

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Lon Kruger

Oklahoma Sooners

THE MODERATOR: Lon Kruger from Oklahoma. Coach, welcome, and your thoughts about the upcoming season?

COACH KRUGER: Great time of the year. Guys have obviously been two weeks into practice, lot of enthusiasm, lot of energy. If you don't have it this time, you're probably not going to have it. So it's been great. It's been great.

Had a little bit of injury with our big post guy, AK, with a foot injury, little stress fracture from July, haven't fully got him recovered. Otherwise, pretty injury-free, and guys getting after it every day.

Q. Rashard Odomes has got a lot of attention this summer. What is it that he brings to your team?

What have you seen from him since he's been on campus, and what can he add off the bench that maybe you haven't had the last couple seasons?

COACH KRUGER: Rashard Odomes and Christian James are kind of similar in that they've got good size at the wing, very versatile. They're very aggressive, physical on the boards. They rebound the ball well from the wing. They can score. For incoming freshmen, they've been well-coached. They have a good feel for the game. Great enthusiasm for working every day, and the real benefit too from having Buddy and Isaiah from a work ethic standpoint in the gym all the time. And those guys come in and see what they do and fall in line and they'll benefit from that a great deal too.

Q. I know some things being out of your control in terms of scheduling and when you start and that sort of thing. But it wasn't too long ago that practices didn't get going until the end of October. Now you guys are practically playing in October. In your neck of the woods, it's football season still. Do you almost wish it could move back a little closer to the end of the year before you guys really started that non-conference schedule?

COACH KRUGER: The goal everywhere in the non-conference schedule attendance at games during that time is to try to work to improve that. Different people, different places in the country are working hard at that. Never thought about moving it back a great deal. Right



now we go through part of both semesters anyhow. Our guys are in town for Thanksgiving, they're in town for Christmas, they're in town for spring break. So there is not a lot there if you were backing up a lot. We're playing almost until the last month of the school year anyhow.

So you can certainly do that, but I don't know if we would benefit a great deal on the other end.

Q. You guys returned four starters this year. How beneficial is that not only just having the returning starters, but the production those guys are bringing back for you?

COACH KRUGER: It's great to have them from them being familiar, them having the experience, a lot of Big 12 starts. Leadership out of that group is outstanding, maybe as good as we've ever had with a returning group. The work ethic, their unselfishness, all those things that you'd certainly rather have than not.

Expectations are different this year, be it the challenge of having those well. These guys have never really been in that position before. But they'll handle it well. They understand how they have to work every day, focus every day, and work at getting better. They know how tough the league is, so they know what lies ahead.

Q. Lon, you mentioned your trio of seniors, but looking across the Big 12, it seems every team has a lot of upperclassmen back this year. And it's maybe a bit of a rarity these days in college basketball. Do you see this year being different in that way and every team has veteran leadership?

COACH KRUGER: I think that's a good point. It appears to be that way. You talk about rosters and we turn a lot of the top players from the league last year, the top three teams, two-thirds of those return, leading scorers, leading rebounders, they return. So down the line it seems like it's a league that's not really very talented, but it's older talent which will make it even tougher.

Q. Your philosophy seems that you let your teams play and really kind of get after it. You have a group of older guys that probably makes it a little easier to do that. But when you've got younger groups, do you tend to maybe not want to do that? Talk me through that philosophy for you, because

that seemed pretty consistent with your team.

COACH KRUGER: Well, every group's a little bit different. But we think confidence is a big thing, maybe the most important thing. You assume they're going to work hard and compete, so that's certainly a starting point. But you assume that's there.

So now confidence, promoting confidence, trying to down play roles, you want guys that can shoot it, to feel free to shoot it. Guys who can't, you have to limit that, but you have to do that individually. Yeah, I think everything's a little bit different. With an older group, they probably identify their roles, they know what their roles are and what to expect from each other.

I think good teams have different individuals that respect other people's roles, but also be accountable to their own, step up and every night deliver whatever it is. Maybe rebounding, maybe blocking shot, maybe scoring. But, yeah, you want them to play. You want them to do the things they do every day in practice and things they're comfortable doing and can do with confidence.

Q. A lot of folks, I think, see Dante Buford as a guy that can give you what Cameron Clark did a few years ago. Is that a valid comparison in your mind?

COACH KRUGER: I think it is. Given Dante's a freshman, and people remember Cam as a junior and senior and very productive. But Dante has a chance to grow into that. He's an undersized four man if you put a number to him. Stretch four, can shoot the ball well, can put it on the floor.

I think he's a guy that will get more and more comfortable, having red shirted last year, he along with Jamuni McNeace, they both benefited from that red shirt year and will get better and better as time goes on. But Dante now and Jamuni both are off to a very good start in the early season workouts.

Q. Does it help to have the Big 12 Conference tournament in Oklahoma City kind of give you a home crowd of sorts instead of having it elsewhere and having your team try to play it? How does that help you guys potentially going into an NCAA Tournament situation?

COACH KRUGER: The Big 12 Conference tournament, of course, is in Kansas City. Having a site there in Oklahoma City gives us something to work toward perhaps. But we've got a lot of work to do to have a chance to earn that opportunity to play in Oklahoma City.

But Kansas City does a great job with the tournament. Great arena, great attendance, and certainly a great

event.

Q. The decision for Buddy to stay for his senior year, how much did he come to you with knowledge or needed some knowledge, because he's obviously one of the best players in the conference? Was that a factor for you having to, not convince, but show him the positives of staying an extra year and staying for his senior year?

COACH KRUGER: Buddy's really smart. He's got a great family, so our function was just to provide information. We talked to a lot of the folks in the NBA and we got the committee's evaluation back, as we do for any young player that may entertain the idea of going into the draft early, and just provided that to Buddy.

Buddy took those projections and took the expert's opinions and said, I can get better. He's got a pretty good experience there, so it's not like he's not enjoying the time in Oklahoma. He said he thought he could enjoy that, improve his game, and maybe elevate his draft status and give himself a better chance to have a longer career at the next level.

But, again, he made a decision that will be very good for him in the long run and certainly very good for our program, but I think good for Buddy, and that is the key there.