

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Nebraska Cornhuskers

Fred Hoiberg

Sam Hoibert

Rienk Mast

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 98, Nebraska - 87

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Nebraska head coach Fred Hoiberg, Sam Hoiberg, and Rienk Mast. We'll start with an opening statement for Coach.

FRED HOIBERG: I want to say, first of all, I'm proud of our guys for accomplishing something that has never been done in the history of Nebraska basketball, getting into the semifinals of this Big Ten tournament.

I like where we are heading into this week, heading into tomorrow, where we will find out our fate.

As I told the guys in the locker room after, one thing that still -- it was such a pit in my stomach last year at this time, a couple days earlier when we lost, because I just had a feeling we wouldn't be able to play again and I wouldn't be able to coach that group, and I loved that group that we had a year ago. It was such a fun group to coach.

The blessing we have is we're going to be playing next week. Whether that's Thursday or Friday, we're going to have the opportunity to continue to compete and hopefully make a little run right here and continue to do things that have never been done with this program.

I thought fatigue set in for us a little bit. We got back to the hotel at midnight last night and had to bounce back and play basically a 2:30 game this afternoon. That's hard.

I thought not only physically did we hit some fatigue, but I thought mentally, and we just didn't finish the way that we had that had us ending the season winning 8 out of 9. Our possessions weren't what we needed to have, and defensively they were beating us to loose balls. I blame



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some of that on fatigue.

Give Illinois credit. They played unbelievable the last 17, 18 minutes of that game. It's an incredibly hard team to guard, especially when your guys are in foul trouble. When Juwan picked up that fourth, that was hard for us. He's one of the keys on that end of the floor. Rienk picking up two. He was in a great rhythm on the offensive end. And Josiah picking up two.

I give Matar a lot of credit for getting us great minutes. I give Jeff Grace credit for getting us a steal late in the game. That's what it's all about this time of year, is to have guys step up when their name is called.

I'm proud of our guys. I like where we are. Learn from this one. Get back on the court on Monday, and like I said, hopefully go out and make a little run.

Q. Sam, Coach kind of talked about just the second half and fatigue, both physical and mental, maybe setting a little bit from your vantage point. Did you kind of sense that a little bit that maybe the legs were a little tired and the energy wasn't where it needed to be?

SAM HOIBERG: Personally, it did set in pretty quickly on that step-back late in the clock, I kind of felt my legs cramping a little bit. But I took something and that kind of took care of it for me. I didn't play that much yesterday. Other guys played more than me.

We don't want to make any excuses for why we played bad. We could've been better. It wasn't just because of fatigue. We've just got to be better the next game.

Q. Rienk, obviously you came out hot to start the game. Did it kind of mess with their rhythm with the foul trouble? Hard to get it going a little bit after that? That's after sitting.

RIENK MAST: Yeah, looking back at it, at the half I was super cold, and then during halftime you try and get going again. Yeah, the foul trouble definitely didn't help with getting back in that rhythm that I had at the start.

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Q. Sam, I guess going forward now, a big opportunity that awaits you guys next week. How quickly are you guys going to be able to turn the page on the sting of this loss and kind of look ahead at the opportunity that awaits you the next few days?

SAM HOIBERG: We're going to do what we've done all season, and I think we've done a pretty good job bouncing back from losses and learn from what we did wrong. See what we're playing tomorrow and just start prepping for them.

We're not going to do anything different than we've done all year, and hopefully we can bounce back in the first round.

Q. Rienk, same question for you. Yes, today stung, but how meaningful could this next week be, just with the opportunity that presents itself for you guys?

RIENK MAST: Over these last two games, we've shown that we can play with the best of them. Coming into this tournament winning last 6 out of 7 or whatever, we've shown that we're a good team. This one stings. So I hope this one gives everybody a little bit of extra motivation to not lose any time soon.

We've got to take it one game at a time. We'll know tomorrow who we play and start prepping for that and put our best game forward for that game.

Q. Fred, when did you know that C.J. was sick and wasn't going to be able to play today, and how did that affect things for you today?

FRED HOIBERG: C.J., he gave it a go in warmups, and he didn't feel good. He was throwing up after the game last night. That carried over, didn't give him much rest. Unfortunately, just wasn't able to go. He was feeling pretty miserable. You could see it in his face and his eyes. He didn't get any sleep last night. So wanted to play it smart.

He's been awesome for us all year. Obviously it shortened our rotation. Again, it leads to the fatigue that we had in that second half, when you take one of your main guys out of the lineup.

Again, our guys stepped up. Especially when we had the foul trouble. Again, Illinois gets a lot of credit for how this game ended. You look at Terrence Shannon making five threes and getting to the free-throw line 16 times. They took advantage of some matchups out there as well.

Again, Sam hit it on the head, it's all about now, going back to the film room and learning from this one and preparing

for the next one. That's what we've done after every game. All the cleanup for our guys on Monday, and we'll get on the floor. Depending if we play on Thursday or Friday, we'll go to our first look and work on some execution type things to hopefully be better next time we're on the floor.

As I said to the guys after the game, I love how this team is playing right now. We can't let one game disrupt the good things that have happened with our program. We've got to get right and have good prep, and I'm confident that we'll do that.

Q. Fred, just in your mind, what was the shift in the second half? What did you see as the turning point?

FRED HOIBERG: We got that thing up to 15 right away. It was great. Forced them into a timeout. It just became a foul-fest. They got to the line on multiple occasions, and that just kind of takes the flow out of the game or taking the ball out of the net.

I thought we were really good in transition in the first half when we rebounded the ball. When you're taking the ball out of the net, whether it's after a free throw or after an offensive rebound kickout, it's hard to have the same type of rhythm and flow that we did offensively.

I think we shot almost 70 percent in the first half, 60 percent, I don't know. It was just one of those things where we just had it flowing so well. When you start taking the ball out of the net like we did, that gives them rhythm and momentum and confidence, and they took advantage of it.

Q. You mentioned, after the game you talked to the guys about next week. What's kind of the approach to turning the page as quickly as possible on this one, and what types of lessons can you learn from this experience that you can apply to next week?

FRED HOIBERG: Like Sam said, we're going to do the exact same thing we've done all year. We're going to learn from this one and start focusing on whoever our opponent will be, and we'll know that tomorrow at probably 5:30 or 6:00. Coaches will get in the film room and start working on the game plan, and we'll get the guys in there and present a first look to them and start working that way.

We haven't played a back-to-back all year. Our MTE last year was different than last year when we've had the experience of a back-to-back. Especially the late game to the early game. That is hard. That is really, really hard. Especially when you have one of the main guys out of the lineup.

Again, I give the guys a lot of credit for the way we came

out of the gate. They were phenomenal for the first 25 minutes of the game. Unfortunately, we weren't able to sustain it. Give Illinois credit, they had a lot to do with it.

Q. Coach, I wonder if you could talk about just being back in this arena with the time you spent with the wolves. Recently Kevin McHale came to senior night for you and supported the team. I think you mentioned that it would take a special someone to beat you. It certainly was that with Terrence Shannon.

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I love being back here. I had seven of the best years of my life in Minnesota, certainly the two best of my playing career, playing on that team back '03-'04, where Sam Cassell, we're a healthy hip away from winning a championship that year. I still have great memories. It's so much fun coming into this building and reliving some of those.

We've still got a house on a lake up in northern Minnesota, so we absolutely love it here. So to be back, our kids spent a lot of their lives. Everybody was here, except for our son Jack, who was working for the Spurs. It was great for the family to come back and relive some of those memories.

My wife took our son Charlie, Sam's twin, on a little memory tour. They went out and saw our house and went to the Target where they used to get pizza when they were 3 years old, and she had to shut them up when they were complaining and just throwing stuff in the cart. It was great to be back for that and really a special place with a lot of great memories.

Q. After Keisei scored 31 points in February against Illinois, they did everything to not let that happen again this time. What did they do differently, and how do you think Keisei played against that?

FRED HOIBERG: Terrence Shannon is one of the not only elite offensive players, but he's a great defensive player as well. Keisei missed a couple of shots that he's been making. I think he had three or four open ones early, and he makes those, maybe he does have another 25, 30 point game, but he didn't. Some of that may have to do with his legs after playing a lot of minutes last night and making some unbelievable plays for us with his 24 point game.

I thought Keisei was playing with a lot of confidence right now. I thought he forced the issue a little bit late when we should have had better execution. He's got the confidence to make those shots. I thought he had a couple of one-mores that were there as well. We'll match those and learn from it, and hopefully we'll have a better 40-minute stretch in the next one, and we'll need it.

We're going to play a great team next week, and we'll need everybody. They're all on board. They're ready to go and ready to start preparing, and we'll get back to work on Monday.

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