

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 12, 2021

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Oklahoma State Cowboys

Mike Boynton

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma State - 83, Baylor - 74

Q. Baylor is a team not a whole lot of teams have been able to find a way around. How did you do it today?

MIKE BOYNTON: Really good players. Our guys showed so much grit and determination and fight. The things that we stress that we've tried to rebuild this program on because it, obviously I hadn't been around Oklahoma State basketball as long as a guy like Berry Tramel or Bill Haisten, but I know what this program is about at its core and it's built on toughness and defense and Coach Sutton restored it that way and, again, happy birthday to Coach Sutton, it's his birthday, and I remember my conversation with him and him telling me what he wanted this program to be about. I'll never forget it. And as long as I'm here that will be what I try to make sure that this program represents when we take the court and I thought our guys displayed a lot of that today.

Q. What was your message to the team in the locker room after the game?

MIKE BOYNTON: Super proud. That team's lost one game all year and ran through the league, had the Coach of the Year, got a guy who many people thought was the Player of the Year, but we stood up and we fought. We took some blows, which you do this time of year, but we never got knocked out, we got up off the mat a few times when we needed to and just kept swinging and I was proud of them.

But now we got to turn our attention. We didn't come here to win a semifinal game. We came here to try to win a championship, and we have an opportunity to do that tomorrow.

Q. Before the game I noticed you were pacing under the goal. Might be a little different for you. What's going through your mind there, was it nerves, was it thinking, was it, what was it?

MIKE BOYNTON: No, so most of the time when we are here my family's with me and I know where they are, and this year obviously it's different. So I was trying to find my wife and kids before the game started because I usually give my son a thumbs up and I blow a kiss to my daughter and I couldn't locate them for awhile but I found them eventually.

Q. Cade and Ice talked about the practice you had, I think it was photo day, where you cut down the nets and you do that every year but this year was different. Was it different to you this year?

MIKE BOYNTON: Not really. I believe in the law of attraction. You got to believe something can happen and you got to see yourself do it before you can put it into action and we wanted to set a tone with this team pretty early about what I expected us to be capable of doing. And then we went to work. We haven't talked about it since, but here we are.

Q. Do you feel like you're close to what you think you're capable of?

MIKE BOYNTON: We're closer. Again, a big part of what we talked about the last few weeks was cutting down on our turnovers and what we could look like if we take better care of the ball. And even in the first half Cade's offensive foul and we had one other, but it was relatively low compared to where we have been. Then in the second half we really, really did a good job and when we do that, that tends to be who we were today, which is really electric team particularly in transition.

Q. They were dominating the boards in the second half. I think it was 16-4 at one point. What was the message and how did you guys turn that around?

MIKE BOYNTON: There's no secrets. I mean, we were up two on the glass at halftime, I believe, and I looked up at the stat sheet, somebody may have told me that we were down 10 like eight minutes into the second half. I told the guys, I said listen, we can do a lot of things and win this game, but if we give them three shots every time they have



the ball we got no chance. At that point, I can't draw up a play, there's not a play that you can draw to go get a rebound. You got to have some guys that have some toughness, some care, and battle. It's not like, they're big and physical and Vital is as good an offensive rebounder as there is in this league, but if you want to win you just got to find a way to get things done, and we did, I think.

Q. And that stretch of the two and-ones from Avery and Rondel, how big was that for you guys?

MIKE BOYNTON: Huge. Again, I hope we continue to dispel this notion that we're Cade and a bunch of like puppets out there. He's really good. He's the best player in the country. I don't think it's close. Again I try to be pretty modest about it all year. He's the best player in the country, it's not close, he should be the No. 1 pick for whoever's got it, and, but at the same time we got some other really good guys. And I told Rondel in the locker room after the game yesterday that he was going to need to be ready today, and he answered the bell, and Avery stepped up again today as well.

Q. A lot of this game will be made about Baylor being upset, only second loss of the season. What does this say about how far you guys can go?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't know. I guess that's more for people who write, journalists, analysts and people like that. Honestly, and it's not coach-speak, I really just want to get better tomorrow. Like I want to get better tomorrow. I want to play somehow, whatever the things that we did poorly today, rebounding stands out, we know we're going to play a Texas team that's much longer and athletic than we are across the board, so rebounding is going to be a big emphasis and so that's really what my focus is. And if we do the job tomorrow, we'll be champions and we'll have accomplished a big goal of ours and then we'll go on from there.

Q. Also, did what happened to Virginia, Duke and Kansas the last couple days give you pause at all, just about wading through this whole thing?

MIKE BOYNTON: The whole season's given us pause, right? But you can only do so much. There's no guarantee that next week -- it's not like -- the virus isn't just going to just disappear. We're going to respect it, we're going to try to be diligent, but can't really run and hide from it. It's not a great answer and I'm sure people are still scratching their head saying, why are we doing this? Well this was the plan. And we're doing the best we can with it. That's all you can do. If it gets us, we'll be disappointed, but we really can't control it. And my message to our guys is, we know it can happen, let's make sure we do everything we

can to mitigate the things that are within our control.

Q. Championships can be won or lost at the free-throw line and 11 of your last 15 points were at the line. How gratifying is it to see you guys win in that way?

MIKE BOYNTON: Free throws are one of those things that I always get questions about, I try to -- we work on it all the time. We try to work on it different way, we do it start of practice, middle of practice, end of practice, but then sometimes our guys are just better there in games than others. And I don't have a great answer. Ray was really, really big factor for us, especially late because we were able to close it out there. We got good shooters and as long as we get the right guys to the line at the right times I feel like it will be something -- because we talk about it all the time, this league specifically, a lot of one, two possession games and if you don't make free throws you really shoot yourself in the foot.

Q. I know you're happy for all your guys, but Isaac has been with you the longest and he seems just so grateful to be able to even put on the OSU jersey every night and so focused, how special is it to see him be a part of this level of success with you guys?

MIKE BOYNTON: Ice has been through a lot, probably a lot more than has been reported, I would guess. His first year here he was thrown into being a point guard, when he ain't never done it. He handled it pretty good, but his team lost 20 games. I talked to Ice probably three days after that season was over and told him that he would never experience that again. That I was going to make sure that he was going to have success as a player. Last year we get off to a great start and he gets sick. And then he misses a month and we don't have the type of start to the conference season. But we finally get on track ending the year. The thing about him is when everything happened this summer, he was like one of the first guys to call me and say, Coach, no matter what happens I'm with you. And we have such a strong relationship because he's bought in and he's about the same things that I am and I think that's why we're having this type of success together is because we really value winning at a high level and the work that it takes to get it done.

Q. If somebody said, I missed it, was Bryce under the weather or what was up with him tonight?

MIKE BOYNTON: Yeah, no, he was actually fine this morning. But I think he ate like a spicy chicken sandwich at some point, like upset his stomach, and I think it was coming out of both ends, I'm probably sharing too much here. But we tried to throw him out in the game and he just

didn't have it. I think, on the flip side, it speaks to our depth that we got a starter, a guy that's been really good for us at times this year who officially did scratch today and we were still able to beat the No. 2 team in the country in a conference tournament semifinal game.

Q. I asked the two players this, when you -- great win. When you look back at the game, did something pop out in your mind as like your favorite play, your favorite moment from tonight?

MIKE BOYNTON: Not necessarily. Just the joy of the kids because they're so bought into each other. Knowing that today would have been Coach Sutton's 85th birthday and winning the way we did, I think with, I think we won with toughness. I'll go back and watch to be sure, but I think we won with toughness tonight. What this program is today versus March 24th, 2017 when I took over, those are just the things that go through my mind and why I feel so encouraged at we got this thing on the right track.

Q. I assume a coach on any level any sport critiques what you did wrong and tries to fix it and is encouraged by the things you did right. Are there levels of your encouragement, for instance, for many, for several weeks in a row you guys have played great down the stretch of games. The last three or four or five minutes. How much pride does a coach take in that one element of the game, knowing that his guys when the game's on the line, seem to be really performing at a high level?

MIKE BOYNTON: Well, it goes back to me, yes, I would say it's a high level of pride that I take in our teams being good late. Partly because we talk about the closeness of ball games in this league, the level of coaching that we're going against, the level of players that we're going against. The environments that we have to play in most years and knowing how hard those circumstances can be to have success. So that's why we practice those situations every day. I mean inevitably, I think today the situation at the end of four minute media was it was 3:40 left, we were up one, and they were shooting a one and one. And at some point in this season those guys have seen that situation. We haven't always handled it well, but they know what it's like and tonight was just another example of us closing the right way because we have felt the experience of going through it before time and time again.

Q. Earlier in the game the TV mics were catching a lot of the communication you guys had on defense. You've mentioned how big a deal that is. Was it, I don't know the best it's been, especially in the early part of the game today?

MIKE BOYNTON: I think it was. Part of it was that was literally the No. 1 goal on the board is that today had to be the best day of communication we have had all year. They move a lot, they got a lot of playmakers, a lot of shooters, and if you don't communicate -- and they got us a few times still even with all that -- you got no shot if you don't do it. And that really hurt us. So the communication was a big, big key for us and then trying to defend those guys who can get you off the bounce and make 3s was probably second and then trying to rebound and take care of the basketball would have been next.

Q. There was a time there, especially in the first half where you guys were running with particularly Avery and Rondel, Rondel has been in a bit of a slump, what does it say about his maturity as a freshman that he was able to step up in a game like this?

MIKE BOYNTON: People -- he's a stud. And I don't like to do hyperbole, really, but once we -- we'll spend some time getting his shot right and he'll have the ability to not have to stay in school for four years, that's how good he's going to be. And he has an unbelievable level of competitiveness, kind of like Ice, in a different way, like I see the same values in those kids when I recruited them. They're about winning, it didn't matter to him that he didn't play as much. It never matters to him -- obviously he's got pride and wants to make shots, but he doesn't live and die with his own game. He's totally bought into his team having success and representing our program. And I'm proud that he's with us.

Q. This was an emotional game for you your guys, Cade and Avery were talking about how much they wanted to play Baylor yesterday. How do you kind of reset the emotions and then go again tomorrow? Cade mentioned you didn't come here to beat Baylor but kind of how do you take those words and put them into action?

MIKE BOYNTON: That's a good question. Nothing's really been easy for this team, right? Most of our games have been pretty close. We probably have played in the last -- I'm not sure anybody's played a tougher schedule the last three weeks than we have. Nobody. We played every team we played essentially has been a top 10 at the time we played them or top-15. So we're prepared, but now we got to play against a team who didn't play today. And we played a pretty physical, emotional game. But for some reason I have a sneaky suspicion that our guys will be ready.

Q. It's probably a pretty good bet that when you guys convened for the first time back last fall Cade Cunningham, with all of his talent and skill, could have

gone head-to-head with Jared Butler and made a pretty good go of it, right? What I want to know is, how would the team that you got then, how would that team have stacked up with Baylor at that time do you think with all of their season, a veteran savvy, know how, all that kind of thing and what kind of growth did that version of your team need to make to get to a result like tonight?

MIKE BOYNTON: Not very good. We would have not fared well. If we had to play these guys in let's say November even, all right, I don't want to say September because that's not realistic, let's just say November. So some leagues -- I think OU like played a league game like the second game of the year. No chance. Home, road, neutral, doesn't matter. Because part of the reason that they were so good expected to be so good is because they had experience, but they had experienced this, played together. Not only -- I got talent. But I got talented guys who don't necessarily understand college basketball and have never played together for the most part. Trying to figure out how to put it all together, it took some time and I'm glad we didn't have to play them that early. And that we have had a chance to now scout and get better people keep saying, hottest team -- doesn't matter. It's only as good as your preparation. We got to be really good in our preparation between tonight and tomorrow, because if we're going to have any chance to win against Texas, then we got to be a little bit better than we were today.

Q. Has what happened since then, is that attribute to you or the kids?

MIKE BOYNTON: A hundred percent the kids and my staff. I just get to sit over there and call timeouts and every now and then I get to stand up and talk to an official and I ask Cade if he wants to come out, you know. But, really, these kids work so hard, they care about each other, they want to win, and they take pride in representing Oklahoma State basketball and that's a big deal. That's where it starts in recruiting and you got to have guys who value things that you value. Otherwise it doesn't work. We got guys like Rondel who are bidding their time while we watch a really sensational player carry us, with some leadership from some other upperclassmen, have a lot of success and they're just kind of playing small parts, but those roles are going to develop as they go along in their careers.

Q. Earlier Ice talked about that he didn't think this team had a ceiling because he said that if you have a ceiling that kind of means you have some limitations. How much better can this team get and if they do get better, what does that look like from what we have been seeing now when you spoke about possibly being the hottest team in the country, what is a better

version of this team look like right now?

MIKE BOYNTON: I don't talk about being the hottest team in the country, because it's kind of an irrelevant thing to talk about. What I always focus on is what can we get better at. I've been asked several times what I think our ceiling is or how good I think we can be. And the real answer to that is I don't know. The truth is, what I said before, I think we can compete with and beat anybody in the country. And I have unbelievable respect for Coach Drew and what he's done with that program -- probably the best rebuilding job in the history of sports. Like what he inherited, I couldn't imagine. I think I was just finishing college and so I knew what was kind of going on at Baylor. So I was well aware -- in fact, one of those kids transferred to Mississippi State and kicked our butt a few times. But with that being said, I never said we could beat anybody except Baylor. Because I didn't believe that we couldn't beat them. I thought we were good enough, we just had to play well enough to do it. The first game we played them without Cade and Rondel, scoring was a problem for us. The second time we played them without Ice, defense was a problem for us. First time we played them whole, we stood there and we went blow to blow, blow for blow with them for 40 minutes there.

Q. You talked about your competitive nature of your guys and in fact I think Cade talked about it as well. Is that something you recruit to, is that something one guy on the team maybe Isaac or whoever that drives guys that way that you got to compete if you want to play, where does that come from?

MIKE BOYNTON: No, it's the foundation of our program. I remember we had lost my second year, we had a really bad year and we were getting our heads beat in. We went to Kansas and it was close for awhile, but they wound up beating us by 15 or 16 and somebody asked, why do you guys keep competing so hard when you keep losing? Because they don't have a choice. That's not an option in our program. Now that doesn't mean, that means that not everybody's going to fit. So in recruiting we have got to be very mindful that that's something that kids value is being put in really competitive environments, being challenged every day to be their best, not that they're going to be their best every day, and being held accountable to that standard. And again, as long as I'm the coach here, that's not changing. If somebody above me wants to try to do this a different way, then have to find another coach to do it, because I don't believe it can be done any other way. Fast.

Q. Is there anything that we missed that you that you want to say?

MIKE BOYNTON: I'm so proud, try to get these guys back and get some rest and try to get a game plan together for the Longhorns.

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