

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

Mike Boynton Mitchell Solomon Kendall Smith Oklahoma State Cowboys

Oklahoma State - 71, Oklahoma - 60

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the Cowboys of Oklahoma State, Coach Mike Boynton and his two student-athletes, Kendall Smith and Mitchell Solomon. Coach, we will call on you for an opening statement. Congratulations.

MIKE BOYNTON: Thank you. Thank you all for being here. I'm really proud of obviously the way our guys competed.

We tried to make a conscious effort to be the hardest playing team for forty minutes today, and I feel like we accomplished that. I think it shows up most notably on the stat sheet on the rebounding. Proud of these guys. They fought a lot of noise all season and for us to be playing as well as we are this time of year shows their character and not just good kids, we got a good team.

Q. Kendall, you played in conference tournaments before but nothing like this. Talk about what it was like to sit down twice, once with four fouls and once fouling out, how frustrating that had to be for you?

KENDALL SMITH: Definitely. They put on a phenomenal event, and in terms of fouls I wanted to play. But the main thing for me is to remain a great teammate. That's one thing Coach Mike told me. After my fifth foul, he said be a great teammate and those things mean more to me than sometimes being on the court.

Q. Mitchell, you guys had pretty good control of the game and they get hot from outside, go on a 14-2 run, they have a fast break from Trae Young to Brady Manek, and it ended their run. It speaks to what the coach was talking about, the hardest playing team, the effort that you put into that one play that turned the game around. Can you describe what you saw and how that changed the game?

MITCHELL SOLOMON: It's not necessarily one guy. If



I don't have a team to help me then I can't do what I do. But that particular play, I mean, they had a fast break. So I knew I had to, like, put a stop to it. I know Trae likes to throw lobs, so bated, jabbed, played fundamental 2-on-1 defense and was able to get a hand on it and found Kendall down court.

Q. For any of you, you were successful with Trae driving to the hoop today. I just wondered if there was any different defensive mindset going in or anything tactically that you did differently than you did that first game because you got him frustrated and fairly ineffective.

MITCHELL SOLOMON: We just try to play as hard as we can. There are different scheming things that we can do, but as long as we're playing hard together and playing well on the defensive end we're capable of doing anything.

Q. Mike, anything tactically?

MIKE BOYNTON: With a guy like that he's a tremendous player and will continue to have a great basketball career. You try to make him as inefficient as possible and I think we accomplished that. It was a team effort like Mitchell said defensively, had a lot of bodies that he was running into in there and tried to make him see traffic as much as possible.

Q. Kendall, how were you so physical on Trae without sending him to the free throw line because that's something a lot of players have struggled with this year?

KENDALL SMITH: Just tried to stay fundamentally sound on defense. But when I have four other guys that are competing their butts off just as hard as I am, it makes it a lot easier. It was a full-team effort and we sent different looks at them and stuck to our fundamentals defensively.

Q. Kendall, this season didn't look so great at one point in the year. You guys have turned it around. What do you point to?

KENDALL SMITH: I think it's a credit to the 14 guys that we have in the locker room. We've got guys that every day we're pulling for each other and we push each other. We got a phenomenal coaching staff that believes in us, so when you got good people surrounding you, no matter the ups and downs that you go through, as long as you stay true to our values we

will be fine and we knew that.

Q. Mitchell, what did you think for Cam's performance? He seemed to be a spark for you guys emotionally when you really needed it?

MITCHELL SOLOMON: Cam played great today. He is always a little guy kind of like me. He prides himself on playing hard and getting the loose balls, getting rebounds when we need him. He was definitely a spark and important to our team's success today.

Q. Kendall, how important was it for you guys to get back in transition defense?

KENDALL SMITH: Extremely important. That's one thing that Coach Mike preached. Told us it was going to be a game about transition defense, so our last couple days in practice we really worked on that and I think guys are really locked in. We really wanted to win tonight. Came in with the right mindset and the right attitude.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Congratulations. Good luck tomorrow. Questions for Coach?

Q. Mike, what level of desperation did you feel like having to win this game tonight meant?

MIKE BOYNTON: None. I don't operate that way and for people who have been around me, you know, I just control the things I can control. The only thing I was worried about for the last three days since we played on Saturday was getting my team ready to play today.

I know that if I can get those guys focused on a few things and they can come out and play hard and execute, we can win. You don't have to be desperate when you have success, you win and you let the rest of it tell its own story.

Q. I know it's hard to beat a team three times in one season especially a team like Kansas. What are your thoughts knowing they're up next with one day?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't know. I don't buy into that either. What would make it harder to beat somebody three times versus one? They're a really good team to beat, ever! So tomorrow's game will have no bearing on what the other two games were like. Between now and I guess about eighteen hours from now we've got to refresh our bodies and our minds and come out and try to be the hardest-playing team. It's who we are. It won't come into our minds third time around versus the first.

Q. Mike, do you feel like you guys have done enough to be an NCAA tournament team now?

MIKE BOYNTON: Yeah, I've said this since opening of

the season, I think -- I've been with these guys since June, I've watched them work and grow and develop and become a better team over the course of the season. We've obviously played our best basketball in the last two and a half weeks. Not that that she had mean more than the rest of the season, but I don't feel like we played poorly at any point in the year.

Obviously we have some losses, but they're all to teams that are by everybody's estimation going to be in the field. Got a lot of high-quality wins on the road away from home, and we play in the toughest league in America and now we have nine wins against that competition. We'll see.

Q. I wanted I wanted to follow up on, you said you haven't been worried about the NCAA tournament or getting that message across to those guys or qualifying, you've been worrying about that one game. What's the motivation, because it's March? We're in the tournament time. You've been here as an assistant coach and as a player. We're tournament time now, how do you get guys motivated if it's not hey we have to win to get to the tournament?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't know if you have to have a mindset of getting to the tournament to come out and play hard. We have to be who we are every day. We came here to win the big tournament and we'll worry about whatever is next week when next week comes. I know that we can only win the tournament if we won today. We couldn't win the tournament today. We had to beat Oklahoma today and now we've got to change our mind from Oklahoma and the team with tremendously dynamic point guard who dominates the ball a lot to a team that has a lot of different weapons and we have to figure out how to combat that somehow.

Q. It's not ideal to have your point guard foul out, but is it nice that he did play limited minutes with the more games on the horizon?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't know. I wasn't worried about it, I may have sat him too long to be honest and he got stiff and couldn't move as well on that defensive play, because he was telling me for about 3 minutes that he could play with 4 and he lasted about 8 seconds out there.

Those things happen. I have great confidence in Brandon Averette to come in and in a different way have an affect on our team and have success out there.

Q. Talk about the absence of Azubuike in tomorrow's game?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't know what you're talking.

Q. He was ruled out with a strain of his left MCL?

MIKE BOYNTON: News to me. I don't know when that was announced or determined, but I guess I will need to think about that. Obviously changes their team. He's a big factor in there for them, but those guys have a lot of really good players. The thing they do best is shoot the 3-point shot and he doesn't make any. Obviously we have a different approach if we don't have to worry about doubling a guy like that in the post, but you have to contend probably now with a fifth guy in there who can shoot threes.

Q. Mike, when you took Kendall out with his fourth foul, you guys -- I don't know how long he sat, 3, 4 minutes, 16-point lead went down to 6. When he fouled out you didn't evaporate like that. You extended the lead. What was different when Brandon came in for the second stretch?

MIKE BOYNTON: The thing that we got away from in the second half and early on and midway through was our defense took a step back, we didn't have the same level of intensity and they got some good looks from 3 and you can't do that. Brady Manek got one on the right side, and McGusty may have gotten one on the left side and we needed to refocus our defense in order to be able to close out the game.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we will see you tomorrow.

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Lon Kruger

Kristian Doolittle

Trae Young

Oklahoma Sooners

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THE MODERATOR: Okay, we are ready to begin with the Sooners of the University of Oklahoma, Coach Lon Kruger and his student-athletes are Kristian Doolittle and Trae Young. Coach, your thoughts on tonight's game?

LON KRUGER: Well, a game in which Oklahoma State did a good job, a little push there midway in the first half, both halves dictated for the most part on the rebounding side of it. We just didn't do the job we have to do against a good club in keeping them to one shot. Thought they were more aggressive in the first half when they popped a little bit of a lead and certainly when we made the comeback to get it within reach I thought rebounding, again, at that point was critical. We've got to do a much more physical job on the boards, but credit O-State and the job Mike has done. They certainly deserved the win.

Q. Kristian, can you address that issue, the rebounding? Because Mike Boynton came in and said we pride ourselves in playing harder than the opposition, and you guys were down at halftime some 15 or 16 and in the second half you came back and didn't gain any ground, actually went further in the hole in rebounding.

KRISTIAN DOOLITTLE: They were just bodying us on the boards. We were switching forward so they would have Cameron McGriff who is a big guy crashing the boards hard and being able to outjump some of us and the lack of boxing out was the main key. But we've got to move forward.

Q. Trae, did it feel out of sync defensively tonight, like you guys kind of took a while to arrive?

TRAE YOUNG: A little bit. We got back to playing. We played defense the second half, but you can't wait until the second half to beat a team like OSU. They're very well-coached. They play really hard. A lot of their points came off their rebounding. You can't get outrebounded like that and expect to win. I think that

was the main key for tonight.

Q. For Trae, your lob pass to Brady on a fast break which was blown up by Mitchell Solomon. You guys were on a 14-2 run or 12-2 run at that point and it had chipped away and made it a 4-point game. They actually went on a run right after that. Can you describe that play from your perspective and how that kind of stopped things, the momentum you guys built up there?

TRAE YOUNG: I mean, I saw his man step up and I tried to throw a lob and I don't know what happened after that. I don't know if there was contact or anything like that, but that's been working all year. Brady goes and gets those and I was surprised he didn't get that without -- I'm surprised he didn't get that one.

Q. Kristian, can you and Trae talk about the next four days? Most projections say you're still in the NCAA tournament, but you never know. What's the waiting game going to be like?

TRAE YOUNG: Instead of taking care of business we left it in the committee's hands. I think our resume speaks for itself. I think we had the toughest schedule in America.

We had to go to Wichita State and play there, USC, a really good team. We played some Pac-12 teams in Oregon and then we played in the toughest conference in America. I think our resume speaks for itself. Instead of us taking care of business we left it in their hands, but we'll see what happens.

KRISTIAN DOOLITTLE: When we get back to Norman we've got to focus in. We won't know who we are going to be playing until bracket comes out, so just focusing on ourselves. Just playing hard, building that mindset of we've got to -- it could be our last game. So just leave it all out on the floor.

Q. Trae, was this one of more physical games that you played?

TRAE YOUNG: No, I think all my games have been physical. I mean, it's just been different. I mean, all my games have been physical. I don't know how else to put it. I think that's the thing, all my past games have been physical. They're a very physical team. They're very well-coached, like I said. They pride themselves on playing hard and playing defense, and they did a

really good job tonight and credit to them.

Q. Trae and Kristian, if you both want to address it, the shooting, that's the other statistic or statistics that jump out besides rebounding. James and the other guys, just trouble getting the ball in the hole. How frustrating is that moving forward and what options were you trying to get to in shooting such a low percentage?

KRISTIAN DOOLITTLE: We made a focus to get to the hole, trying to get to the free throw line, but it's not necessarily that we were getting fouled. We just weren't able to finish the easy ones around the rim. We started the game off shooting threes, but they weren't falling, which we are capable of making. But it's just not smart to keep shooting threes when they're not going down. So you've got to do something else to get yourself going. So we just made a focus to try to get to the hole. We were able to make some, but we weren't able to make enough to make a difference in the game.

TRAЕ YOUNG: Like Kristian said, we were playing, shooting a lot of threes early on in the game. Just weren't making them. Like I said, we were very capable of doing that and making shots and when they're falling everybody loves it, but when they're not falling it's not good.

Good for us and good for our team. We're going to continue to play the same way. We've got to get back to making shots and doing that. You never know.

Q. For Trae, two months ago people were talking about you guys possibly being a No. 1 seed or in the mix for that and now it's in the hands of the committee. Is it kind of surreal that you guys are in this position considering where you were not that long ago?

TRAЕ YOUNG: I mean, I didn't expect to be in this position by my means. It's a lot different. I didn't expect us to be in that position. I obviously expected us to keep winning and hopefully have a chance to get a 1 seed or 2 seed or up in that range. But our body of work speaks for itself and I think we have a good shot of getting in just because of our resume and all of that. We'll have to see. Hopefully we'll get in.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we will let you go back to the locker room. Thanks for coming. Questions for Coach?

Q. Follow-up on the blow-up of the lob, the fast break lob from Mitchell Solomon. Did you sense anything at that point? That looked like a potential turning point in the game. You had such a good run going?

LON KRUGER: We had a good run going, cut into the lead and had the momentum and didn't finish that play, and as it turns out as you look back on it O-state then went on a run but then why did they back out. There plays that are going to change the momentum and that's one we didn't finish.

Q. Kind of along the lines of what I asked Trae, Lon, is it surreal that you guys have gone a different direction here down the stretch considering how well you were playing in January?

LON KRUGER: It's very disappointing. Obviously a very good stretch early, nonconference, early conference and then in February we just didn't play well at all. Actually played better the last couple weeks, better defensively, still not the way we need to play as well as we need to play, but, yeah, it's disappointing for sure.

Q. Lon, they had six players instead of three. How tough is it to defend a team that can do that? That has that kind of depth?

LON KRUGER: They've got a lot of guys that make shots. Again, they're playing well. They're doing a good job. Always the more guys that can make shots the more difficult it is to defend as a group.

I thought, again, decent job on the first attempt, but we can't give them that many second opportunities. Can't give any team let alone good teams that many second shots.

Q. Mike Boynton was talking earlier about they like to pride themselves on not being outworked or outworking the opponent. With the rebounding disparity, the offensive rebounding disparity, their sense of desperation like the only chance of continuing the season is to win here and win tomorrow and on and on. Do you feel like they played harder than you? Is that a fair characterization?

LON KRUGER: Anytime you get whipped on the boards like that. Certainly they were more aggressive. The stats speak for themselves in that way, for sure.

Q. Lon, very similar to that, in the locker room a couple of your guys mentioned lacking fight tonight maybe over the past month or so. Would you agree with that? If so, how do you manage that in March?

LON KRUGER: For sure. We've got to improve. Clearly rebounding is about competing and fighting, and yeah, we're not pleased with the job there at all.

Q. Do you feel comfortable on Sunday going into Sunday, you guys are going to be in the tournament?

LON KRUGER: Well, it's irrelevant, you know. We didn't take care of our business here, so we don't have any say in that at this point. But, again, when you look at the nonconference schedule and the number of quality wins, you know, that's what the committee will do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.