

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Kansas State Wildcats

Bruce Weber

Postgame Press Conference

Baylor, 74 - Kansas State, 68

BRUCE WEBER: Obviously you know we wanted to win. We came here with big dreams and hopes. But at the same time, you know, I told the guys all I cared about was playing with courage, and courage means -- because the first to times, you guys saw it. They didn't just beat us, they just played with us and did whatever they wanted.

We showed them with scores last night, showed them stuff -- we just played with one of the best teams, I think should be maybe the best team in the country. We played on a turnaround of, what, 14, 15 hours with not a whole lot of prep with playing a hard-fought game last night, and gave them everything we had.

It's just -- I've said it all along, I didn't want the season to end because I think we're actually playing high level basketball. We could compete with anybody. We just showed it. But you hope you use this as a momentum going into the next season.

But it's just -- I don't know what to say. I'm proud of them, happy for them. Appreciate Mike McGuirl's leadership. Appreciate that the group stayed together. They believed us and they got better. Somebody told us that from I don't know which date it was, February 10th, February something, from that date on we have the third best defensive efficiency, not just in the Big 12, but in the country, in this last month or three weeks or something.

And I mean, we gave a team that has three elite players, probably three NBA player guards, they turned it over 21 times. The first time we played them Jared Butler had three assists; tonight he had seven turnovers. Yet that are really good. Baylor is really good.

But as I said, our guys, they were bought in. They executed. We got it inside. I know you always hope we were a little better passing team. We had some foul trouble. Could have made it a little bit of a difference in the



game probably, I thought.

But then we didn't -- when we would turn them over we did not always take advantage of our points off of turnovers. Should have been more, and especially if we had -- I don't know how many layups we missed. Just two or three come to mind right away. If we get one of those to fall, maybe the game is different.

Proud of them, the two freshman, Davion, Nijel. We said use it as motivation, not getting picked on any of those teams, not getting any recognition. I think they made a nice statement the last two days.

DaJuan I told him this morning he had a tough task to play one of the toughest players in the country in Vital, and I said, "you're going to have to match his energy," and I thought DaJuan did that. With how hard he played he gave us a chance.

But, you know, proud of them, but obviously disappointed that it's ending and disappointing that maybe we could have had a little bit of a miracle here and found a way to win and done something really, really special. But it didn't happen.

Q. Coach, now that the year is over what sort of toll has this entire year taken on you professionally as a coach going through all the protocols and the losing, and how much excitement do you have now after the way you guys finished the year to get back at it?

BRUCE WEBER: Well, there is no doubt. I think you talk to any coach in the country, and I talk to a lot of guys, this is been hard. It's been stressful. It's been a challenge. It's been hard on everybody. One, no one has had vacation. No one has been able to get away from it. It's just your mental health, well-being, that puts -- even adds more stress to it.

But as I said to you guys last night, to me as a leader, it's about the players and helping them and being there for them. And no matter how bad it got and what we had to deal with, I had to be there to lead them and help them and keep them believing and giving them hope and giving them



love, and that's what we tried to do.

Last night about 2:00 a.m. I was cramping literally, and it wears you out. But I got up this morning ready to play and ready to coach, and I thought our guys did the same thing.

They were really composed and ready to compete at a high level today, so I appreciate them. As far as -- I said before, I told them three weeks ago and we hadn't won a game in a while, I said I don't want the season to end. I saw the improvements coming. They probably looked at me like this dude is crazy. I said, "Guys, I see it coming. I see what's happening. I see how we're making the strides.

We have been together, we've had practice. You understand defense, all this stuff." And I just told them again, I wish the season wasn't over, but now use this as a motivation. Use this as -- we just played against some of the best players in the country. You want to be like them? Now you got put in the time. Those guys were good players three years ago, but they weren't like this.

You know, if you want to be like that, now it's the hard work. This is your time, the next five months, to get better. And I gave them a dream and vision for next year where I expect them to be. Hopefully they want to be there.

Q. The play at the end of the game with Nijel where he throws the ball up trying to get a foul, what was your perspective on that?

BRUCE WEBER: I thought it was a loose ball and they kind of bumped him. I guess he probably in hindsight probably come down with it and get knocked over and we get two free throws. I think he thought I'm going to just act like I'm was shooting because it was a tussle for the jump ball. Obviously they didn't make a call, any call at that point.

So I'm not sure -- obviously we're close, but there were several plays like that, and obviously the foul trouble really hurt us. But our guys hung in there. Every time I thought, guys, we have foul trouble, we got mixed unit. Rudi Williams, you got to give him a lot of credit because a few weeks ago he was struggling and the whole thing had taken a toll.

For him to come this weekend and play his butt off, I'm happy for him and proud of him. But the foul trouble definitely probably made a difference I guess in the game more than anything.

Q. You just mentioned there a second ago the stress of the season and how arduous this has been at times. At this stage in your career, is retirement anything that you mull over or consider in the off-season?

BRUCE WEBER: It's funny, my daughter asked me this the other day. She said, Dad are you retiring? I said, No, why? And she said some -- I don't know who it is, some dude on social media said I was retiring. I asked his name and I never even heard of the guy, to be honest.

She deals with social media all the time because she's in advertising and she said he was verified or checked. I don't know what the heck that means. I guess he must have a lot of people following. I don't know if he knows something I don't know. I'm not sure.

But I think -- I don't know, I love coaching, I love practice, I love being around the guys. I love their development. I think we've improved as much as any team in the country. I think that -- we were so low I guess we better have improved.

But I love coaching, being around players, so I'm looking forward to next year. I can't wait. Give them a couple weeks off and hopefully we get back at it.

Q. Did you feel like in parts of the second half you were just hanging on for dear life, one foul call, turnover just seemed to tilt the balance?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, I said I kind of thought there were several times where I thought, God, we're in trouble, and you get 9 and then all of a sudden it's back to 3 or 4 or whatever. Seemed like every time something went against us our guys responded and found a way to make a play.

Some of those hustle plays, DaJuan, Selton. And I thought we guarded pretty well. Even though they shot 50%, but they turned it over 21 times. Those three guards are really good. They can make shots and play and play off each other pretty well.

I just kept hoping, wishing, praying, Hey, we're going to hang in there and maybe something special is going to happen and we're going to find a way to win. It didn't happen, so, you know, credit to them. We pushed them and they found a way to get us.

Q. Two freshman today combined for 36 points or 12 of 20 shooting. Just vital to keep to group together, isn't it?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, it is. I talked about Davion, what he -- I texted him after he didn't get any recognition. I thought Nijel really should have got recognition even though Davion, I thought is as consistent as any guy and played against some of the best big guys in the league and handled himself well.

You know, Davion said, Coach, it's fine. We have a lot of -- a lot of time to prove things at K State. We know how hard we worked. We know what we've been through. The kid has an unbelievable heart. I was talking to Tom Gilbert about it last night after everything. The kid is amazing from where he's come and what he has in his big heart and how he cares, how much he's improved. I mean, he's done unbelievable.

And then Nijel, he's been through some stuff but he's hung in there. I knew was a good player. I just kind of talked with him after the press conference and there are some things he knows he's got to get better, but pretty nice performance on national TV against the best team in the country for both those guys.

Q. You have already been asked a few questions, but given the quality of the opponent and the circumstances, was Davion's performance one of the best you've seen by a true freshman?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah. I mean, yeah. It's impressive. You know, for them -- and even Selton, guys. You know, I told Selton last night, because he has -- you look at his stat line and I think it was 9 points, 5 rebounds or 7, something like that, some assists, and he was 7 on the (indiscernible) which is high for his year. If he doesn't miss the dunk and he's got a dead layup and three free throws, people are talking about him for -- being one of the best players.

And then his defense on some of these elite guards lately has changed out team, and we told him that. So all three of those guys have -- they've been -- made a lot of strides and understand what it's about.

But Davion was good and Nijel was good and Selton, obviously we would like him to be a little better, but he still -- you know he still has done some things as a freshman that -- I don't know if I want to guard Davion Mitchell or Jared Butler or Reaves or Nembhard or anybody of those guys. He stepped up and done an unbelievable job.

Q. I know there are so many areas you can look at and say if we had just done this better, this would've been different. You note that they committed 21 turnovers and then you guys only got the 17 points off them.

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, I said that earlier, and it's been a problem all year, just finishing in transition, making good decisions, making the right play.

You know, that's been -- it's been something we haven't been great at, and definitely hopefully we can get better at. But, again, it's something that we didn't get the work on in

the summer, in the fall. We didn't even get to work on it once practice started because you didn't have people. It's hard to run drills when you don't have ten people.

So that was -- we just talked as a staff just a minute ago while I was waiting, and I think that was probably the biggest thing. And then we had a couple layups, that one time DaJuan get unbelievable rebound, misses, rolls around, Selton grabs it, tips it in, doesn't go in, and then they go down and make a tough shot.

Those are couple of those little plays that could have been big difference makers in the game.

Q. And last thing from me, the performance in the first half, you guys were only down by two and Mike and Nijel only had four points to that point.

BRUCE WEBER: And foul trouble and we're hanging in there. Just like Tim mentioned, hanging on for dear life. But we kept doing it and we kept -- again, the heart of our guys, their never-quit attitude. They came together as a group and they believed and they battled and understand what it's about now.

That's a big turnaround from losing by whatever we lost by, 40 or whatever it was a few weeks ago.

Q. Just to be 100% clear here, your plan right now is to be back as Kansas State's coach next season, right?

BRUCE WEBER: Yeah, I mean, I don't know anything different. I don't know why I wouldn't. I love K-State, I love coaching. I think obviously we haven't won as many games the last two years as you always hope, but it's been a long time since they had won championships. To me -- a homeless guy yesterday when I was walking around the hotel, he said, Hey, Coach Weber, the difference between Kansas and Kansas State? Kansas reloads and you got to rebuild. Like that homeless guy is pretty smart.

I think we've done that, done it the right way, and I think we have a great nucleus. Hopefully this group wants to stay together and this gave them a lot of hope and drive and motivation. We can continue moving forward.

So I don't know who started the rumor or how it started, but I don't know the dude's name on social media, but obviously somebody must have said something to somebody. So maybe you started it, I don't know.

Q. I did not start it. I promise.

BRUCE WEBER: Okay.



Q. I did not. Looking ahead to next season, what would you say you guys need to add or develop to take that next step and be quite a bit better?

BRUCE WEBER: The development is so important. I've talked about to them about that. Just I've used Baylor as an example, how far Jared Butler, how far Teague has come, Mitchell. You know, and we didn't have a spring, didn't have a summer, have a limited fall, and now you're going to have that chance. Each guy has some things to work on that development is so important, and then obviously if we get other scholarships or something happens we need to get somebody that -- I love the guys we have coming in, but we might need something, another guy or two just to see.

Passing is something that could definitely get better, and then we made some shots lately, but shooting and passing are two things that we could definitely improve on. There is no doubt.

Q. We know you're coming back next year. Is Mike McGuirl coming back with you?

BRUCE WEBER: You know, after, and I talked to him all along, and I just -- I know he has big dreams and goals. I know today wasn't -- I thought yesterday his game was as balanced and so good. Tonight, a little hectic.

But I hope he does. He wants to. I think he wants to. But he wanted to get the season done before he made a decision. I think he has a chance to take a nice big step. You know, that's -- I know his goal is, we've talked about it, to be a high level player. He's got himself where he's competing with top kids in our league who are top players in the country. Now can he take another step.

So I hope so. But until he tells me I'm definitely coming back. I know he's talked about to our guys about different majors and getting a masters and some of that stuff, so I guess that's a positive sign right now that he's thinking about it.

Q. And then obviously there is still some time before guys can decide, but how big is the last stretch of the season just to keep the guys together and make sure that you bring that core back next year?

BRUCE WEBER: Well, there is no doubt it's huge. Tim mentioned it a few weeks ago. You know, it's part of college basketball. It's the part I feel sad about. I don't know if kids think it's going to help them in the long run to keep moving. Work on yourself, and going to a new place is not going to always change it. It's going to be part of

college basketball, and it's important.

Every coach in the country is going to go through this every year, and we've been through the stress of COVID and all we've had to deal with and now every year we're going to have to figure that out.

But, again, use Baylor as an example. Those guys, you know, couple of them red shirt, transfer red shirts, used that time to get better, mature, get tougher. Now they're special players. So hopefully our guys have that same thought process and motivation and we can all hang together.

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