

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Kansas State Wildcats

Bruce Weber

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas State - 71, TCU - 50

BRUCE WEBER: Obviously, I'm really excited and happy for our guys. Where we've come from to where we are now is amazing. Our defense, again, was the thing that gave us a chance. You hold them to 23 at halftime, and our goal was to hold them under 50. They got a couple buckets down the stretch to get the 50, but if you look at, I don't know -- Tom would probably know. You guys know -- last six or seven games, we've held everybody in the 50s, except West Virginia to 65.

So they made great strides. I thought we had a great start to the game. Then we allowed -- the only reason they got back into it was our turnovers, which led to points on the other end. Once we settled down, obviously, the two threes at the end of the half by Nijel and then the start of the second half were really, really key. Then just slowly but surely wore them down and kind of broke their spirit.

I haven't got to talk to you guys since the All Big 12, the honors went out. I was really, really disappointed to Nijel, and I know he missed games, but there were other people that missed games. I'm not sure -- we all told him use it as motivation. I think the biggest thing is, when he missed games, everyone knows what the scores were, so how valuable and how good he was for us was important. Also, Davion, he's been as consistent as anyone.

So we just said, hey, this is our chance. Two of their guys got honors. Here's your chance, Selton. He's really gotten better on defense. And then gets 11 but has to get 4 late, and Mike did a great job on Miles also. I thought that it was Kaosi's, maybe his best game for us. I don't know, one of those early ones before he had the surgery. I know he had it pretty good. But on this stage to get 6 points, 8 rebounds, just did a lot of big things for us that were really important. And I was really happy for Rudi also, came in and gave us a little spark in the first half that helped us make a difference.



But Mike McGuirl, what can you say, how far he's come. As a player from freshman year, I was just proud that he got honorable mention for the whole conference. That says a lot in the best league in the country, when a lot of them are going to be drafted. But he has made huge strides. I thought last year's TCU game was really important in the tournament for him moving forward, and this game, 17 points, 5 assists, no turnovers and 3 steals. He just kind of read them, got to the hoop, hit the pull-up, got it inside, just did a lot of good things.

So a great, great team win. You know, we talked about playing hard and defending, and that gives us a chance. We had to play hard. Mike had double digits on that, and DaJuan had 9. Both of those guys do so much for us that it makes a difference in the game.

But happy, proud. Obviously, we've got a tough task, quick turnaround. I've got them going back, get a shower, food in their stomach, and then see if we can have good preparation for Baylor tomorrow.

Q. Coach, nice win. Is that the best your team's played this year?

BRUCE WEBER: It's probably pretty close. I would say on both ends of the of the court and the consistency. If you cut out those turnovers in the first half, I thought it was as good a game as we've played. Obviously, you beat Oklahoma at home, Number 7 in the country, who is one of the hottest teams in the country, we played pretty well in that game too, a high level.

But it was good. I thought both ends of the court, consistency. If we could just cut back a little bit on turnovers, I thought we -- and maybe make our free throws a little more consistent. And I'm asking for everything, but we might need everything tomorrow.

Q. Defensively, you guys have gotten so much better as the season's progressed. I kind of feel like tonight was next level. It looked like one of your better defensive efforts that I can remember, to be honest.

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, as I said, we've gotten so much better. The preparation, the scouting reports, understanding what we've got to do, protecting the paint.



Obviously, it helps to have a defensive stopper, and Selton's kind of taken that on. He's really, really good -- one-on-one defense, getting over ball screens, that which is important. And then you've got another one with Mike McGuirl, and our big guys have done a good job of getting on the line of the ball screens.

Then it's good help defense. Dana White mentioned that, just our help defense. We had nine steals, which was really important, which led to some points, especially in the second half, kind of broke their spirit.

Q. Finally, you guys have obviously struggled scoring the ball at times this year. Did you feel like your team relaxed after Nijel hit those shots to end the first half and came out with a better state of mind second half?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, just better execution, knowing what they're looking for. We feel like we have an idea how to score against them, and we had a couple little different looks. But it helps to have Nijel go 6 for 8 and 5 for 6 from three and get five assists. So it spreads the defense. Same thing, Mike. You know, it spreads the defense, allows us to get inside touches and get to the hoop. The points in the paint, we've gotten better at that too. You win that 36-30.

Q. Bruce, are you worried at all about the confidence of the team going up against Baylor after how those games went?

BRUCE WEBER: Hey, we have nothing to lose. I know they're just happy to have the opportunity. We're going to just go. We're going to play. We're going to play our butts off, and who knows? You've seen craziness happen in March. I kind of joke, maybe we make some shots. Pretty good tonight, 48 percent. We've just got to guard them. We've got to do a good job of guarding them to give us a chance.

Then somebody like Nijel, Mike, somebody's got to have a big game for us to give us a chance to compete with them. I thought they struggled for a couple two, three games, but it looks like they were hitting full stride this last couple games.

Q. Is there anything specific offensively that was working today other than the shots going down?

BRUCE WEBER: I thought it was good balance. Just we made the right reads, like I said. We talked a lot about getting straight line drives. We took those when they were there. We talked about playing off of the tight curls, off our motion cuts. The one time Nijel came off the curl, kicked it to Mike, just like we practiced, Mike went down the alley

and got a layup. Then we talked about we've got to get inside touches. Probably they need even more, but 3 for 4 for Kaosi and 4 for 6. So those two guys are 7 for 10.

So you've got a good mixture of points. If we make our free-throws and we had those layups to start the second half, some transition. You're going to have to make those tomorrow or get to the free-throw line. You can't waste those opportunities.

Q. Bruce, congrats on the win. I'm just wondering, have you ever been part of a team that's improved more from day one to now than this group?

BRUCE WEBER: Well, I think my first team at SIU, we had a dunk contest, and only one guy made a dunk to start the season, and he got hurt when he made it. So those guys ended up winning -- I don't know if it was like 15 games that year. I didn't think we'd win any, to be honest. So that group was pretty special to me and always dear to my heart.

But when you talk about what our guys have done, where they've come from, what they've had to deal with, it's astronomical. And I think more than anything, to buy in, to believe -- you know, we've constantly tried to be positive, give them hope, and then the hope has come out. They bought into that hope and positivity and responding with winning 4 out of 5. And even some of those other games that we lost in that stretch, I thought we were much better.

Obviously, the Texas game, the Kansas game, you're playing elite teams, and I thought we were much better and competed with them at a pretty high level. It's fun to watch. It's fun to see how they've done it, and it's just been -- I told you guys a few weeks ago, I don't want the season to end because I love that this group comes to practice every day, they want to get better, they listen, and it's too bad we didn't hit this kind of stride earlier in the season, but it's better now than not at all.

Q. I also wanted to ask you, did you hear the K-State fans in here tonight? I know there were not a lot of them, but could you hear them?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, we could. It was a very limited crowd. We probably had, I would say, 80 percent of the fans that were there. So they got excited when we had some good -- when we played good basketball. There's no doubt. It's nowhere near what we've had in Bramlage or some of the other places, but just happy to be playing.

A year ago, you guys were all part of it. We won, played a really good game against TCU, and we went back to the hotel, and we went home. Then there's so many

unknowns. Now, as long as we don't test positive tomorrow, we'll be playing a game at 1:30 and have a great opportunity to play one of the best teams in the country.

Q. One last thing. Anything for the guys against Baylor defensively? Is there one key to slowing their offense down?

BRUCE WEBER: We've got to take care of the ball so we don't let them get in transition. I think that's going to be key. Hopefully, we've made the improvement where now we can guard people one-on-one a little better, better in ball screens, better on help. I think the key to the game will probably be, if we're going to have a chance, we don't let them get second chance points. Transition points and second chance points are going to be really key for us.

Q. Bruce, how would you categorize this stretch of basketball that you guys have been playing for the last three, four weeks?

BRUCE WEBER: Obviously, it's good basketball. We're competitive now, and we probably weren't competitive at that time. A lot of people questioned, and we were so new, so young, we didn't have practice. We didn't have them together. We didn't have units. They didn't understand. But as I said, they've gone with what -- they stayed positive. They believed in each other. They believed in us, and they played good basketball.

Now we'll see tomorrow. Again, I just hope we can come and compete at a high level. We've been able to do it against Texas, against Kansas, against Oklahoma. So now let's see if we can do it with a quick turnaround against Baylor.

Q. What key is Davion as an interior force to be a force spreader and keep things in motion?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, I've said all along, he's been as consistent -- he's been our biggest surprise, and he's been as consistent as anybody. He's had a couple bad -- not bad games, but games he just didn't get as much done, but he made some big plays today. He's got great hands.

You know, when he didn't make -- him and Nijel didn't get any recognition, I texted both of them. The thing that Davion said, Coach, only we know how much improvement we've made, only we know how hard we've worked, and only we know how hard we're going to continue to work and what we're going to do at K-State.

It says a lot about a young man that has not had the easiest life in growing up. People have helped him, taken care of him, and he's got a huge heart. He believes and

trusts, so really, really proud of him.

Q. What's given your staff that patience to continue to preach the hope and that you're going to stick with them?

BRUCE WEBER: I don't think there was any other choice that we had. It's been such a difficult year for everybody. Again, I always tell you I have a strong faith, and I believe there's always a reason and why things happen. Slowly, just all I could do, I told you I was there for the players. That was the number one thing. I had to be there for the players.

We had to go through a lot, but we -- and our coaches really -- not just me, but the constant communication, every night, texting them, talking to them, getting them in during the day to watch film. I would tell you we've watched -- we've had more players watch more film than maybe we ever have had. So it's been fun to watch. I hope we can come -- we should be relaxed, but just come and play and compete tomorrow and see if we can push them a little bit.

Q. Congrats on the win, Coach. Earlier, you mentioned that your athletes, or you have nothing to lose by playing Baylor tomorrow. Arguably, some of your athletes, this is their final game possibly in their collegiate career. What message are you trying to send them, and what values do you hope they'll take away?

BRUCE WEBER: I hope we have everyone back. If you know anything about our team, we've got all young guys. Our one senior, he can come back also. So we hope that we have this group back.

All along, we've said that one of the things I talked about this week, you're brave enough to start, to go through all that we did. Now you should have the courage to finish. That's what we've talked about. All the things we've been through this year, it's not only you've seen their improvement in basketball, it's going to help them in life to deal with tough times and situations that you have no control. I think those are the big things, and just to enjoy the opportunity.

We've talked all along, hey, we're -- I think there's only -- not many teams in the country that have played all their games, and we've played all our games, and you've got to give our guys some credit. Our medical staff, our players, the staff, for being difficult and fighting through this thing. I still, I look at people are 11-4 and stuff like that. It's like they've played 15 games, 18 games. We played every game, and we played with six guys, we played with seven guys, we played with eight guys, we played undermanned,

and they never lost faith, and they kept coming back. So you've got to give them a lot of credit.

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