

March 15, 2014



Louisville: 71
UConn: 61

An interview with:

LOUISVILLE

THE MODERATOR: We'll transition immediately to the Louisville Cardinals, head coach Rick Pitino, student athletes Russ Smith and Montrezl Harrell. Coach, your comments on today's game.

COACH PITINO: We're super excited to win our third straight championship, to win a regular season championship and a tournament championship back-to-back is not easy. You have to have special players and these two epitomize exactly that. We played great defense tonight for most of the night. We didn't have it offensively. You general can tell when we play well because we have 17 to 25 assists. We weren't passing the ball like we have been. We had a great run in February, a great run in March and everybody knows about the press and everybody knows about talent, but what's made us special is our passing and tonight we didn't have the passing, the passing wasn't there.

That was the greatest thing I told the guys in winning the championship. You learned the most valuable lesson why you didn't click for forty minutes offensively because the passing wasn't there with only 11 assists. But these two guys were spectacular, Montrezl is similar to Gorgui, he came in a very good athlete and he will leave us someday as a very good basketball because his passing and shooting skills may be the smartest player on the team in terms of a scouting report, certainly no words to describe Russ Smith. He just is having a spectacular senior year.

Q. Andy Katz said on TV that you said you thought you guys deserved a 1 seed. Is that what you said and do you think it will happen?

COACH PITINO: Well, I judge it from the eye test. Now, understand something, every analyst has an agenda, every coach has an agenda. I think it because I was there at SMU in the ugliest environment in 39 years, I was there at Cincinnati in the most hostile environment. I've been there with a run through March, I know what the guys have been through.

Do I think we should be, yes, do I think we will be, no. That being said, if you ask me who is the best college basketball player in America, I would say Russ Smith if you ask me who is the best power forward I would say Montrezl Harrell, so I have an extremely biased opinion, but I'm impressed with our guys and what they have done to win a regular season, the conference tournament, the way we have done it in the fashion we have done it fits the eye test. I can't talk about the strength of the league. If you want to blame anybody blame football, don't blame us.

Q. Coach, what is it that you tell your team going into March for them to get on high street because y'all have done it the past two years, the beginning or middle of February you all get hot and carry it into March and on into April.

COACH PITINO: Well, I think it's recruiting quality people, and then the older guys convinced Terry Rozier and Chris Jones, look at the transformation in Chris Jones in less than a year from buying into what Louisville is all about. It's all about winning, playing for the name on the front and we always take the philosophy if you play for the name on the front the name on the back gets rewarded. That's been our theme. I think our guys understand it. We did not pass the ball well tonight but outside of that, we understand why you play the game and we play extremely hard for all the right reasons, and Russ comes in and immediately grabs a freshman and I remember going back two years ago in the Big East Championship, he's screaming at me from the foul line, "I've never won a championship, I've never

won a championship!" Now look at him, not only does he have multiple MVP's, multiple College All-Americans, National Championship, back-to-back final fours, his legacy is pretty incredible, all coming from a guy who just scored a lot of points in high school, but didn't win anything, didn't even win a scratch ticket.

Q. Rick, you won these three games by a total of 100 points, and there was a time-out with will 11 minutes left up by 17 and you are laying into your guys pretty hard. Tim Henderson talked about how guys are afraid of getting screamed at when you are up 50 or 60 points. What is that attitude and what are you trying to convey?

COACH PITINO: I'm not personalizing my voice, I'm telling them that regardless of the score, the game must be played a certain way because if we would have passed the ball tonight like we did in a close, hard-fought game we would have lost the game. So you're preparing and trying to be fundamentally sound all the time. It's not a -- like I told Russ, it was one on four and I said let's take the ball out and run our back screen action and use clock. We weren't going to lose that game but I want our guys if we're in a tight game to understand what we take and don't take.

Q. Why do you think your teams tend to peak this time of the year?

COACH PITINO: I think it's a system of recruiting the right people. It takes a while to do that, by the way. My best team did not get to a Final Four, got to an Elite Eight, because -- even with the team that lost to Moorehead State totally bought into the name on the front. These guys buy into it totally and the team that lost in the Elite Eight didn't, that's why we got beat by a good Michigan State team.

So it's our philosophy, we know we can lose, we respect everybody, we are a humble group, these guys buy into that name on the front. That's why I'm so hard on them in the time outs, because they didn't pass the ball tonight. Luke Hancock was off, wasn't playing well. He took bad shots to try and play well rather than pass the ball, use his teammates, get the ball back, he would have had a good night so even the wise people learned a valuable lesson tonight.

Q. Coach, you have had a Hall of Fame career, you flirted in 2011 with coaching the

Puerto Rican team. Seeing your future coaching the National Team, U.S. National Team or another team to further your trophy case?

COACH PITINO: I wanted to coach the Puerto Rican national team very much. Unfortunately they changed the date as well as the place. It was supposed to be played in Puerto Rico and they moved it to Brazil and they changed the date to when school started. I was looking forward to it because it was something I had not done. If the situation arises again and they would like to have me, I would love to do it.

Q. Russ, besides the national championships, the conference championships, and the individual awards, what else do you feel like you have accomplished during your four years at Louisville?

RUSS SMITH: I feel like I've accomplished meeting a bunch of new people, making a lot of connections, getting an education, and living out a college athlete's life. I have a lot of fun being Louisville and it's probably one of the best places ever. I always invite my friends to come and just stay with me.

Just the whole college experience is fun and my teammates. Besides the individual awards and the accolades, I remember I went through that whole time last year about what I wanted to do, even though I had almost done everything a college athlete on the court could have done. There was some things I was missing, being a senior on campus, my teammates, helping new freshmen grow so a bunch of maturity points that I wanted to get better in helped me a lot.

Q. Montrezl, you guys have won, starting with SMU, the last five games, averaging 30 per game. What have you guys done to accomplish this stretch?

MONTREZL HARRELL: We take it one game at a time and we buy into Coach's game plan. We try to focus on the defensive end because we know if we get a defensive start that's going to lead to our offensive break. Look at our scouting report, paying attention to every little thing to win the game.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you very much.

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THE MODERATOR: We can get started with UConn, head coach, Kevin Ollie, student athletes Shabazz Napier and DeAndre Daniels. Coach?

COACH OLLIE: The first half we came out and established ourselves, we got down about 14 and anytime you spot a team like Louisville 14 points it's hard to come back. We did some good things in the second half. I was proud of our guys that we kept fighting. Now we go into the next tournament. We want to win a national championship. I still believe in this team, we got to clean things up but I like our execution in the second half and we got to show heart and compete and that's what I like and hopefully it carries over to the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Shabazz, seemed like you had a difficult time doing what getting things done on offense, was it just that you couldn't find your rhythm?

SHABAZZ NAPIER: The first half we didn't play as well as we should have, we didn't move the ball the right way, we didn't knock down open shots. We just didn't find our rhythm.

They did play great defense but once we got into the middle, guys were open for shots and we couldn't knock 'em down and we gave up too much offensive rebounds in the beginning of the game. It took away from our offense.

Q. Shabazz, you guys went 3-0 against Memphis, Louisville went 3-0 against you, all of the teams that have been ranked, what do you make of that?

SHABAZZ NAPIER: Just competitive games. Sometimes it goes that way. The saying is you can't beat a team three times in a row but at the end of the day it's anybody's game. It's a new day. They came out and established what they were doing and we wasn't able to do what we wanted to do offensively and defensively, but credit to Louisville they played great.

Q. Kevin, I know you're not into moral victories, but playing so much better than you did a week ago. You take some positives out of that obviously and you didn't let it get away from you like it did last week?

COACH OLLIE: No, I'm not into moral victories, but I did like how we responded the second half, just with the ball movement we had, getting Amida going, he had 14 points, most of them came in the second half. He started to establish himself. That's how you beat the zone, you get it at the high post and you make plays. Our guards started passing it in there and we started making shots. That's what we're going to need to do going forward so we will be able to play with a match-up zone. You never know what's going to happen in the NCAA Tournament. Every coach comes with something new. I thought our ball was great and we started making shoots. We got 10 assists. Six in the second half, we got four in the first half, and that's improvement. We're going to go back and see who we going to play on Sunday. Then my coaching staff is going to have a great game plan and I know our guys are going to follow it and we're going to go deep into this tournament. That's our goal.

Q. What was the difference between last week and today?

COACH OLLIE: They won the game. If you win by 10 or lose by -- you win the game. Wasn't no difference. We had that game by 7 at Louisville and didn't get it done. It's a game of runs. We try to keep them at bay as much as possible but at the end of the day you gotta

rebound and can't give up 16 offensive rebounds and expect to win. I thought our defense was great in the second half where we held them down to 32% and shot 50%. That's something we are going to look at on the tape and try to keep improving. I liked the ball movement and the competitive spirit. We could have gave in, but this team is not like that. We fought all year and I think they're going to fight in the NCAA Tournament. I'm proud of them. We didn't come down here just to win a semifinals game. We came down here to win a championship. It didn't happen but I think our guys gave it their all and they play with their hearts and that's all I ask of these guys each and every day.

Q. Kevin, anything can happen over the next few weeks, I know you're only concerned about your own team but does it seem like Louisville is playing better than anyone else in the country at this point?

COACH OLLIE: Yeah, Louisville is playing great basketball. They won the championship last year, they went to the Final Four the year before, and they got pretty much their whole team back. They're an experienced bunch, they play hard and they're well coached. But you know how this tournament is one game elimination, somebody can get hot and hopefully that team will be us and we will get hot and play together.

Q. How do you guys feel heading into Selection Sunday and the tournament about how you're playing?

DeANDREA DANIELS: Well, we feel good just coming in, how we battled this the second half. We played the right way and shared the ball and we played UConn basketball. It's time to put it behind and you say move forward and prepare for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Shabazz, do you think you guys got better from a week ago to -- through the three games this week?

SHABAZZ NAPIER: Yeah, I think there is always room for improvement. After you lose by 30 points you got to look at yourself and figure out how can you help the team. I think we definitely played well against Memphis and we played well against a Cincinnati team but definitely we're improving as a team and we just got to get over that hump. Once we do, I think we should be fine.

Q. Shabazz, after not being allowed to play in the NCAA Tournament or any postseason last season, how much have you been look forward to Selection Sunday and seeing UConn on television tomorrow night?

SHABAZZ NAPIER: I really haven't had time to look for it. Now I do since I'm -- tomorrow is Sunday, but I'm definitely happy. It's a great thing to hopefully see your name being called and with your teammates and see everybody smiling and knowing that we have a chance at hoisting another trophy, but I haven't thought about it because I was thinking about the games ahead of myself. Now since we just finished this one, you know, we have time to look at it.

Q. Coach, on your roster you have four players that were not born in the United States and one that's with Puerto Rican descent. Do you look for players that are maybe overlooked in other teams?

COACH OLLIE: You know, I look at basketball players. I don't really care about their descent, I want them to play for UConn and play with pride and bleed Husky blue. Really doesn't matter to me as long as they play hard and defend well, I don't care where they come from. We do look at first and foremost character and we look at guys that understand team work and we look for guys that don't mind rooting for their teammates.

After that, you know, we let their talent speak for themselves. But they gotta play the right way. If they are not playing the right way, they're not going to play and we're going to get somebody else.

Q. Kevin, this is the last time you will play Louisville for the foreseeable future. Are you disappointed? Would you like another shot at them? They have had your number a little bit lately.

COACH OLLIE: I just play who is on the schedule. We would have liked to have won this championship game but if Memphis was in the championship game, don't matter to me. I just make sure we worry about us and that's our main goal. I wish them the best of luck in the ACC and this American conference is going to be great. I like what Tulsa is doing, they made it into the NCAA Tournament and congratulations to Danny Manning and this conference is going to be great. We are going to continue to hopefully be at the top

of this league and keep it going. We are just going to play the right way and hopefully have everybody come in and do the same thing and make this league very viable, but I like what Memphis is doing and SMU is doing and this conference is going to be great.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

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