

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Bill Self

Malik Newman

Devonte' Graham

Kansas Jayhawks

Kansas - 81, West Virginia - 70

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by the champions of the Big 12 conference, the Kansas Jayhawks, Coach Self. Student-athletes are Devonte' Graham and Malik Newman. Coach, congratulations on your victory today and the championship.

BILL SELF: Well, thank you. It was obviously a fabulous college basketball game. Both teams were really good offensively against two good defensive teams today. They got control of the game in the first half and we made a run, and they got control of it in the second half and we made a run. That was the difference. When they had a chance to probably distance themselves we made a lot of great plays to get right back in it and we played about flawless for the most part down the stretch.

Really proud of our team. It's been kind of an up and down week for us, obviously for a couple of reasons. But I thought the guys competed as well as they've competed all year long and played with as much freedom as they have all year long, too.

Q. Devonte', was that the best half of basketball you played this season?

DEVONTE' GRAHAM: Maybe. Once they went on a run in the the second half Coach called a timeout and we got locked back in and started making plays and just competing. It was just fun. Fun to be out there.

Q. Jevon Carter had said it's difficult for them to -- or it was difficult for them to press you like they did in the second half when you were making shots like you did. When did you sense that you were going to be able to handle whatever pressure they threw at you and you were in the zone?

DEVONTE' GRAHAM: I don't know exactly when, but we knew if we handled the press we would get some easy buckets and Konate did a good job of coming over and blocking shots. But we like to run. We like to shoot threes. Just ball movement, attacking the paint,



trying to get in and make plays for others and thankfully we were able to make shots tonight.

MALIK NEWMAN: Coach always said when a team is pressuring us, go fast break. We just tried to play fast, and like Devonte' said, we were able to make shots. So they had to fall back and they couldn't press us as much and we had to run our offense and it worked.

Q. Guys, typically that press they have wears other teams down. This is the third time this year that you guys have worn them down. What's that say about your conditioning and overall also what's it say about what you guys have got going on that you're able to do that?

DEVONTE' GRAHAM: I think for the most part we're pretty good conditioning. We play four guards and the weave thing that we do, we run that a lot and it's actually a lot of running and gets us tired in practice. So when we come to games we're not that tired. But playing back-to-back-to-back games, I knew their press wouldn't be as good as it was on the first day. So as long as we were breaking it and getting through traps I knew we had a good chance of wearing them down.

MALIK NEWMAN: Basically Devonte' summed it up, but I'm just thankful for our training staff. They did a great job of recovering, making sure that I had my legs all the time. So I mean, credit to Coach Self for the offense that we run to help us get in shape, but also credit to the training staff.

Q. Devonte', could you comment on Silvio's ascendency and his improvement and what it means for your team to have him giving you quality minutes like that?

DEVONTE' GRAHAM: It's huge. We knew we wouldn't have Udoka and Mitch and him would have to step up and he's coming into it and finding a rhythm and finding it at the right time. Everybody is happy for him, because he's been struggling. It's hard to come in in the middle of the season straight out of high school and get all this stuff thrown at you, all the plays, how fast we play. It's not like high school. So he did a great job of just sticking with it, coming into practice every day, learning the plays and it's finally paying off.

Q. Devonte', I don't think I've every seen anybody remove an item of clothing during a play and then

continue to score. I wonder, like, was that thing just annoying you? What was happening there?
DEVONTE' GRAHAM: No, actually he pulled it off, he was pulling my arm and it came down. So it was just like, my sleeve was right here. So I just threw it off and just kept playing.

THE MODERATOR: All right, guys. Congratulations again on the victory. Good luck next week. Questions for Coach Self now?

Q. Bill, not necessarily about the game, but the league is set to get a bunch of teams in the tournament, whether it's 7, 8 or 9. How important is it for the league to do well in the tournament? Do you think that's been a point that people have made that knocked the league down in the past, good regular season RPI, not as much in the tournament?

BILL SELF: I think it is important. I think our league has played out this year to probably be as tough as it's ever been and three of the last four years I think we were number one, thought of, in the RPI and usually that should translate to more success in the postseason.

So I think it is important. I don't think our league is top heavy. I think our league is really middle heavy. I mean, there's no poor teams and whenever you went to your conference tournament with nine teams out of ten, 90% of the teams all can make a legitimate case for being an at-large team, I think that speaks volumes to the depth of it.

But even with that being said, we gotta go play and play well because the teams in our league are really good. But we're like all the other teams. There's not as many dominant teams across America, so once you get into the tournament they're going to be coin-flip games. We need to close those games out.

Q. Coach, could you talk about the importance or the advantage of having a team on the uptick at this point in the year?

BILL SELF: Well, you know, I'm not sure that we've been on a serious uptick until today. We were bad last Saturday. We were better on Thursday. We were bad yesterday and then of course today we were terrific. That's as well as we played maybe all year long. So I think it should give us confidence moving forward. The best thing that can happen for our team right now is to get some rest, but to try to somewhat bottle the energy and how well we played together today. You're not always going to make shots like that and then to get Udoka back healthy. With Silvio's emergence and you can't bank on 16 and 10 every day, but he and Udoka and Mitch that's a totally different look than what we

had three weeks ago from a depth standpoint. Hopefully that will be the case that we can have all three of those guys.

Q. Bill, I know you told us a couple nights ago you weren't going to sleep very well with some of the things that were going on. After the way Silvio played how much easier are you going to rest tonight?

BILL SELF: Yeah, well, we'll rest. We may enjoy it a little bit before we rest. We needed something like this. But you can have a good performance and not win. You can still get good things from a game if you compete hard and certainly if this game had not gone our way I would have been really proud of our team because we were a better team today than we have been here of late. But, yeah, we'll rest better and I'm happy for all our guys, without question.

I think this definitely validates what happened during the regular season. Nobody can say that Kansas caught a break or was lucky this year. We were able to validate winning by two games by winning this, but tomorrow at noon it doesn't matter anymore. We will regroup and hopefully have fresh minds and fresh legs going forward.

Q. Coach, playing alongside the Big 12 Player of the Year, Malik comes out and wins Most Outstanding Player of the tournament. Can you comment on his performance and what that means to this team?

BILL SELF: He was great. It should give him a ton of confidence. He really labored in Stillwater and has had good plays for us this year, but hasn't had a breakout moment like this. So I'm really happy for him. He has had a great attitude. He works hard. He's really starting to understand exactly how he needs to play in order for him to have total confidence and freedom, and I think he's buying into that better than he has all year long.

It's amazing to me when you care about the right things and you defend, and, you know, try to do things the way that you're supposed to do it to help your teammates you shoot the ball better. I think that was certainly the cause for all his success this weekend. He was great.

Q. As much as any coach I've heard you always separate whether you made shots or missed shots from we played well or didn't. You said this is as good as you played all year. You obviously made a ton of shots. What besides the shots makes you feel that?

BILL SELF: We went against pressure for forty minutes and turned it over three times in the second half when

it counted the most. We're not going to be a great rebounding team, folks. But I thought we competed on the glass harder. I thought if you look at the box score we played seven guys and all seven contributed in a very positive way. I thought we played right even when we missed shots.

So to me that's what I think playing well is. You can miss the same shots we made today. That doesn't mean you played bad. That means you didn't make plays or make shots. So I can look at this game, I think, before I watch it, but especially after I watch it I guarantee I will be able to say even if we hadn't made shots we still would have played right and we don't always do that.

Q. There's been some sentiment in here by a few coaches that they will be happy to get out of the league because it's been so tough this year. Do you feel that truer than ever at this time?

BILL SELF: I do feel it's time for everybody to go play somebody else. You know, now, we run quite a few sets. The sets don't work. Everybody knows your stuff. We don't run as much now that Udoka is out because half our stuff was trying to get him the ball. But playing against somebody where they're be not as comfortable with you, maybe can allow you sometimes to look better. But on the flip-side, they can look better, too. I do think playing against the same grind night-in and night-out, it's going to be a grind in the NCAA tournament. But we're tired of each other.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations. Good luck next week.

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Bob Huggins

Daxter Miles

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West Virginia Mountaineers

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THE MODERATOR: Okay, we're joined now by the Mountaineers of West Virginia, Coach Bob Huggins, and student-athletes are Jevon Carter and Daxter Miles.

Q. Dax, how did you see things just kind of get in the way for you over the last six minutes of the game, when they went on their run? What happened with Kansas making their run at the end of the game? How did you see them doing it and what did you guys not do?

DAXTER MILES: They made shots.

Q. For either one of you, can you talk about Kansas without Azubuike. What was the approach to attacking them without as Azubuike today?

JEVON CARTER: Same as it always is. They just did a real good job of knocking down shots. Every shot they put up went in and when we went cold they kept hitting and that's when they went out and got the lead.

Q. For either of you, looked like y'all pressed a lot in the second half. How effective do you feel like your pressure defense was?

JEVON CARTER: Um, it was okay. We've done better. It's just hard to press a team when they're making shots. Like no matter what we did on defense they made tough shots.

Q. Jevon, you've been in this environment. You know what it's like playing in a title game in front of a partisan crowd. Did you need to clue your younger guys in on how they would have to deal with this environment today?

JEVON CARTER: Yeah, it was the championship. We had to come to play. I feel like we did a good job. When it came down to it we didn't make shots and they did.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. Congratulations on a great season and good luck next week. Thank



you for coming. Questions for Coach Huggins?

Q. Bob, the league is set to get a bunch of teams, whatever it is into the tournament. How important do you think NCAA tournament success is to the reputation of the league and how important will it be to the Big 12?

BOB HUGGINS: I think in that that's all that you hear about, see, read, whatever, for a month. It's pretty important.

Q. There has been a reputation by some that the league over the years has underperformed a little bit. Do you have a response to that? Do you agree with that?

BOB HUGGINS: I've never heard that, so I don't think it has. I haven't really looked at it that close to be honest with you.

Q. What Jevon said, they made shots. You guys didn't. It's pretty simple analysis. Is that the way you see it? I guess that's what most games come down to, right?

BOB HUGGINS: They shot 72% the second half. They shot 56 for the game. They shot 56 from 3. They're going to beat everybody when they do that. They were contested shots. We didn't give them wide-open shots. They were contested. They made 'em.

I think probably J.C. and Dax got a little bit tired, because of the way we play and the fact that they've played a lot of minutes in the first two games. It just didn't seem like they had legs at the end, but that's, you know, that's to be expected, I think.

We just couldn't get -- they did a good job with the rescreen on the ball screen and you have to help a little bit whenever a guy gets loose, and we tried to help a little bit and still get back, which I thought we did a pretty good job of recovering. The last three or four shots they made from the corner were contested shots.

Q. Bob, you had them on the ropes at some point in the last three or four games at some point in those games. What is it about them that allows them to come back and what is it about you guys that you haven't been able to finish the deal?

BOB HUGGINS: It's nothing about us. They've got a

lot of guys that can make shots. I mean, let's be honest, all those guys out there--if they weren't McDonald's All-Americans it's because they're from another country, you know? So they've got good players. They've got good players and the guy can coach. He's a Hall of Fame coach. We've got great kids who just play their tails off that aren't as skilled, quite frankly. But we're able to compete because of their character and because of how hard they play and because of the fact that they're good people.

Q. De Sousa, 8 for 8, 10 rebounds. How big of an impact did he have on the game?

BOB HUGGINS: They made shots, Wendell, so you're gonna get spread. When you make shots like that you're gonna get spread and we got spread and then all of the sudden now you're chasing them. Then with we tried to double the ball screen then you double the ball screen you've got two guys chasing and if y'all haven't figured it out, Devonte' Graham is pretty good!

If we ran in and helped they kicked it to the corner and made threes, and if we didn't run in and help they threw it to him. We made some mistakes early on with them. They got some baskets early on. We didn't do a very good job of doing what we were supposed to do. But that's basketball.

Q. Coach, moving forward and moving out of this league schedule and taking on teams that are more unfamiliar, and this team likes to compete. How do you feel about this team as it moves forward?

BOB HUGGINS: Well, we've beaten the No. 1 seed earlier in the year. We've had, what did we have, 11 wins or something like that in the hardest league in the country. I think we'll be okay. We've just got to, you know, you can't miss shots. We just missed shots. We missed a couple of lay-ins. We can't do that. We're not good enough to overcome that. We don't surround the line with all those guys that can make shots. We've got guys that quite frankly when they make one we all stand up and cheer because we're shocked as hell.

Like I said, we're able to compete because they compete their butts off. They played hard. We have to play a different style to be able to compete, which is very taxing.

But if we went back and played half-court with them, we would get beat by 20. And we've had chances, you know? And you guys know the history, man. I don't have -- I can't go into that and I don't need to go into that. It's not like we haven't had chances. We've had chances.

Q. Keeping with the theme of looking ahead, is it fair to say this looks like a year, feels like a year

where we could have some surprises in the tournament, some unexpected teams advancing to the Final Four?

BOB HUGGINS: Well, I think Bill would say this: They have to make shots, but the majority of the time they do. When they struggle they don't make shots. You know?

They're very dependent on spreading you and making shots. So, yeah, I mean, if they miss shots, yeah, they could get beat. I tell our guys all the time, you know, if you're going to advance to the NCAA tournament you've got to make open shots. You can't miss open shots, because you don't get very many. Everybody is playing hard. Everybody knows you're one loss and you're out, so you gotta make open shots. We had open shots, didn't make 'em. They had contested shots and made 'em. They're going to win. If they can do that for three weeks, they could win a National Championship. But if they have one game where those don't go in, it's going to be a struggle, just like it is for everybody.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach.