

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Oklahoma State Cowboys

Cade Cunningham

Avery Anderson

Postgame Press Conference



Cunningham, Cade Cunningham, Cade Cunningham, but today was a great example of everybody else and how it's a team. I mean, maybe, if you could expand a little bit on where Avery was going with that.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I'm glad you asked that question. Yeah, I know there's a lot of attention on me a lot of times, but we didn't get to this point being a one-man show, and I think that shows. Huge players down the stretch -- Avery with a huge layup. One-K with huge free throws, Isaac with a big time block at the end. Like he said, Bern making huge plays for us. It's a team game, especially in March. You're not going to win with just one person. It's a team effort. West Virginia is a really good team.

We all had to make plays, and we all had to contribute to the win. I'm happy we all came in and made the plays. Some guys -- we made mistakes for sure. Plenty of them, like you said. It wasn't a piece of art, but we fought through. That was the biggest thing for us.

Q. Yeah, for Cade, I kind of want to ask about Isaac's finish. I know he had some big moments today, but the block at the end and the big rebound. He kicked out to you pretty quick, and that was a turnover, but what about the way Ice finished?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I think it shows what type of competitor he is. Even when things aren't going the way he wants them to go, he's still going to try to compete for his team and make plays to win. I know he probably feels like he could play better. I know his thumb was kind of bothering him sometimes when he was shooting the ball.

But he fought through it and still tried to make plays on the other end, especially on defense. Rebounding, things like -- big time offensive rebounding for us. So I think that just shows what kind of competitor he is and his will to win.

Q. Avery, you were here last year in the tournament. Ice had the layup to win the game, and he has those big plays down the stretch. What is it about him in these moments?

AVERY ANDERSON: He's built for it. That's what it says.

Oklahoma State - 72, West Virginia - 69

THE MODERATOR: What a result today. There was a lot of grit. This isn't one that's going to go up in the museums any time as a piece of art, but as a piece of grit, that sure was. Avery, can you start us off with a little bit of the team's mindset going in. As the game flowed, what was the conversation like on the bench? What was the team talks towards that end?

AVERY ANDERSON: So going in, we had a lot of energy. We were stoked to play. Just coming out, they got on us early. So I guess that took our energy level a bunch of meters down. So going into halftime, we had them little turnovers, and everybody was just looking down. We had 21 minutes to go in the game, so I was just trying to keep everybody together. Told Cade pick his head up because he's a game time situation player, so I knew he was going to be ready. Key, we just had to tell him stay in the game. So everybody was just trying to pick each other up at the halftime.

During the game, Bern played some big minutes for us. He really got us going with the rebounds and the free throws. So that's how we really picked up our energy in the second half.

Q. Cade, maybe before we get to the game itself, I feel like I need to ask you, how are you feeling?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I'm good. Man, I'm good. My ankle, I mean, adrenaline and stuff kicks in, and you don't really feel it too much. Halftime, coming out of halftime, it kind of stiffened up a little bit, but as the game got back on, I was all right. Adrenaline takes over for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Avery kind of touched on, talked about Bernie, and he talked about other guys. Maybe your perspective on -- I think a lot of times, the talk about Cade

He shows up when we need him to show up. He's just a big time player, and that's what we need. That's good that we have him back. It brings the team back together so we can be at full strength.

Q. Cade, the turnovers were a problem again today. How do you guys clean it up? Some of them seemed like it was just some lackadaisical passes or plays. How do you guys clean it up?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I think definitely on film seeing ourselves more and more, but, yeah, like you say, just trying to value every possession. Avery, through the course of the game, would never -- our game plan and what was written on the white board in the locker room kind of leaves our heads, and we're just kind of out there competing. I think the biggest thing for us is just trying to keep that in the back of our minds, like taking care of the ball.

We shoot such a high field goal percentage, and that's something that Coach always preaches. When we don't turn the ball over, we score most of the time. So just keeping that in our minds and trying to value our possession, make the most out of every play, I think that's the biggest thing for us. We're all still standing, that's for sure.

Q. Last year you guys won a game and then got sent home because of COVID-19. How does it feel to know you got another game planned after you get your first win in the conference?

EVERY ANDERSON: I was just saying like it brings even more excitement to the team knowing we've got an extra game and not going home because of COVID.

Q. This can be for either one of you, but you guys kind of alluded to you didn't play your best game today. Is that promising that it didn't come together and you still were able to win, or is it a little frustrating that it's this late in the year and you're still not playing maybe as good a basketball as you might have wanted to?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I wouldn't say it's frustrating. Any win at this time of the year, we'll take. There's still things that we could add to our game, but we've had -- me and Ice just coming back, everybody was just kind of getting back into the groove of things. And with that, you know, we still competed and grinded out a victory.

We know we're going to have to clean things up for sure if we want to make it as far as we plan on going, but we're definitely not going to get down over a win for sure.

Q. Avery, for you, Sherman, he had two big threes there kind of towards the end of the game. How do you keep a solid mindset after those threes like that? There was nothing really you guys could have done differently, so how do you kind of keep going after seeing him make those world beater shots?

EVERY ANDERSON: He's a good player. I had seen him in high school at the state tournament, so I knew he could shoot the ball really well. Just how you keep your composure, just going to the next play and try to get a stop on the next possession. You can't stop the shot going in, so you have to keep level headed and contest it even harder.

Q. Cade, last thing for you. Can you kind of take me through your vantage point of the final sequence with Ice's block and the couple pumps where One-K got him to hesitate before the shot? Can you kind of just take me through your vantage point of that?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: Ice did a big time job fighting through -- first they set an elevator screen for him to come through, so two guys wedging Ice in. You know Ice is like a football player playing basketball, so he fought them down well. You could just tell how bad he knew Sherman was going to get it, how bad he wanted to win it. So fought through it, got a high hand, blocked the shot, and, yeah, it got all the way out to McNeil. He pumped a couple times. I was wondering, there's no way he's going to get it off. There's no way there's enough time.

I guess last pump, he got it off. I just turned around, and I saw a ball go through the net. I didn't know if he got it off on time or not.

EVERY ANDERSON: I didn't even see the ball go through the net. I already knew the buzzer went off when it was in his hands.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I kind of figured it was too late. So big time win for sure.

Q. What's the most important thing -- you've already talked about Isaac, I know, but what's the most important thing he does for you, day in and day out, in terms of the program?

EVERY ANDERSON: I would say being a leader and always talking to everybody, keeping each other level headed and just bringing the energy for us and just being a good leader on the side when we need it. He's a good instructor to go to, I would say, because he's been here for three years, so he knows what Coach expects and what he needs.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: He has a really high IQ, and he does a good job of helping other dudes by explaining what the team does. He's been with Coach Mike for a couple of years, so explaining what we do as a team and just trying to keep guys motivated when they're down and things like that. He's always in guys' ears. You'll never hear Ice not talking for sure, in practice and huddles and whatever.

That's something that -- that's our guy. That's the dude we know wants to win, and that's what we need. We need somebody like that.

Q. Cade, what about that guy sitting next to you? He had 31 the other day in Morgantown. He had 15 in the second half. What can you say about the way Avery's come along as a scorer on this team?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I mean, I've been watching Avery for a long time now, and I've always known about his ability. Yeah, I know he don't like hearing about himself, but I've always known about his ability. I think the biggest thing for him was just being confident. Yeah, he can beat out a guy with the ball in his hands.

I know I had the ball in my hands a lot. Ice did a bunch. But having somebody like this that we can have to take pressure off of us and be the guy that's the primary ball handler and go make plays for everybody, it's huge for us. Now that he's gotten really comfortable in that role -- I've already seen it in high school and before that, so I knew he could do it. But, yeah, big plays after big plays, those don't happen by accident. He works every day in the morning, and it shows on the court.

Q. Avery, what do you say about these last two games, the way you've come through and sort of blossomed as a scorer?

EVERY ANDERSON: I'll just say that my work is finally paying off and showing. Like he said, I get up in the morning and workout. I lift -- if I'm not lifting, I'm doing a basketball workout. So just doing something to get up and do something in the morning and just work on it. You've got to stay the course, and that's what I'm trying to do. When my time will come, my time will come.

Q. Could you tell that you guys needed an offense -- obviously, they needed you Saturday in Morgantown with Cade and Ice gone, but could you sort of sense that, hey, we need a scoring pick me up today?

EVERY ANDERSON: For sure, for sure. We had trouble scoring in the first half, so I knew somebody needed to pick up the scoring in the second half. K had got it going. I had

got it going in, especially on K-two, so that was big time.

Q. Cade, sum up what this experience has been like this season. What level of anticipation do you have for what's to come here at the tournament?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: I'm excited, man. I'm excited. I don't think anybody expected us to be at this point, especially whenever the sanctions came down and we wouldn't make the postseason. They thought everybody would probably leave or whatever, but to see everybody stay the course and buy in to the system that Coach had set in place, I'm excited. I'm excited to see how far we can go with this, and we're going to try to make the most out of every moment. We're going to try to live in the moment and see how far we can go.

Q. Describe what West Virginia did to you defensively today. It looked like they tried to double you at every touch almost.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: Yeah, they tried denying me a bunch. On ball screens, they sent doubles and things like that, but you know, when those type of things happen, it's best to try to take that challenge on, take the doubles with you, and find open teammates who can go and make plays. So that's what I tried to do early in the first half. We made plays, stayed in the game. Ended the first half bad, but it's a roller coaster ride through a game. Every team makes a run. Basketball is a game of runs.

So my team definitely kept my spirits high and kept me motivated, and we came out with the win.

Q. Cade, I apologize if you addressed this. My connection was crap at the beginning. What was it like sitting there watching the game Saturday and what your teammates did?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: Man, I'd say that was probably the biggest game of the year and probably the most fun game of the year, just because, you know, I don't think anybody besides our locker room believed in us at the time. Just finally seeing like -- you know, I know how much attention that me and Ice get, but me and Ice know how much attention that the rest of the team deserves. So to see that game and see how Avery button for us and see how everybody stepped up, man. It was just fun to watch.

Yeah, it was --

EVERY ANDERSON: He was a big support on the sideline. We needed that. He was a big support.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: It was fun.



Q. What was the message at halftime after the turnovers led to West Virginia kind of getting some fast breaks?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: You know, just keep our heads. I know I'm a better player than getting my ball to half-court. So just kind of try to take it to the chin, know he got the better of me on that play. I'm going to stay confident. I have a short term memory. Yeah, I think all of us, we just kind of went in at first, like Avery said, we're just kind of shocked how we performed in the half, but we've been there before. We've been down six at the half before, and we came out with a different mindset knowing we had to pick it up. So we did that.

Q. I don't know, you guys may not have a good answer for this, but I think Derek Culver was ill today. Is that any kind of concern in a bubble when a player is playing through an illness?

AVERY ANDERSON: You said he had an illness?

Q. Yeah.

AVERY ANDERSON: I didn't even know.

Q. That's fair.

CADE CUNNINGHAM: He didn't have COVID, so it's cool.

Q. Looking at it, I would say there's a good chance you get better tomorrow, but let's say you do. You played them last week. How much do you want a rematch with Baylor to have another shot?

AVERY ANDERSON: We got everybody back, so I think everybody ready to play them again. I'm ready at least.

THE MODERATOR: Fellas, before we let you guys go, I think you know how we like to do it. Is there anything that's important to you that maybe we missed that you want to share while we've got the whole group here together?

CADE CUNNINGHAM: Great job, Bernie.

AVERY ANDERSON: Good job, man.

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