

National Invitation Tournament: Utah vs Indiana State

Tuesday, April 2, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Indiana State Sycamores

Josh Schertz

Robbie Avila

Ryan Conwell

Semi Finals Postgame Press Conference

Indiana State 100, Utah 90

JOSH SCHERTZ: Obviously first, congratulations to Utah and an incredible year. That's a great basketball team. Every time we thought we hit them with a knockout punch, they kept coming. Thought we took a great shot from them, 17 for 29 from three is hard to do by yourself.

So to do that in a game of these stakes is a credit to them but they have a great team, very well-coached, and just it was a high-quality game both ways.

Really proud of our guys. They are tough to deal with. We struggled to get stops but I thought we were really good offensively. Made it hard on them. They threw a lot at us, man, zone, switching man, different types of zones from 1-3-1 to 2-3, etc., and I thought our guys, as they have all year, were just able to handle it with intelligence and poise and attack it correctly. One turnover the entire second half for our team, and just thought we worked together collectively to attack whatever they threw at us in a really intelligent way.

And we hung on, got enough stops to win, even though it didn't feel like it. So incredibly proud of these guys. Can't wait. I'm excited to get to coach them again tomorrow and certainly can't wait until Thursday night.

Q. You win the game in this event, you play that well with that crowd, how much fun did you just have the last two hours?

ROBBIE AVILA: It's been amazing. This entire run from starting at the Hulman Center, those three games have been sellout crowds. It's been a lot of fun coming into Hinkle and seeing a sea of blue. Utah is a really good



team, and it was a great game but to continue to play in front of our fans like that, it's a blessing.

RYAN CONWELL: First and foremost, I just want to say all glory to God. I'm just blessed to be part of such a great team. I just love playing with these guys. Just going out there and just being able just to go to work with them and just play the game that we love to play except being back in my hometown, all the blessings. It's nothing but fun out there.

Q. Coach mentioned how you took care of the ball better in the second half. Utah, especially, took care of the ball in the first half, and it seemed like you guys had some pretty big steals there in that second half, especially the final eight minutes to cement the win. What can you say about how you were able to speed them up or keep them on their toes and get some steals?

ROBBIE AVILA: It's just a credit to our guards. Those guys give it their all defensively, especially Swope. Swope, Julian, Ryan, they are hard to go against when they are really locked in and they get steals, they ball pressure. It's insane. When you have those three on the defensive side, it's really hard for teams to run their stuff, and so I think it just allowed us to kind of create turnovers and really get some easy buckets.

RYAN CONWELL: Yeah, kind of like what Robbie said. We had to do what we had to do to win, so whatever it took we were willing to do. Ju came up with some big steals towards the end as well. We just had to do what we had to do.

Q. Talk about the way you guys continue to feed off each other at different moments in the game.

ROBBIE AVILA: I think teams have to pick their poison, really. Obviously in the beginning of the game, I was able to get open and so I was able to get going. But then they really started to focus on me, switched defenses, and switching five and zone that started to create for Ryan and Swope; and just the ability of everybody to sacrifice and



allow whoever has the hot hand to continue going is the reason why we are able to put up so many points like that.

RYAN CONWELL: Yeah, I think it just shows how good of a team we are. I feel like teams can't really key on one person. I feel like in the end, it helps all of us be able to do what we want to do on the court.

Q. We talked about the fan support throughout this NIT run, starting at the Hulman Center today. You guys talked about it a lot this season, but what does the continuous support from the Terre Haute community mean?

ROBBIE AVILA: It's a blessing to play in front of this crude and environment has been amazing. I think we are doing it for more than just our team. We are doing it for the entire city of Terre Haute, Indiana State University, and being able to play games in front of them again it's a blessing.

RYAN CONWELL: It's a blessing. It's something I've never really experienced before and something I don't take for granted. Just having all those people come in and support us, we feed off that energy as well. So just playing in front of a fan base like that is, you know, nothing short of a blessing.

Q. Your shooting percentage, like all your teammates, they get better every year, but what did Josh do and what did you do to make across the board your shooting numbers go up so high, not just points, but efficiency?

RYAN CONWELL: Really, first, I want to shoutout AP, Alex Peavler, our trainer. He works on me all the time. Just day-in and day-out, early mornings, late nights before, practice, after practice, you know, just telling me what I need to do in the game.

So I want to give a shoutout to AP. We've been putting in a lot of work and I'm just glad it's paying off.

Q. Those are some big dudes in there inside. Talk about having to neutralize what they do in some degree to get what you guys got done?

ROBBIE AVILA: It's a physical game especially at this level. You've got -- both of their big guys are seven feet tall, real strong dudes. So you've just got to be able to step up to the challenge. It starts in the summer when you're putting in the work in the weight room.

And so it's just something I'm trying to develop my game still. Obviously I'm not there yet but just continue to get better and been dealing with physical guys like that, you've

got to be ready.

Q. Talk about the start of the game, you just start shooting threes, top of the key. You love that spot and you find wide open shots there.

ROBBIE AVILA: It's just my teammates creating for me. A lot of that is I got the first one in transition. I was able to knock that one down and then the other ones, Ryan and Ju, my ball screens downhill and they were able to draw the big man and kick it out to me.

So I don't get those open shots if they don't get downhill and create it for me. It's just within the system and those guys are able to make plays for me.

Q. You talk about, this is the fourth time that you've scored 10 points this season. How do you guys get the offensive firepower that causes you to score so many points?

JOSH SCHERTZ: I think it's just credit to our guys. We've got really, really talented guys who are super skilled. They are incredibly unselfish and smart. You know, there's an old quote, simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, and these guys make the complex look pretty easy.

There's a lot of firepower, a lot of diversity. We've got five live guys out there at all times, whether it's Julian attacking the paint, Isaiah as ignitable as any player in the country; Ryan playing at an elite level; Robbie; Jayson Kent with all the cutting and movement. Whatever you throw at them, they are able to attack it, decipher what it was.

They were jumping and pressing late game in that scenario. You know, we saw zone, 1-3-1, 2-3, switching man, drop man, a little bit of everything. And just that combination of skill, unselfishness and the intelligence to have that many guys with those character traits is pretty rare.

Q. How did you strategize for this team? This is a very big team, probably the largest team you've played this season, maybe in the three years you guys have had.

JOSH SCHERTZ: Going into the game, I thought the game plan was pretty simple. We were going to -- and I thought we did a good job early, trap the post. We call it MIG, for most important guy, but trap it with Robbie and try to force Carlson baseline to his left hand. You know, we were really effective early.

And then when they went and they took Lovering out, right, they took their fives out and then they put the younger

Carlson in No. 1, and then that became more difficult because there's nowhere to trap off of because the fives were non-shooters. We really, we had to adjust to that. Obviously we gave up some two-point baskets.

But biggest thing we told our guys is we're going to have to fight. Utah is huge. They are really physical. These guys are skilled. I think Carlson, Branden Carlson is an NBA-level guy, just the talent, touch, shooting ability. Madsen is tough to guard.

But Julian Larry, if I'm ever going to get into a deal where somebody has to chase a guy off a hundred screens, I'm always choosing Julian Larry to do that. He was phenomenally defensively and got 15, 8 and one turnover. Underrated, elite performance by him.

Q. Talk about maybe the way Isaiah got you guys going in the second half?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Yeah, Isaiah, it's weird, he can go through stretches where -- I thought he took good shots in the first half that didn't go in. And we just said, keep shooting them because we know he's going to anyway but at least encouraging him to do so.

There's no more ignitable player in America. Like you saw in the Drake game on that Sunday, I think he scored like 17 of our 21 points down the stretch. He's also a guy that tends to play his best basketball in money time, in those moments of truth down in the late game part of it. You know, he's just got a great confidence and belief in himself.

And I thought he was outstanding those last 20 minutes, getting downhill, finishing at the rim, a couple steals, big-time plays, and just again as ignitable as anybody and when he gets going, that changes our whole team. He can carry a team by himself.

Q. As a coach, how satisfying is it to see a bunch of kids go from crushing disappointment on Selection Sunday and turn it into a journey that you've taken to the limit as far as you can go?

JOSH SCHERTZ: It's inspiring to me. Like I'm amazed watching them. If you would have seen them on Monday afternoon after Selection Sunday, I don't know if I've ever seen a sadder, more devastated group than this one.

But their iron will, you know, is there. Like they showed it against Drake down 18 with ten to play. They routed to take the lead. They never thought they were out of it. They get, you know, heartbreak, lose that game, lose a piece of our heart. We don't get into the tournament.

They always say, the true measure of who somebody is, is how they respond when things don't go their way, right. So when you look at the true measure of who these young men are, like, it just shows in the fiber of them, in their core, who they are as human beings. To be able to pick yourself up from that kind of disappointment and prepare yourself and go out, and we're down 15 to SMU in the second half, and to find a way through that, and to get here -- and I don't want to -- because I think that true measure of who you are applies to our fans, as well.

They didn't treat this like NIT like some sort of consolation prize or "we don't care anymore"; "we didn't make the tournament." Hulman Center, and obviously tonight, they have responded just like our team's responded. It's been amazing to watch not only our team but our fans respond to something that was obviously devastatingly disappointing.

Q. The six guys got All-Conference, each one of them have had games or runs this year that could make them stars. You've been around a lot of winning clubs. Have you ever been around a club that's this unselfish and full of guys who genuinely don't care if they put up 30 points or zero points as long as they get the win at the end of the day?

JOSH SCHERTZ: It's funny, we've won 32 games, and I think in the last -- this is maybe the sixth time in the last ten years I've been a part of a team that's won 30 games. Those character traits are hallmarks of those teams. Some have them more than others.

This team and the 2016 team I was part of at LMU are the teams that in terms of like absolutely could care less about anything other than each other, winning.

I said this after Cincinnati, this group's superpower is how much it cares, and they care about each other. They care about winning. They care about their individual performance. They hold themselves to an incredibly high standard. They care about the fans. They care about Indiana State. They care about their families. They care about Terre Haute. That's why I think they are so beloved. But that's their superpower.

It's a group that on its own accord is really good, but when you look at it, you know, the sum of this group is much greater than the individual parts because everybody has bought into the right things. It's almost in an ERA of NIL and transfer portal, sadly a throw back team but that's what it feels like, a throw back to the old days, we don't want this ride to end, let's everybody put aside everything.

You could see the bench guys aren't playing. Jake Wolfe



started 100 games in his career; he's not playing. He's into the game. Aaron Gray had multiple 30-point games in Division I, and has not taken his jersey off -- put his jersey on in I don't know how many games. He's over there living and dying with every possession.

The quality and character of this team is not just the guys you see but it's the unseen, and it's really from guy 1 to 15, it's been -- I've never had a more fun year coaching than I have. It's been truly an honor to come to work with these guys every single day.

Q. You had a moment there in that second half with Swope where he's starting to catch fire, like you said earlier, and he's scoring points, gets a steal, and then he has that pass from the left sideline at midcourt. Curious in terms of that pass and what these guys do how much are you working on clinical passing and delivering passes like that and teaching them?

JOSH SCHERTZ: Nah, you can't teach that stuff. That's innately in them. I think what we do do is free them up to make those plays, to feel like they can make those plays. You know, that's what we have tried to do is give them the freedom to feel like they can attack. Jabo (ph) and Robbie -- Swope to me is not a great passer, but that was a great pass. That was an elite pass.

We have guys on the team who are elite passers, and Julian is developing into one. But that play, that bounce pass, full court, was remarkably good play by Isaiah, and what we do try to do, we talk about passing and we work on it. But you can't teach what those guys do. That's innately in them and a credit to them on that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll see you again on Thursday.

JOSH SCHERTZ: Can't wait. Have a great night.

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