

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

**Kansas Jayhawks**

**Coach Bill Self**

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas 69, Oklahoma 62

**Q. You guys outscored them by 20 in the first half and then they got you 47-34 in the second half. What was the difference between the two halves?**

BILL SELF: Well, the first half we were great. We got everything we wanted. We didn't make shots. But we did everything else great. We rebounded, we defended, we shared it, we turned them over.

Second half we didn't play near as well, but they were as good as we were, the first half, the second half. They were great. And they made shots, and of course Brady and Reaves were terrific.

And then we made some bonehead plays -- didn't play smart. How many baskets did we give them by just tossing the ball to them from underneath their basket or not rebounding an airball or stuff like that. As many breaks as we got the first half, they balanced out the second half.

But it was a great game to win because they put real game pressure on us and we had some guys step up and make plays. Ochai was the best that I've seen for a period of time in the second half that we've had in a long time, and Marcus was really, really good. The other three starters go 3 of 18 and we still win, and that's because Juan and Mitch were so good. It was a great win. They are so gifted offensively, and it's good to get out of here with a W.

**Q. What was it about Ochai that -- he's so calm usually. He looked like he had more emotion tonight, he was looking for his shot during that stretch. More assertive or was there anything different?**

BILL SELF: Well, I think that, in sports, whenever somebody is really doing something really well and they feel it, they're probably going to be more aggressive. So I don't know if that was anything in particular. If he hadn't have made -- I think he got started by getting fouled on a



three-point shot. I could be wrong. I think that kind of started and he got an and-one on a back-door layup. But if those things hadn't happened he may not have been as aggressive because he may not have been seeing as big a basket. Yeah, he was special there.

And Juan, the last three he made from the corner of our bench, what a job Juan did screening for him. Juan is our best screener and he did a great job with that. It was great. Marcus played more in the post than he has all year and Ochai was certainly more aggressive. But CB didn't scratch, Bryce made one basket, Jalen made two and still to score 69, that's a lot of points for us with no David and three starters going 3 for 18. So that's a positive.

The negative is obviously we left our game at halftime, for the most part, so we've got to put together 40 minutes.

**Q. Can you talk about the play of Marcus tonight, especially defensively?**

BILL SELF: Well, I think he's always good defensively, but I thought he was as good offensively tonight as defensively. I thought he was terrific. What did he end up having? 17? I can't see. 17, 7 of 12, made two threes. One of the threes he missed was all the way down, it came out. Three assists, four steals. He was really, really good, and as good as he was, he was the best player, we had other than Ochai, but Dajuan Harris is right there, too. I thought Dajuan was special.

**Q. What did you see from him in the first half, Juan?**

BILL SELF: Just the same thing you guys did, his hands, he was everywhere. He was four steals I believe at half. He was taking charges, I think he took two for the game. Made a couple of good passes when he got in there tight. He was arguably the best player in the game the first half.

Second half he didn't quite do as much but he still played well. He had an uncontested lay-up on a back cut and he tried to catch it with one hand. There's a lot of things like that we can tighten up. But I thought he was pretty good both halves.

**Q. Do you feel you guys have gotten a little better at finding the hot guy?**

BILL SELF: You know what, we haven't had a situation where that's really happened this year. I hate to admit that, but it hasn't. And in this particular situation, I thought our guys did a great job of looking for him. They did. And I thought we did a good job screening for him, as well.

**Q. David maybe though when he's gotten it going.**

BILL SELF: Well, yeah, but that's easier. That's a different deal because, one thing about David, when he's in there, there's probably no big in the country, maybe other than Garza, that gets more -- maybe Timme and Garza that actually touch the ball more. I think that's what we've done a good job of is playing through him. But we haven't played through a perimeter player like we did tonight, so that was good to see.

**Q. After you found out about David, what did you say to the guys to keep them on task, after you knew you were going to have to change the way you played and what did you tell Mitch about what you expected from him tonight?**

BILL SELF: I told Mitch he's going to play great. Mitch told me, Coach, I'm going to play good, and I believed it. So much of guys playing well, a lot of times, is opportunities and being able to play through mistakes. Not everybody has the same freedom as what a starter does and that kind of stuff, and bench guys usually don't.

So, you know, if a bench guy has got it going, great. If he doesn't have it going, he's probably not going to get a chance to see if he going to get it going near as much. But we were able to keep those guys in for extended periods of time.

But yeah, I really didn't say anything other than, hey, we played some of our best ball this year first semester without David. We beat some teams basically playing small without David. We haven't played small much, but we played a really good first half against Texas without David or Mitch. So, I mean, we've shown that we could do it some, so I don't think it was anything that the guys thought, oh, no. They probably thought, well, it's going to be a little harder now, so everybody has got to bow their neck a little bit more.

But it was good for us, it was good for us, and I think it was good for the committee to probably see that we can play really well and not have David or Tristan out there, even though they'll both be back next week.

**Q. How much of that was what went into starting Bryce?**

BILL SELF: No, the whole deal was if they start Kuath, we're starting Mitch. If they start Brady, we're starting Bryce -- because we switched everything the first half and it was very effective. And then, when we went big, Mitch did such a good job on Brady, even though I think he had seven points at halftime, he didn't hurt us like he did the second half. The second half Lon made sure they played through Reaves and Manek almost every possession there during the key stretch, and we didn't do a very good job with it. That was strictly the only reason.

You know, there's a good chance tomorrow we'll go big because -- I'm not saying that positively -- but you play Texas, they start big. If you play Tech, they start a true 5 man. That may have been the reason why we -- that was the reason why we started for this particular game only.

**Q. Can I also ask you where David and Tristan watched this game? Are they back in Lawrence or in their room? I assume they watched.**

BILL SELF: Oh, yeah, they watched. But I'll be honest, 30 minutes before tip-off I didn't call and ask them where they were actually watching the game tonight. I think that they were in their room, and to be real candid, they're supposed to be in their room because they're supposed to be isolated. So I'm sure they were.

**Q. Did you discuss the importance of having active hands on defense and how that may have contributed to success tonight?**

BILL SELF: You know, good question. We discuss every day, activity level, and so much of that is hands, feet and hands. But so much of that, and our activity level was great the first half. I don't know that we really pressured them out of stuff but we made them catch it in uncomfortable spaces and of course we did a really good job with our hands as far as deflection. It seemed like to me, once again, what did we get three steals in a row and come away with no points when we had numbers? We had chances to really add to that lead the first half and just didn't convert. It's encouraging seeing our guys guard like that.

**Q. I also wanted to ask about the atmosphere tonight at the Sprint Center. What were your thoughts about it?**

BILL SELF: I didn't really notice it much, but I do think it appeared to be a pro-Kansas crowd for sure. But pro-Kansas crowd, so it was 1,500 to 300. I mean, it

wasn't like it was a true home game. I don't think the crowd had anything to do with who won the game, but I do think the crowd makes it more fun to play because you could tell they were enjoying watching our guys play.

**Q. How much do you enjoy watching Dajuan when he plays like he played tonight?**

BILL SELF: Well, yeah, I love watching Dajuan play because he's a ball mover and does what he does, and he's active. I guess the little guy always kind of -- you want to see the little guy do well. But yeah, I really love watching Dajuan play when he's aggressive. To me he's not that much fun to watch when he's not. I love his activity level when he gets those hands going because he is very, very -- he's probably the best on our team as far as hands go.

**Q. Oklahoma had twice as many turnovers as made field goals in the first half. Is that just a matter of you guys -- your activity and energy level, or did you do something just to get them out of sorts?**

BILL SELF: I'd like to say we did something special, but we didn't. Our guys were just turned up. You know, there's a lot of things with the game, you make some shots, you get some confidence. You also get some stops and you get some confidence, and I think we were a confident defensive team the first half, so we were probably trusting our feet more, probably more active. Second half when they started driving by us and stuff, now we don't come out as far, they walk into a couple of threes, that kind of stuff. I just think we were a much more confident defensive team versus the first half.

**Q. You touched on it a little bit about the different lineups tonight. Did you have a favorite lineup that you put in tonight?**

BILL SELF: Probably not. I think there were stretches in the game where we were better with five guards and it didn't matter who was out there and we were extremely better with Mitch in the game, it didn't matter who else was out there. I don't know that I would say that -- the best team that we had out there tonight, though, was probably -- what was it, probably about six or seven minutes the first half where the lead went to probably 8 to 20 or something like that, and I think Marcus was even on the bench for a portion of that. I don't think I had a favorite. I thought it all fit pretty well.

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