

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 8, 2018

Bill Self

Sviatoslav Mykhailiuk

Malik Newman

Kansas Jayhawks

Kansas - 82, Oklahoma State - 68

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Coach Self and the Kansas Jayhawks, his two student-athletes with us are Sviatoslav Mykhailiuk and Malik Newman. Coach, congratulations on your victory.

BILL SELF: Thank you. It was hard fought and obviously getting behind 10 early isn't what we had hoped for. We couldn't guard 'em early, but then when the game settled in, Malik got on a role and basically carried us offensively the first half and we played better defensively the second half and made some time and plays.

Q. Malik, how much do you think today's performance not just by yourself, but by the team in general was fueled by, as Coach put it, the beat down that you got by Oklahoma State the other day in Stillwater?

MALIK NEWMAN: I mean, it had a lot to do with it. We wanted to come out and be aggressive and play tough because the last two times we haven't played tough against those guys, so we wanted to come out, execute the game plan and be tough.

Q. For both players, we spent in the media the first two-thirds of the season talking about what this team couldn't do. What is this performance tonight, missing your big horse inside, what does it say about what you guys can do moving forward?

SVIATOSLAV MYKHAILIUK: I would say we just showed that we can play without Udoka, and we can win and he is a force for us whenever we want to and he can score, but right now he can't play and it's a little bit different team. We drove a lot more and we shot a little bit more threes and just a little bit different to play. We play a little bit faster and I would say a little bit more scrappy on defense, but it just changed us a little bit.

MALIK NEWMAN: Just to piggyback on what Svi said, the big fella, he's a key part to our team, but without him, like Svi said, we can play a little faster and be a



little scrappier and the guards, we are able to dictate the offense a little bit more instead of trying to play through the big fella a lot more.

Q. Malik, career high for you today. Just talk about your confidence level coming into this game and then as the game unfolded. Did your confidence grow?

MALIK NEWMAN: Yeah, I had high confidence coming into the game. Coach has been emphasizing that the goal is to win games in the postseason. I know I have to be good as well as the other guards so I just wanted to come out, have a lot of confidence in myself, be aggressive and once I saw my first couple shots go in, my confidence did actually grow a little bit more.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, Svi and Malik, congratulations on your victory. Questions for Coach Self?

Q. Bill, knowing Oklahoma State rebounds like they can, like they did last night, knowing that you're missing Udoka down low, how did you mitigate that? They only outrebounded you guys 36-33. How do you mitigate that?

BILL SELF: I don't think we rebounded the ball that well. I thought we did a much better job of blocking out today even though they had a couple of -- like Cameron McGriff got a nasty dunk to start and I think when he got hurt he missed a dunk on a follow. But other than that we blocked out good until the last six or seven minutes, and we don't go after the ball with two hands like men do a lot of times. So we've got to improve there.

But they're physical and they crash, you know, with four spots as well as anybody we played all year. So we were better even though I won't be too giddy about it, I think tables show we can definitely rebound better than what we did.

Q. You are up 1 at halftime, one guy's got 20. You've got a lot of guys capable of doing that, did you just need somebody to do that today?

BILL SELF: We've got guys capable, but we haven't -- other than Devonté we haven't had anybody do that recently. Svi has shown he can do it. Malik has had some good games, Lagerald hasn't scored the ball in the last couple of months like he was early in the

season. So even though we got four guys that can get 20 or 25 any night we haven't shown that we've got four guys here of late. Malik putting us on his back was huge.

To be down 10 early when they just kicked us last week and they were making everything it seems like and we're struggling. To have him put us on his back and get us to halftime with a 1-point lead and in the second half we just kind of pieced it together but that was big for us. Going forward without Udoka, especially, we're going to have to have some perimeter player play great, maybe two to play great to give us the best chance.

Q. Bill, thoughts on what the selection committee should do with your Alma Mater?

BILL SELF: Well, I'm biased, because they played us better than anybody has all year, twice, and I think they're without question a tournament team. I look at the things the pundits but up there, the blind resumes, whatever, surely how you have played down the stretch and those sorts of things matter. In our league if you go 6-4 down the stretch you've played well considering all ten games are monster games. So I don't think there is any doubt Mike and his team deserve to be in and I would be very disappointed if they're not.

Q. It seemed like the first couple months of the season every time we did a press conference it was about what this team didn't have, what they couldn't do, what they needed to do. Have they shown us all something down the stretch here the way they ran way in the league and played shorthanded today?

BILL SELF: Yeah, I think playing today, one, the sample size is too small with just today, with Udoka, we're going to have to play well tomorrow without him and if we're fortunate enough to win, Sunday, but for one day, yeah, we got 14 and 14 out of our other two bigs, which was a positive.

This team is easy to nitpick with because when we're good it's magnified in ways because we can shoot and move the ball. When we're bad it's magnified in ways because we don't do the things in grind-it-out games that a lot of teams do.

So I think it's fair to say that this team leaves you wanting more sometimes, but to your point, in this league to win the league by two games, they're probably not saying that about Texas Tech and West Virginia. They're probably saying that was a great year and sometimes I think we get spoiled on what our expectations are.

But I'm real proud of them. I think they've competed hard for the most part, but the reason there is frustration is because I think the things we visibly see are things that we can control that we be don't do better at and we've still got to tighten up a lot of stuff.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll let you go. Thank you.

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Mike Boynton

Cameron McGriff

Kendall Smith

Oklahoma State Cowboys

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THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Oklahoma State, Coach Mike Boynton. Student-athletes are Cameron McGriff and Kendall Smith. Coach, your thoughts on today's game?

MIKE BOYNTON: Thanks for being here. Obviously, tough day at the office for us in terms of shooting the basketball. Wasn't our best offensive day specifically in the second half and looking at 0 for 10 from the three is hard to win in the game especially now if you don't make any.

But we played against a No. 1 seed and those teams are usually projected to get to the Final Four as far as I understand how that goes. Beat that team twice. I'm proud of the guys and the effort they showed for the last 29, 30 hours, played two games and looking forward to seeing what's next for us.

Q. Kendall, I would like to get your assessment as this tournament ends today, Coach said you came here yesterday to win the Big 12 tournament. But as it ends today, what are your thoughts about the NCAA tournament and where you guys deserve to be?

KENDALL SMITH: I definitely think we're a tournament team. I think we've proven that all season long. We won a lot of big games on the road, and we won games at home when it counted. If you look at that and especially look at where they projected us to be in the beginning of the season and everything that we fought through and especially to see the kind of basketball that we're playing right now I definitely believe we should get in.

Q. Kendall, you go almost eight minutes there in the second half without scoring. From your standpoint, what went wrong there?

KENDALL SMITH: I don't know exactly what it was. Pretty sure we'll watch film and figure it out. Like Coach said, they're a No. 1 seed in the tournament.



So they're a really good basketball team and they were locked in defensively.

Q. Cameron, I wanted to get your take on Sima's first half. He was exposing them in the post, the weakness that they had, the player they were missing, and how that went way in the second half?

CAMERON McGRIFF: I feel like he did great. He brought us great minutes in the first half, and I really couldn't comment on the second half. As a team we may have gotten stagnant offensively, but it's not his fault.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you for coming. Questions for Coach?

Q. Mike, your thoughts on Sunday?

MIKE BOYNTON: Obviously, I think we've done what we're supposed to do. We play in the best league in America, without question. If people can get over the fact that they didn't think we would be any good in October, with all that was going on in our program and open their eyes and watch what we've done and the team that played the last two days and the last couple of weeks. Really over the course of the season we have done some really good work and I don't think it's a question of whether we deserve to play in the NCAA tournament.

Q. How much was fatigue a factor today in your defensive performance? Kansas got a lot of open shots first and second half. You had to play eighteen hours earlier. How much was fatigue a factor?

MIKE BOYNTON: I'm not going to say it didn't matter. We did just play and we played a really emotionally driven game. It was a big game for us, but we knew that coming in. We also put ourselves in that position to have to play in that scenario, and Kansas earned the right to have the extra day of rest by winning the league.

It certainly factored in, but at the end of the day Kansas just played better than we did for forty minutes today. They were really good. As good as they've been in probably a long time, at least from what I've been able to watch, both offensively. And they were as aggressive defensively as I've seen for a long time, too.

So credit to Coach Self and his kids for getting locked in and ready to play against us in what will be the second time in less than a week.

Q. What can you tell us about the game plan with them missing Azubuike inside? Going in, seemed a big first half. Looked like Mitchell was trying to get it going early in the second half?

MIKE BOYNTON: We tried to make a conscious effort to attack them in there. We know that without Azubuike they don't have as much shot-blocking presence. We feel comfortable with the bigs we have that can score in there. But we needed to have some other contributions from our other guys especially once you get down and they make a run it's hard to get keeping twos when they're getting threes. And they shot the ball really well today.

Q. What do you think of the new quadrant system and how do you think some of the wins you have can help you some Sunday?

MIKE BOYNTON: If that's what truly matters, if that's the reason they created it, to evaluate how you do against the best teams, teams that will essentially be playing in the tournament, then, again, it's not a question. We won at Kansas, at West Virginia and at Iowa State, and I'm not sure the last time anybody in our league did that all in one year. We also beat Texas Tech, who will be probably be a top 3 or 4 seed. We beat Florida State who is certainly going to be in the tournament. And beyond that, the losses we have, there is nobody who is not going to be in the dance that we lost to.

So sometimes I think people try to bring arbitrary numbers into the equation to justify, again, back in October they weren't supposed to be any good. So let's figure out how they can still not be any good even though we watched them play and they were pretty good. So let's talk about the nonconference strength of schedule.

Well, we scheduled a game against Pittsburgh two years ago when they were a top-25 team every year, and then they had the worst year in the history of their program. That is bad luck and I don't think they will ever have a bad of season ever again. We played a Charlotte team who is usually in the top 150. They fired their coach three games after we played them. They fired their coach. So those are things outside of your control that when we scheduled those games it was within mind that those are quality opponents that you're going to play and all of the sudden they turn into "bad games," "bad scheduling." Since when has Pittsburgh been a bad game to schedule? First time ever! We just happened to play them this year.

If you just look at our team, watch us play. We have beaten the best teams that we've played all year and that should count for something.

Q. Coach, you mentioned how everyone had to get over the fact they thought you were going to be bad early in the season. Why do you think that is and is part of it because the Big 12 is so good you got overshadowed a little bit?

MIKE BOYNTON: No, let's be realistic. We had a guy who came into our program after it was down for a couple of years who was essentially going to be the guy to save the program and resurrect it, and we had some good success with some really good players last year, and he left and they hired me and nobody in this room knew who I was. That's the truth. So you've got a program that looks like it's unstable, and you've got a guy who has never been a head coach before, coaching it. No way they're going to be good. No way they can win eight games in the Big 12. If they can finish 11th, they will do that. As opposed to, we finished with the 6th best record in the best league in America. And so instead of accepting that as truth because that's what happened, we say, well, they played Pittsburgh who lost every game in the ACC. Well, it's never going to happen again. So, again, it's confirmation bias in some ways that people just can't accept what they see because then it invalidates what they said a long time ago.

Humility, it's okay. We can be wrong every now and then. Our team competed really well. We dismissed two guys mid-year. We went the next game and beat a top-20 team on the road. NCAA tournament teams do that, figure out a way to go have success even with all the distractions, and we had a lot of them. There was a little investigation going on. We happened to be part of that. Our kids could have easily -- they had every reason in the world not to compete the way they did. It goes to show the character of the people in that locker room, and I'm really proud to be their coach.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we will let you go. Thank you very much.