

# State Farm Champions Classic: Kansas vs. Michigan State

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

**Kansas Jayhawks**

**Bill Self**

**Ochai Agbaji**

**Remy Martin**

Press Conference



Kansas - 87, Michigan State - 74

**Q. Ochai, what to you make of tonight? Welcome back to college basketball.**

OCHAI AGBAJI: Yeah. It was a lot of fun, a great way to start off the season, but I can only just thank my teammates. They found me around the court, found me for lobs and stuff, found me out in transition, so I can only thank them.

**Q. Did it feel different for you, just being a veteran senior? This is year two now.**

OCHAI AGBAJI: Yeah, a little bit. Just leading my team, willing my team. They all trusted me. They kept talking to me, keeping me confident throughout the game so it was just great knowing that they had my back out there.

**Q. Having as much speed as you guys have now, what's that do for you as far as just trying to make it in the year?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: I would say on the offensive end just getting downhill, getting paint touches, and driving and kicking. I think that's something we can point to a lot.

And defensively we got guards that can pick up full, distract their point guard, and just get their rhythm from their offense out of sync.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

OCHAI AGBAJI: I really, coming into this year, I didn't try to put too much pressure on myself. Like I said, like I'm always going to keep saying I just relied on my teammates. They know my abilities. They have seen me in practice. They know how hard I work and the positive attitude I come in with every single day to practice, just willing to get

better. So I'm always going to give it to them.

**Q. Remy, what does it mean for the team to win a game against an opponent like Michigan State on opening night?**

REMY MARTIN: It means a lot. It means a lot. We know that we still have, it's a long season. We got a lot of games left. Michigan State was a great first matchup. It's exciting to be out there and play in front of fans and have fun and it was extremely fun, and even though it's Michigan State, it's still one win and we still got to get better and we still got to focus on the next game.

**Q. What did you do differently to have more of an impact in the second half?**

REMY MARTIN: Just be more aggressive. My team was telling me, Hey, we need you. We need you to get going. Ochai was going already, just to help him, help him help the team, and then when I'm aggressive and I touch the paint and just be more aggressive in general, it opens up everything for everybody else.

And I was just happy that my teammates stuck with me throughout the whole thing. Even coach was telling me, Let's get going. And in the second half just kind of changed my mindset and started to go down hill.

**Q. Ochai, was this a reflection of what you did through the summer with testing the waters? You just look so much more confident with what you're doing.**

OCHAI AGBAJI: Yeah, I would say that, just getting a lot of, getting more confidence in my game and everything, with my game, my shot, my handle, different stuff, play-making decisions. But I would say, yeah, it's a result of that.

**Q. Remy, you made an adjustment for you coming to new program. Do you feel comfortable to turn yourself loose and play the way you played at Arizona State or do you still feel like have you some figuring out to do?**

REMY MARTIN: I don't put too much thought into it. I just

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go out there and play my game. I think in the first half nothing was opening up for me. Instead of going out and taking it, I kind of settled.

But usually I go out there and play my game. These guys want me to play how I play. Obviously I have a little bit of better players around so I don't have to do too much. They make my job easier.

I came here to win. I didn't come here to score points. I didn't come here to be the face. It didn't matter to me. I just came here to win and I'm just extremely happy to get the first win and keep it going.

But these guys want me to play my game and everybody's going to have their night and I'm happy it was Ochai's night and we just got to keep going and keep playing.

**Q. Did you know he had that kind of night in him?**

REMY MARTIN: Yeah, man, I practice with this guy all the time and the stuff he does at practice, he dunks and hits shots like that, and he deserves it. He puts in the work. And he could have a night like that every night. He was hitting shots, getting steals, dunking. The crowd was into it.

He's just a player, man, and he's capable of doing that every night and the scary thing is we have five guys that can do that.

**Q. Ochai, was that kind of assertiveness that you had tonight, did you have that a couple years ago?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: No. I mean, I -- obviously not. Spurts, yeah, I feel like I would have for like a two-minute spurt where I would get going and get aggressive, but now it's just like picking my spots on the court throughout the game, finding my spots around the court. Things have changed and evolved over time.

**Q. Ochai, some people around the Kansas program thought you were gone, off to the NBA. How close were you and what ultimately, why did you decide to come back?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: For this. To be on this stage, be in this moment, leading my team, willing my team to a win, know that my team has the utmost confidence in me. I think that's why I chose to come back and actually do something with this season.

**Q. How close were you to being gone?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: Really close, but I mean, I made the right

decision. I know I did.

**Q. What was the message you got from coach not starting in the exhibition game?**

REMY MARTIN: No message. That was the message, not starting. I wasn't doing my part. I needed to do a lot better at practice. And coach pushes me. He wants me to be the best I could be and I'm meeting the challenge. I came here for that reason, to get better as a basketball player, and he's pushing me to be that every day and I'm happy. I love the group. I love him. I love the Kansas culture and I'm bought in and I just want to win.

**Q. Remy, I was going to ask you about preparing for Walker. Obviously there wasn't any tape on Michigan State. How did you prep for him and what was the difference between him and Hoggard at the point?**

REMY MARTIN: Well, we know from where he was, he could score. He's a scorer. He's capable of scoring and we did a great job in film knowing their sets. We knew Michigan State likes to run their offense in a flow and our job was kind of keep them out of their flow and to deny certain things, cut down certain things, and just to kind of get them off their offensive.

The point guard, when we play you get that out, it just ruins everything. So we knew that they had great point guards and great players, but we wanted to make them work a little bit harder on the offensive end.

**Q. Can you both just assess Zach and Bobby and KJ tonight, the freshmen?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: They did what we asked them to do, come in, bring energy, make plays, whether that be scoring or rebounding or blocking shots. So we, that's, they did exactly what we asked them to do.

REMY MARTIN: Those guys, man, they put in the work as well. That's what a team is. When I'm not going in in the first half and I'm not playing as well, guys like J-Cole and Bobby at my position go in and change the game, attack the paint. J-Cole hit a three and then got a charge. Man, that's a team right there. That's something that we want is that next man up. If I'm not playing well the next man up. So I'm happy that those guys were able to do that and then I changed my mindset in the second half and it turned out better.

**Q. Did either of you have a favorite freshman moment from any of those guys?**

OCHAI AGBAJI: I would say -- you said Bobby. Bobby's



and one, Zach's three, and then KJ's block.

REMY MARTIN: That was momentum going into the second half.

**Q. When you're running the team now, are you much more judicious about getting other people touches maybe than you were a year ago just because of people that are around you?**

REMY MARTIN: Yeah, a hundred percent. And I will always, I was cautious, a bit. I think that maybe the place that I was maybe the best play was for me to go.

But now Ochai has a hot hand, get him the ball. Dave, he's sealing, give it to him and get out of the way because those guys can do those things and my job as point guard is to win basketball games. It definitely is a change of mind set, but again, they want me to be myself and they want me to be aggressive and I think when I do that I just try to make the best play possible, whether it's for me to score or it's a drop off to Dave or kickout. So I just, my mindset stays the same, just better reads.

**Q. Now that we got this whole brave new world of NIL. I'm curious, both of you have experienced NCAA basketball before and after, and what's the difference this year and how has it been kind of balancing that?**

REMY MARTIN: You know, it was funny, and I know Ochai is on, everybody's kind of on the same mindset that we're not too worried about it, honestly. We're just here to play basketball. Our mindset is everybody has goal to make it to the NBA, right, and I think that our mindset is don't worry about that, don't worry about the money now. Worry about putting in the work now when getting the bigger money, right?

And obviously, I'm very grateful for the opportunities. I'm very grateful to have a car. But we always keep the main thing the main thing and that's to win basketball games for KU and hopefully make our dreams come true.

OCHAI AGBAJI: I would say the same thing as him. None of that really comes if you don't win or succeed, so we kind of see it as that and everyone's really mindful of that. Freshmen coming in, newcomers coming in are very mindful of that, so that's good.

**Q. What do you make of Ochai?**

BILL SELF: Yeah, he was terrific tonight. He's had some big games in the past, but I don't know if he's had a bigger game on a bigger stage and the bright lights and he had a lot of individuals labor from a starting standpoint offensively

and he just basically carried us. So I was really happy for him and he was really good.

**Q. In a game-like setting against such a high-caliber opponent, what was it like to see the speed on the floor?**

BILL SELF: I don't really notice. I thought they looked faster than us in transition.

But I do think that we have some individuals that we ran through a couple of passes and got a couple of bunnies and those are plays that we probably haven't been making consistently in the last couple years with our speed. We're definitely faster and when we go to the bench we're probably faster than we are with our starters, so that was encouraging to see.

I think Bobby and Joseph will really add a lot of that before it's all said and done.

**Q. While Ochai had a star performance, what can you say about the level of depth that you saw out there from your team tonight?**

BILL SELF: Well, we don't know what we're doing yet. That's probably pretty evident. We're hard to scout because nobody knows what we're doing. So we don't even know.

But I thought Zach Clemence was terrific, seven points and in four minutes. KJ Adams was great the second half. He made some unbelievable great hustle plays. And I thought Bobby was really good. So that was because Joseph didn't get a chance to do much and Jalen Coleman-Lands, he made a big shot early and he's not quite healthy yet. But I was encouraged by our bench. I really was.

**Q. You played a lot of guys tonight. Does that speak to your depth, and how long will you do that for?**

BILL SELF: I don't think we're going to play 11 guys a game for the whole season but depending upon circumstances we might could. When Jalen comes back that's going to knock somebody's minutes down, obviously.

But I'm still trying to figure out what our best combinations are and what looks best together and those things. But the team that we put out there today was too small to be real competitive over a course of time. We got to get J-Wil out there and then I think we'll look more like what we're capable of looking like.

**Q. With Ochai, how difficult was it maybe earlier in his career to get him to be assertive and what's that**

## **process kind of played out like?**

BILL SELF: I actually thought last year towards the end he was much more assertive. You got to understand, he wasn't recruited. He was ranked 300 when we recruited him or whatever, and we weren't going to play him. So you don't think guys that aren't good enough to play as a freshman are automatically going to be pros.

But he had a, he finished strong his freshman year and had a pretty good sophomore year. Last year he was better. But there's still another step that he has to take in order to be an elite player and that is he's got to become assassin and, from a confidence level and everything, and he certainly did that tonight.

## **Q. What's your impression of Max Christie, the freshman?**

BILL SELF: I don't really know much about Max, but watching him on tape and seeing him on the circuit, he's long, he's going to get stronger. I don't know if he's pure, but it looks pure to me on tape, really shoots the ball, and he'll get tougher and harder just by being in the program.

But I think he'll be one of the best freshmen in the country. He may not have had his best night tonight. I don't know what he did statistically, but he's going to be a guy that I would think would be about as good as any freshman in the Big Ten.

## **Q. What does it mean to open the season with a win against a quality opponent like this?**

BILL SELF: I don't think this game means a ton in February. I don't think -- it's too early in the season. There's two or three seasons before we even get to the post-season.

But I do think it's one of those games that you look back and you start adding good and bad, and this is definitely a mark in the good space for us. It's not a game that hurts you if you lose, but it's a game that can help you if you win.

But we can't be happy with winning. We got to get better. I don't know my team that well yet and I don't think Tom knows his team that well yet, but that's what this game's for so we can get to do that.

But it's a good feather in our cap. Any time you play Michigan State or compete in this little, this Classic, a win is a very positive thing.

## **Q. Remy looked much more comfortable in the second half. How would you chronicle his transition right now**

## **from one system to another?**

BILL SELF: I think he's doing well. I haven't quite figured Remy out, and I don't mean that in a negative way. He does some things. He doesn't even take a shot, doesn't look at the basket the first half. He doesn't get to the paint, and then so second half we just tried to spread it so we could just get him in there. He's a guy that gives energy and he plays with personality, so he's going to be a big bonus for us in that regard.

But if he can get 15 a game the way we play, it's going to be a huge, huge bonus for us.

## **Q. You guys went smaller lineup with Jalen out (no audio.)**

BILL SELF: Going smaller now? Oh, I have no idea what we're doing.

But Jalen's going to play a lot.

## **Q. Tonight, though, how do you think that played out?**

BILL SELF: I thought it helped us in many ways, but rebounding it hurt us. I thought they kicked us pretty good the first half on the glass, but we were much better the second half. To me, that's the biggest negative to us playing that small would be rebounding the ball.

## **Q. Speaking about Remy, what is your presumption with the transfer portal that you get somebody and they automatically make your team better? There is a relationship learning curve when you get these guys in. How does that evolve as a coach? It is relatively new, adding these guys and adjusting them.**

BILL SELF: I actually think that people believing teams are better just because they got a good player in another program, is not fair to think that immediately, although it will play out to be that way.

I've always thought, in my opinion, freshmen that you recruit are being taught by their high school coach fundamentals. It's basically a preparation for the next level regardless of where you go and you're not, from a scheme standpoint or from a philosophy standpoint or a culture standpoint, they're not so entrenched that they don't know what's getting ready to happen next. They're open to it.

Then when you get to college you start teaching the schemes and the philosophy and things like that. And Remy's been a guy that is used to having the ball in his hands and I'm trying to get it out of his hands more. So it is an adjustment. He's used to passing the wing and going



back and getting it, and there's nothing wrong with that, nothing wrong at all. It's just different than how we want to do it.

So I don't think he's even remotely comfortable playing the way we want to play and I don't think he can see yet how he can benefit from playing the way we want to play even though I thought he did a really nice job the second half tonight.

**Q. Harris plays the second most minutes tonight. Poise, what has he showed you, especially when you go small?**

BILL SELF: Well, he's our point guard, so he's, he gets four assists and no turnovers and three steals or whatever, he actually got in there, made some better plays offensively, and then their big guy wiped out a couple of them. But he's kind of like the security blanket for us.

**Q. Walks, taking charges, how do you think the team did defensively?**

BILL SELF: I thought we -- KJ made a good play to end the half. I thought we hustled. I don't know that we got on the floor. I don't know, they come away with two loose balls because Ochai didn't get on the floor. He reached for them. There's things like that we got to get better at.

But I thought Ochai did okay so we'll let that slide. But we need to get more 50/50 balls. We definitely do.

**Q. Do you think Mitch's minutes and then Cam not playing, do those go hand in hand a little bit?**

BILL SELF: Well, it's not my decision. It was his decision. Cam wants to redshirt and I think it's a good idea because at least it gives us a veteran guy coming back next year, and Zach's kind of coming.

But Mitch's minutes, the only reason he didn't play as many minutes tonight is because of fouls.

**Q. What did you get from him, though?**

BILL SELF: I thought Mitch played pretty well. He just fouled a lot. But I thought he gave us some good minutes.

**Q. We talked before about looking at Walker in the portal and how did you kind of scout him based on that scheme? Kind of what you were talking about with Remy. When you have a point guard coming into another program kind of thing, do you scout the scheme or do you scout the player or how much do you do either?**

BILL SELF: I actually, I may not get it like some coaches do. I just want to try to get the best guys we can and then get them to do what we want them to do after we get them.

I didn't think about, well, they played zone, or they're not used to playing man, or that, that wouldn't register with me. Can they shoot, are they explosive, are they tough, that to me matters more.

And he was one of the first guys to make his decision last year out of the portal, so even though we recruited him, we didn't really get that far because the decision was made pretty early. But I think he's a good player. He's fast.

**Q. How do you defend? How do you come into this game to defend a guy that's coming into a system that's new?**

BILL SELF: Just by, we had two exhibition tapes and we based on how we guarded him on the exhibition tapes, not by what he did at Northeastern.

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