

MEN'S GAME 5
March 14, 2019

Buffalo - 82
Akron - 46



KEN MATHER: We're going to go ahead and let Head Coach John Groce open with a statement, and then we'll take questions for Loren Christian Jackson and also Channel Banks.

COACH GROCE: Appreciate it. Three thoughts, you know, on the game. One is obviously we didn't play very well. They played terrific. Usually when you get, you know, a score with that type of disparity, that's the case. So give them certainly a lot of credit. I thought they played really, really well.

The second thought, I certainly don't mean this in a derogatory way, we had three good guys today with the crew, but it was just a weird half for our players and I thought for Buffalo's players at all. This is the first game I've ever coached I believe in my career with two players with four fouls and two players with three fouls at halftime and I thought it really disrupted some of the rhythm. Obviously Buffalo had 12 fouls as well, so the game was called that way, which again we had a great crew. I know all three, they do a great job.

And then all of a sudden the second half it was three fouls on one team and six fouls. I just think if you're a player -- now, again that wasn't worth 35 to 40 points, okay, so I don't want to come across that way. But I think if you're a player, I think it's hard to kind of figure that out during the course of the game and I thought it disrupted the rhythm really for both teams and the game itself.

And then thirdly, even with as poorly as we played, I felt like going into the game, if we could hold them under a point per possession, that we would be right there. And we did that, because there were a lot of possessions during the game, but our offense was just, you know, unfortunately anemic. Low assist numbers, low field goal numbers, low percentage shooting numbers. Give buffalo a lot of credit for that, I thought they were really disruptive defensively and really got into passing lanes and put great pressure on the basketball.

And then the second half, we finally start the second half with a little bit of rhythm on offense and we weren't able to get stops that we needed to really cut into that lead. I thought the first four minutes of the second half were going to be critical to figure out whether this thing was going to be on or not down the stretch. Our offense was better all of a sudden with ball movement and shot making. And then in the first half we keep them off the backboard at 16 out of 20 on the defensive backboard, which is terrific against them, and then they get four offensive rebounds in the first four minutes of the second half. So we flipped it there for the first four, five minutes. I thought once we got through those four, five minutes and weren't able to make a dent in it like we needed to, we knew it was going to be even more of a

challenge down the stretch to climb back into the game.

But again, give Buffalo credit, they do a great job. They've got really good players, they're well balanced at both ends of the floor and that's a really good basketball team that we played today.

Q. For both players, at the end of the season, can you define why it's such a great disparity in production and execution, whatever, home and on the road? It's really amazing to see how well you play at home and then to see sometimes how you struggle on the road. Is there anything with you guys or is it something you can't put a finger on? Loaner?

LOREN CRISTIAN JACKSON: Just got to be better.

CHANNEL BANKS: I agree with that, we've just got to be better on the road.

Q. This question's for either player. What in particular did UB do to disrupt the defensive flow in the first half?

CHANNEL BANKS: We weren't moving, number one. Our offense was stagnant and we just couldn't get a rhythm as far as making shots. Our ball movement wasn't good, we didn't get that many open shots so that was our struggle/

KEN MATHER: Loren, anything to add?

LOREN CRISTIAN JACKSON: No, sir.

Q. Obviously you guys offensively all season had your -- it was rocky. Do you feel like you got -- I mean, what do you have to do, you know, going forward to fix that? Do you have any idea at this point?

LOREN CRISTIAN JACKSON: We just got to get better, so we've got to go in and get better, that's all. Our leadership has got to be better and that's on me, so we got to go in and get better.

KEN MATHER: Channel, anything to add?

CHANNEL BANKS: No. We've got to get better. It's the offseason now so it's time to put together what we didn't have this year and bring it next year.

Q. I'll hit you with the same thing, Coach. Is there anything you can kind of point to, home/road? Really play so well at home.

COACH GROCE: I think I've said this before, Elton. There's a difference between playing well and getting over the hump and finishing out the game. So if that's what you're alluding

to, we do need to get better at that.

But we've got the ball out baseline out of bounds at Nevada. They're pretty good team. 3-point game, we get a stop, we're going to the other end for a chance to win it. We lost to Clemson, who's not bad, 72-69. We had this same team that you just watched twice in one-possession games on the road the last two times we played at Buffalo.

So I think we have to be very careful of saying we didn't play well. There's a difference. We've got to have the toughness. I think we've got to be a little tougher mentally to get over the hump and maybe have a chance.

Obviously what you're talking about is outcomes, you know. We did play some good basketball on the road, we just didn't finish like we needed to finish in some of those situations and that's the next step certainly for our team.

Obviously I look at where we were at in year one in that regard to where we're at now and we've clearly improved and gotten better from that standpoint. We've got to find a way to get over that hump and be better executing both offensively and defensively, you know, to finish out some games.

I'm hoping with the experience of this team that we went through this year as well as some things that, you know, we'll have to look at from a coaching perspective how we can help them more. But I'm confident. We took several -- my gosh, several steps this year in a lot of areas, and I think playing well on the road was a lot -- we made a lot of steps there, but we've got to try to finish them out. I think that's what you're talking about, you're talking about outcomes.

Q. I'll ask you the same thing I did the players, what do you think you can -- do you think you have the shooters and they just -- or what do you think you can do to --

COACH GROCE: Yeah, that's a great question. I thought that -- I thought Channel was, you know, pretty close there.

The one thing I'll say is certainly give Buffalo's defense credit. I mean, they're No. 1 overall in league games. We were 23rd in the country coming into the day defensively and I think they were inside the top-30, so they're pretty good on defense.

They were disruptive today. I thought they got in passing lanes, I thought they created a lot of that where we were stagnant, as he was talking about. And then obviously shot making, we're going to look at all of it like we always do in terms of how we can get better. Everybody has a part in it.

I appreciate Cristian saying "it's on me." That's probably what your quarterback and point guard should say, but it's really not, it's on everybody. We've all got to figure out a way to help that end of the floor without sacrificing what we built defensively.

Some of those games that we played on the road that Elton's alluding to last year, all of them look like that, okay? So we've come a long way. We've got to figure out how to get over that hump, and the last thing we want to do is sacrifice where we're at defensively right now. That obviously has been a real calling card for us. Today we put so much pressure on our defense, like I say, we actually got our number that we needed, but we need to be exceptional on that end of the floor because our discussion here about our offense just was anemic. Part of it was some things that we can control, I'm sure we'll see that when we watch the film, and part of it was Buffalo's prowess on defense.

Q. Does sometimes the concentration on defense sort of, I don't know, take away from --

COACH GROCE: I've been asked that question a lot and I think it's a really logical question. I do, I think it's a great question.

I think as we continue to have more and more depth, I thought that was a factor today, too. Obviously both teams were accumulating fouls pretty heavily in the first half. I thought their depth was better able to absorb that than ours was. But, you know, we're a little bit deeper than we were last year and I think moving forward we'll be even more -- we'll have even more depth.

So part of that, to answer your question, it does take a great deal of effort, concentration and focus to play defense like we have the majority of the year that consistently, but I'm one of those guys that believes you can do both. I've seen both done before, and we've got to have a roster of guys that believe that and we've got to get better offensively. As those guys said, we've got to improve. It's shot making, it's not taking care of the ball.

That's what's the oddest thing, you know. Talking to a colleague the other day, you look at our turnover numbers, we don't turn the ball over. We make free throws from a free throw percentage standpoint. You know, we've just got to execute a little bit better, got to make shots a little bit better. You know, got to continue to make sure what we're doing fits our players on that end of the floor.

But I like, certainly, the improvements that we've made, and the defensive disposition that our program has developed I think will serve us well and allow us to move forward.

KEN MATHER: Thank you for your time.

COACH GROCE: Thank you.