

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Wichita State Shockers

Paul Mills

Corey Washington

Bijan Cortes

Postgame Press Conference



Wichita State - 73, USF - 68

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, I mean, we had a lot of respect for South Florida and just who they were and their ability and obviously having an All-Conference player in Jamille Reynolds, just knew the problems that that presented, even though that we got up 16 early there in the second half. I mean, UTSA was up 20 on these guys with nine minutes to go and then South Florida came back and won.

There were a number of games they had like that. I know they were down to Rice by 13, came back and won. So we had zero, I mean zero reservations about our lead being able to be withheld, and it's a situation where winning's hard, especially this time of year and just proud of our guys and how they handled everything.

Obviously, Bijan played really well, and I told him yesterday just about his ability to take care of the ball. So to get through this with zero turnovers is a tribute to him. Then Corey can shoot it better than what he's shown on the year. He did today. But he's actually better than this from the free-throw line. So we're looking forward to cleaning that up tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You mentioned how USF is a good team at coming back in the second half. What did you like about the team's composure today?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, you know, I mean, that's what you have to have. You have to be able to have poise down the stretch. You got to be able to convert free throws. So you have a situation where it's a one-possession game, and they foul Bijan on a one-and-one opportunity, and he goes up there and he knocks down both. Like, that's what's required at this time of year. You're just going to see players elevate their ability to show up and handle difficult situations. We've kind of done that all year, just been able to handle difficult situations, but I'm proud that we were able to do it in the middle of a game.

Q. Can you just talk about the happy medium or that needle that Bijan has to thread of being aggressive because he loves to create for others, but when he's aggressive, how much does that change the offense and just how well did he kind of thread that needle today?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I mean, the best Bijan is the aggressive Bijan. We have kind of encouraged him to stay aggressive. I thought a play that was kind of indicative of him kind of flipping a switch was the three-point opportunity. They had cut the lead to within four, and then he goes and makes a three-point play off a pick and roll going right with he and Quincy.

But again, he's got great vision. A lot of people have vision, just very few people can actually deliver a basketball. He has the ability to deliver a basketball, but you have to think score. If people know you're trying to defer, then people can play for that.

And the other thing about Bijan today that didn't happen at South Florida when we played is he would get bumped off of his line and kind of fumble the ball, and that didn't happen today. He handled it with some level of physicality. But again, he's a good player, but the best Bijan is an aggressive Bijan, and he was today.

Q. Corey, you are a better three-point shooter than what it's shown. How good today did it feel to see that many fall, especially the first half?

COREY WASHINGTON: For me, the mental part was just trusting my work. The guys was trusting me and making the shots, so I just put it up with confidence.

Q. Like, when the shots aren't falling, do you do anything to try to get out of that? You put in extra shots or you just trust the process of what you've been doing all year?

COREY WASHINGTON: You definitely have to work harder if the shots are not falling. Coach says this all the time. I mean, it's just the work that you put in. That's what you're going to get. And Bijan today was finding me and trusting me, so I have to be confident in the shot.

Q. It's funny how much better the offense looks when threes are going in. How nice of a lift was that today?

PAUL MILLS: I mean, you have to shoot it. You can't sit there and allow a team just to disrespect you like that, that level of dare shot. And you can't over think it either. I mean, there were numerous times you're just yelling -- I was yelling at those guys to shoot the ball. And they need to know when to shoot it. It needs to come after we've had an interior opportunity. It just doesn't need to come down and shoot it, unless you're on a heat check like Corey was. And so those situations are fine.

But we do have to think changing hands, changing sides, and being able to get a paint touch. If you get those shots, you have to shoot it, but specifically because we're a good offensive rebounding team. I know we didn't show it today. We usually out-rebound teams, so to tie it at 43-43 and give up 14 O boards is not characteristic of what we normally do, but you have to shoot the basketball if you're going to be a basketball player; otherwise, go find something else to do.

Q. Coming off that tough loss last Sunday against Tulsa, what was the team's energy like coming into today?

BIJAN CORTES: We know it was elimination basketball, so just staying together, knowing that through practices this week and knowing that it's going to be a lot of ups and downs, we stayed together throughout this game. So that's what we were just focused on, making sure we did all we can to win.

Q. Quincy made a couple of big blocks on one possession in that first half. How did that add fuel to the defense?

BIJAN CORTES: That just kind of helps with our momentum, for sure, just getting those blocks out and then

getting players like Corey to run out on transition with us and being able to hit 'em kind of worked out a lot.

Q. Coach, Corey, it looked like he tweaked his hamstring there in the first half. What did you like from his efforts throughout the game?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, Corey can run for days. Honest to goodness, if we were to tip off here in two hours, Corey Washington will be ready. Now it depends on the opponent about how ready he'll be. But Corey Washington is easily our best player in regards to stamina, and Corey can run through days. He's a tough kid. He can fight through things.

So I just ask him if he's all right, and I trust whatever answer he gives me. But of all the guys on the team with stamina, he's the least I'm worried about.

Q. You mentioned Q, just like how much more active he was. Just was it night and day compared to Tulsa?

PAUL MILLS: Well, I mean, how many games has Quincy Ballard gone without a blocked shot? I mean, you go look at the stat sheet via Tulsa, and he shows up with zero. So five today, you could hear Quincy A yelling at him, That's you, Q. I thought his presence was bigger and what I mean by that is there were a lot of situations. When you go back and look at the Tulsa film, his hands are down below his waist. I thought his hands were at least horizontal today. If you can get 'em closer to your shoulder and be a bigger presence, that's important.

But I thought he did a great job on Jamille Reynolds. If you remember at our place, Jamille had a career high. So to be able to hold that guy to 2-7. And there were a number of one-on-one opportunities. That's a tribute. So I thought his physicality was great and at the same time he was able not only to block shots, but alter them.

Q. On Bijan, just that aggressiveness, does that remind you of -- I'm sure you've watched tape of him in high school back in the Kingfisher days. Was that kind of reminiscent of him, just that offensive aggressiveness?

PAUL MILLS: You know what? When I was at Oral Roberts, I went to Kingfisher High School, and I went there to watch Matthew Stone, but Bijan didn't even give me the time of day. It was just like, who are you and why are you here? So I said, you know, if I ever get the chance to get him back, whether he's on the opponent, I'm going to find a way to shut him down.

But it's a privilege to coach him. Bijan's always been

aggressive, but he has a team mentality. He wants to get others involved. The thing we've talked about him is you're doing what's best for the team when you think shot and because his reads are really good, he can recognize if somebody's coming over and trying to block it because he can find somebody else.

But watching Bijan at Kingfisher and just the quality of player he is, but again, we have to stay -- as much force as we can play at the rim, that's what we need to do.

Q. How long are you going to allow yourself to celebrate this win with Memphis on the horizon?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, there's no celebration. I mean, you do your job, you move on to the next thing. I don't drink alcohol, I don't do anything in particular. I may have a couple of ice tea. But I tell you, like, this is not work for me. This is fun for me. So to stay up for the next few hours and think through and get with your staff and get with your guys on what's the best way in order it find an opportunity in order to be competitive tomorrow, I mean, that's what we're going to do. But if you're sitting around celebrating this time of year you're in trouble anyway.

Q. Bijan, how confident do you feel with your game right now because the points have come at a such a high rate, the turnovers next to none, we're seeing it in all phases right now. How confident are you in your game?

BIJAN CORTES: I'm very confident, especially with the people that I'm around, they tell me every game when I go out there, Just be you, look to score, be aggressive. And that just comes with all my teammates as well, so I'm really confident about these next couple games.

Q. Back to the Memphis question, obviously you guys have the Tigers up next, some good history lately. Do you hold any weight to that, what's the approach?

PAUL MILLS: Yeah, I think, one, everybody has a chip on their shoulder, and two, they're a good team. So that's what you're going to do this time of year, you're going to play good teams. I place zero weight on the fact that we were able to win at home. It's kind of what you hope to do is be able to win at home, especially in conference. You get to play a really good basketball team. But that's what you do this time of year, you play good basketball teams.

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