

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Wichita State Shockers

Paul Mills

Harlond Beverly

Colby Rogers

Postgame Press Conference

Wichita State - 71, Memphis - 65

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, good game. The guy to the left of me right here -- I think Wemby was the second person ever to have a 5 by 5, and this guy almost had one. Five blocked shots, five steals, obviously 17 points. He was two assists away from getting a 5 by 5, and they're really rare. And then Colby, as he's done all year and yesterday and today, kinds of bails us out with a shot and is able to make a difficult one.

But as I shared with the guys, it's that time of year. This wasn't a good win, a great win, an ugly win. It was an expected win. We had guys who you come in, you expect to win this time of year. The two guys to the left of me and everybody in that locker room showed up. So you win a game, but we're not even -- you know, everybody's here to do the same thing and that's to win a championship. You're not even halfway there, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll start with questions.

Q. How much do you think the experience of playing in so many close games -- I know you guys have gone through adversity, come up short time and time again, and how much do you think that experience helped you guys pull this one out?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I mean, I think you can circle back. The reality about situations as you move forward is you



have to go through difficulties. You got to go through 'em. You have to understand 'em. There is a Bible verse in James that says, the testing of your faith produces something in you. What it talks about there is you have to be tested. If you're not tested, you'll never have a testimony. So you have to go through this.

The reality about us is our clutch record, if you know anything about the NBA, that means plus or minus five with five minutes to go. We were 2-10 in the league. You have to kind of go through those adversities and you have to clean some things up. We have a team that's been very receptive the entire year and been able to understand what's going on in order to make that happen. I do think that you can draw back on those experiences and they propel you forward when games are tight like this.

Q. What was the message there? Seven minutes without a field goal, they were on a huge run, 17-2, they take the lead. What did you see from your guys down the stretch? What allowed you guys to pull that one out?

PAUL MILLS: Well, we don't have your stats that you have. Like, we don't sit over there going, oh, three minutes without scoring. You don't really think about it. All you're doing is thinking about the quality of the shot. I thought we had 'em. I just told guys, keep taking those. We're going to make 'em. But those are shots you can't turn around and pass up. They were quality shots and at the end you trust your guys. You trust them to make free throws, you trust 'em to make plays. That's what happened late.

Q. Early in the first half, your team was really -- was moving the ball very well. Guys were taking four, five passes before even pulling a shot, and you guys were dominating the paint on rebounds. Can you just talk about the physicality of the team and just being able to play together.

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, there's a little bit of a thermometer involved where you're kind of gauging the officials on what's about to get called, what isn't. So I think during that whole process, our goal, and these guys will tell you, was we needed to keep them under a 30 percent offensive

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rebound. So the fact that they were only able to get 27 percent for the game, 21 in the second, we needed to limit second-chance opportunities. In order to do that, we had to retrieve the basketball.

So other than that first media, I thought we did a fine job. They only had three points off of second chance and we were able to get 12. But that kind of the difference, we needed to -- they got 45 percent of their misses when we played them last time. So we knew we had to have a level of physicality and everybody had it. It wasn't just some bigs sometimes or Ronnie. All of these guys had it. I think when we go back and look on film, it will be a testament to the character of the team.

Q. You guys had a pretty rough loss the first time you guys played Memphis. It was a close game second time you guys played, what does it feel. How does it feel to finally beat them when it really mattered the most?

COLBY ROGERS: Especially winning at this time of the year, this is where it matters most. So to me, it feels good. It shows hard work pays off when you just stay faithful, stay determined, keep working as a team, keep believing in each other.

They got the lead late, but we didn't rattle, we didn't fold, we kept pushing, kept grinding. Like coach said before the game, the tougher team is going to win and that means mentally and physically. I think that we accomplished that today.

HARLOND BEVERLY: I feel like the two games prior to this mattered just as much. This is just for the tournament. We learned a lot those first two games and I feel like what we learned in those first two games really propelled us to help to us win today.

Q. Colby, how much do you think the experience of playing in so many close games, and like I said, the experience of losing them, knowing that just facing that adversity, how much do you think that prepared you guys for this moment today?

COLBY ROGERS: Tremendously. I can just speak for myself, just the way they defended me today, it made it very tough. But it's a 40-minute game and we had to learn that the hard way. There was a couple possessions late where we could have turned it over and we didn't. We ran the clock out, got a good shot. Whether we made it or missed it, just the fact that we didn't turn it over and ran a good offense, had good possessions, kind of demoralized their defense when they were running and jumping.

And then getting stops on the defensive end. Not letting the game -- my offensive game kind of determine how I play defensively. I think as a team we did a good job of that. It was an ugly game, but in March, there's going to be games that are going to be ugly, but mentally and physically we were just a tougher team and it showed tonight.

Q. You started off quoting a Bible verse. Just what can you say about your faith and how that plays into how you teach these student-athletes and how it's a part of everything you do?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I listen on the Dwell app to Psalms 1:18 every game and it says, Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. And I remind myself that whether we win or whether we lose, God is good and I don't want to get caught up in the fact that you're blessed, you're blessed, and I think at the end, everybody does ministry, everybody has influence, and you want to influence well. There's times where these guys will tell you I have to check myself. I don't do it well. You're just reminded that the same way that I'm putting faith in this chair, I understand where my faith is placed, and for me, it's in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. To both of the student-athletes, Wichita State has some incredible history in men's college basketball. Just what it means to you, not only this season to advance in the tournament and the AAC, but to be a part of Shocker history and just why you chose to be a part of Wichita State.

HARLOND BEVERLY: Rich basketball history has a lot to do with coming here. Of course Coach Mills it's really cool, hopefully, that we can keep propelling the history forward. I will only be here one more year and I know Coach Mills will continue to do that, so I'm excited.

COLBY ROGERS: Just to piggyback off that, I came here last year. I had to sit out, but kind of the main reason I came here was to be a better player, but I knew the history of Wichita State and I remember watching them make that Final Four run and go 30-0, and just the atmosphere and the culture there around college basketball is like no other, and so I just felt like that's just -- as a college basketball player, that's a plus anywhere you go, just to be somewhere where they value college basketball that much. So, yeah.

Q. Can you speak about the challenge of Harlond guarding David Jones? You know he's going to get his and make some really tough shots, but what do you think of the job that he did and just the mentality that you have to take to guard someone like that?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, you do need to understand that players are going to make tough shots. You try to remind guys all the time that just because they make a shot does not mean you played bad defense. Just because they missed it doesn't mean you played good defense. When you're playing against quality players, you can be chest to chest with those guys and they can still make plays. That's what good players do. I've been blessed. Our staff has coached a lot of NBA guys, so we have seen it up close. But I will tell you, just from a mental approach, we asked Harlond, You look fatigued. Do you want to switch? And I can't use the words he used, just because this is PG, but he said, no, and he's going to make sure that he does the job necessary. Very proud of Harlond, but more proud of the level of commitment that guys have internally to get stuff done. When the challenge is up, whether I succeed at the challenge or not, I'm up for it. As I tell our guys, we don't expect you to win every fight. We do expect you to fight every fight though. I'm proud of Harlond, the fact that he fought that fight, because that was a tough one.

Q. Having confidence in someone like Bijan Cortes, who has had ups and downs all year, and you stuck with him, kept playing him, kept showing confidence in him and the starting lineup. I thought he's had two really good games down here. Can you speak about just the trust that, you guys, you put in that and how much does that faith matter to you guys as a coaching staff into the players?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I will tell you that when players come in, and I'm telling you, I was no different, I was a Division II player at 18. I was shocked I wasn't one and done. And when you're 18 years old, you kind of think that way, especially when you've had success on the basketball court. But you kind of, they have their dreams and then there's reality. And the bigger that gap, the higher their frustration. What players do, they may not have played for a year, they think they're going to come out and get 30 and 20 opening night. And they're, sometimes, depending upon the player, they're a little crushed when it doesn't happen. But you have to go through it. You have to go through the process and this journey that's difficult. To Bijan's credit, yeah, you do, you ride the highs and lows. But at the end he stuck with it. Those kind of people who can stick with it -- I mean, anybody who has ever been married will tell you, and I've been married for 26 years, it's not always great, but the fact that you honor a commitment that you made, that's where I'm proud of B, he has honored a commitment that he's made.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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