick each other up during the game.

Q. Alec, doing this at home, as your school's about to go to the Big Ten, your thoughts on this today?

ALEC BURKS: It's love. I'll always come back to Kansas City and put on a great show. It's love, because I'm from here, so I love playing in Kansas City.

Q. Levi, why do you seem to match up so well against Kansas State?

LEVI KNUTSON: I'm not sure. I think we've defended and rebounded really well in the three games we've played against them. But they're out in passing lanes, denying, pressuring defense, and we've got guys that can make plays off the dribble. I think that helps a lot. But for the most part, rebounding the ball has been our backbone against those guys.

Q. Alec, how much of the challenge now going forward, maybe even more than facing Kansas, is there an element of having to recover quickly and play three games in three days? How tough is that for you guys?

ALEC BURKS: It's not really that tough for me. I'm 19, so I'm young. I got a lot of legs under me. But I think we're hungry, we've got the toughness, and we can bounce back to be ready for Kansas tomorrow.

Q. Will this prove that the first two victories were not a fluke?

CORY HIGGINS: If it doesn't, I don't know what does. I mean, we beat a great team three times. It can't be a fluke all three times.

Q. I think the question Colorado fans would like to know, do you think this proves that you belong in the NCAA Tournament now?

LEVI KNUTSON: We're still trying not to focus on that. Like Cory said, we're here to win this tournament, and then we'll let the chips fall where they may after that.

Q. Cory, after you turned the ball over, when Pullen tackled you basically, or whatever you want to view it, I know you guys can't talk like that, but they cut it to one. How did you guys recover and close the game out?

CORY HIGGINS: I think Coach told us in the huddle, we've responded this whole year in times of adversity. So, I mean, it was nothing we haven't seen. We just have to get back to what we do well and execute. And we were confident we were going to come out with a W regardless.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. They can't talk about it, they don't want to talk about the NCAA, but you guys are one of the most talked about teams in terms of the bubble. What can you say about that?

COACH BOYLE: We were talked about coming into this game, and I think people are going to look at the results of this game and see the fact that, again, I mentioned it before, K-State's playing at a high level. We came in at halftime and we were like down two. And those guys are -- they're good. And they're playing very, very well right now. Like Cory said, we beat a good team. We're not backing into this thing.

And, again, I tried not to talk about things that I don't have control over. I just know the kind of teams we've beaten in this league. And I know the fact that we've gone on the road in preseason, everybody has bad losses, Colorado included. But we got some great wins. I think this is our sixth top 50 RPI win of the year, if I'm not mistaken. Six. I don't know how many, quote/unquote, bubble teams have six wins.

So, again, it's not something that we talk about. You can tell by the response you get from our players. It's not something we talk about with them. We just talk about the next task at hand,

which now is the Kansas Jayhawks, in Kansas City, and it's a great opportunity.

Q. Defensively, what did you do to shut them down about the last minute and a half when it was a 3-point ballgame?

COACH BOYLE: Well, we started switching -- we've done a pretty good job on Jacob Pullen all year long as a team. And Cory, I thought, was terrific today against him. And I know he ended up with 18 points, but he had to work for every one of them.

Normally what we're doing is doubling him off the ball screens, but late we started just switching them the last probably minute and a half, just switching, because we knew they were going for 3s, so we just wanted to make him shoot a jump shot over a hand and box out.

But nothing special. Our guys just dialed in. The whole key with K-State the way they run their offense you have to jump to the ball. And we got a couple of silly fouls not jumping the ball and chucking cutters, but for the most part we did a good job of that taking away their easy baskets.

Q. After beating them twice in the regular season, was the game plan pretty much the same, or did you do anything differently?

COACH BOYLE: Nothing different. I think when you play them, you just talk about toughness and mental toughness, and your question to Cory, when they did cut it to one, is a testament to our guys' mental toughness.

They made their run and our guys bowed their back and we came down, we executed. We got to the foul line when we had to, but, no, the game plan was no different going into K-State.

It starts with Jacob Pullen. It doesn't end with him. Curtis Kelly had a heck of a game. He's played as well as I've seen him play in a while. But they're a good team. But I've got so much respect for Jacob Pullen in this league for what he's done for the four years, and we just want to try to get the ball out of his hands as much as we can, and when he's got the ball, the other four guys have to be really aware.

That was the game plan. And just win the battle of the boards. Pretty simple.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what you have to do to prepare now, like you said, for another tough challenge with a quick

turnaround like this?

COACH BOYLE: Well, we get rest. This time of year our guys know what they have to do. The scouting reports are pretty well versed in their minds, and we know what Kansas is going to try to do now. It's our challenge to go out there and try to limit them from doing it.

And they present a heck of a challenge. I hope they shoot from the perimeter tomorrow like they did today. Because what makes them so hard to guard is they've got inside post presence from multiple guys. And they've got some pretty good capable shooters surrounding them.

So they're a good team. It's going to be a heck of a challenge. But our guys are ready for it. It's time for us, hey, let's go ball, we know what we have to do, let's let it all hang out, we've got nothing to lose, and we're going to be loose, we're going to be loose tomorrow but we'll be ready.

Fatigue, like Alec said, these guys are 19, we'll get nice beds tonight and they'll be ready to go.

Q. The mental toughness you talked about, how much do you think was kind of built up during the season when you had some of these close losses? And also I wanted to ask you, I guess your former team, Northern Colorado got its first NCAA Tournament bid last night. What do you think about that? Did you get a chance to check out any of that?

COACH BOYLE: Yeah, we got the scouting report on K-State done. I was selfish as a coach; I wanted to watch it. I watched it from start to finish. I'm really proud of those young men, and I say they're my second favorite team in college basketball behind the Colorado Buffaloes.

But that mental toughness that you talked about is something that you create as the year goes on, and I think adversity, the greatest thing about college athletics, what it teaches these young men to deal with, is adversity.

Whether it's the whistle's not going your way, whether it's being on the road and people cheering against you, whether you have a tough night shooting the ball or you're just not playing well that day, you gotta figure a way to overcome those things.

And our team's done a very good job of that. We haven't always got over the hump and overcome them, but I think it's all about your attitude and your effort and the way you approach every day and every game and every possession, that we've -- I think we're trying to create that

culture of every possession means something, and mental toughness is a big, big part of any team's success, especially this time of year.

Q. I'm going to take your answer to the NCAA question a while ago as you feel pretty good about things. And going back to the Northern, could you have envisioned both of these teams being in there? And how would that make you feel?

COACH BOYLE: That would make me feel pretty darned special and proud.

The Northern situation's a lot different than the Colorado situation. It's apples and oranges. But at the end of the day it's about educating young men. It's about getting them to buy into a belief system and a culture where every day you wake up, you try to get better.

And four years ago, when I was at Northern Colorado we were 4 and 24. We weren't eligible for postseason play. And four years later they're going to the dance. Colorado basketball -- I think yesterday we got our 20th win. I think that's the fifth time in 108 years of basketball at Colorado where they've won 20 games.

These young men are trying to make a statement and leave their footprints in the sands of time. And the only way you can do that is wear your work boots every single day and come to the gym, like we came to the gym today ready to go. So I'm extremely proud of the Buffaloes. I'm extremely proud of the Bears, and it would be a great day on Sunday if we both got in.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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