

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

Coach Lon Kruger

Postgame Press Conference



Kansas 69, Oklahoma 62

LON KRUGER: Obviously can't have a half like that against a really good ballclub, to dig yourself a hole. Proud of the guys' response. Came out in the second half obviously much more like themselves, moved the basketball, made plays for each other, battled on both ends of the floor, but dug ourselves a big hole and worked to get out of it, and couldn't quite do it.

Q. What most disappointed you about that first-half performance?

LON KRUGER: We hadn't had one like that on the year, so it was kind of shocking to everyone. Obviously, what, 12, 13 turnovers, 16 points off of turnovers, half their points were off of our turnovers. That was just really surprising. Got stuck in the sand it seemed like, no one was moving. Everyone was trying to get a bucket on their own. Just didn't have any ball movement or people movement in the first half, and Kansas is way too good a ballclub to do that against.

Q. Looking at those turnovers, did Kansas do anything differently than maybe you expected? Obviously they're a different lineup out there without McCormack, but how difficult was that to adjust to, or was it just mainly y'all just not moving the ball and being proactive about things?

LON KRUGER: Kansas is very good regardless if they play big lineup or they've done small lineup a lot on the year, so they're good with both. Obviously without McCormack we knew it was going to be Lightfoot and Wilson at the 5, and those two guys are good players. I thought Lightfoot really hurt us the first half especially, and Wilson is a good player. Yeah, it wasn't too many options. They had alternatives. They had so many guys, and we knew who they were going to play, we just didn't play very well.

Q. The last two possessions you had Austin either shot the ball, lost the ball, made a basket. I know that's what you've done all year, but do you wish you were a little bit more diverse or are you okay with just going through Austin for two straight possessions in the game?

LON KRUGER: Well, Austin is kind of a decision maker with the ball, late-game situations, and obviously a big reason we got back into the ballgame. I thought Brady was great, as well, in the second half. Those two guys were the big key. E.J., we just battled much better in the second half.

You know, Austin made some big plays to get us back into it and get us close and obviously a couple didn't go the right way there late.

Q. What was the message to the team at halftime when they came out and you had to take a chunk out of that lead and you guys were able to do that? What was the message and what were they saying amongst themselves?

LON KRUGER: The message is let's go play like you've played all year basically. The first half was a shock to everyone. We haven't had a half like that on the year and picked a bad time to do it, but again, lessons to be learned, and we understand it's a 40-minute grind and a 40-minute battle and we can't afford to give away 20 of it, that's for sure.

Q. The opportunity to play, to beat Kansas was there, I think, for a lot of folks going into tonight. Talk about the opportunity you had in the field house earlier this year, not to focus so much on the specific one-on-one battles with KU, but will you rue some missed chances specifically when you look back?

LON KRUGER: Well, you think about the things that you didn't do that maybe would have allowed you to win, but yeah, certainly here today we've got to play better for 40 minutes to beat a Kansas club like that.

Q. There down the stretch did you feel like the guys

really just ran out of gas after playing the late game last night and then having to use all that energy to get back into the game coming out of halftime?

LON KRUGER: Yeah, I don't know that -- obviously playing back-to-back days is a factor, but I thought their activity, their competitiveness in the second half especially -- first half wasn't where it needed to be, but I thought the energy level didn't look like it cost us in the second half. I thought they battled through it, to their credit, didn't rotate in a lot of people in the second half. The guys on the floor were the ones we were going with, and they kept feeling like in time-outs they were doing fine, and we stuck with them for the most part.

Q. All of your points except for 10 came from Elijah, Austin and Brady. What was going on that the other guys couldn't really get anything going to really help you out outside of those 10 points scoring offensively?

LON KRUGER: Oh, it's hard to say one thing. Different guys had some opportunities. Again, first half was just kind of a -- everyone was out of it in the first half. In the second half, getting good results offensively. The guys were scoring. We'd like for everyone to score, but whatever is working like it was in the second half, we'll take that, and that doesn't mean everyone is going to score. But the three guys, like you mentioned, did a good job.

Q. Is Marcus Garrett -- is Kansas a bad matchup for you just because of Marcus Garrett? He looks like maybe the most equipped guy in the league to bother Austin with his great defense.

LON KRUGER: The guy is a terrific player, yeah. He's a tough matchup for everyone. He's that type of player, makes his teammates better, good defender. Yeah, he's tough. He's tough on everyone.

Q. Sunday you'll find out your assignment. After a game like this, such a diverse result from half to half, do you go into the NCAAs worried about your team or encouraged by the way you played that second half?

LON KRUGER: No, like our team a lot. This group has done an amazing job. When you think about back in November, where we were at, the progress they've made, what they did there with a great streak in January and early February. Tough finish, but they bounced back. Yeah, the second half, certainly uplifting compared to what it would have felt like had we not responded in the second half. So going into the postseason, feel much better about how we played in the second half, but disappointed to not win today, but this group will be excited about what happens on

Sunday and be excited about the next opponent without any question, and deservedly so. Happy for them.

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