

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Kansas State Wildcats

Coach Bruce Weber

Nijel Pack

Mark Smith

Postgame Press Conference



some shots today, and that's what is important.

Markus, just to play in the game after not going, you could tell he didn't have quite the rhythm; didn't practice for a week or so. But he wanted to be out there and his improvement has been amazing.

But, you know, these two guys, can't say enough about 'em. What they've done this year is really impressive.

And I think as a coach, with Nijel getting most improved, you've got to feel really good about it. It's his work ethic, and obviously you hope you had something to do with it.

And Mark, to have the kind of year he had is amazing.

It's tough. All the losses have been tough. You know, we've been there the whole way. They haven't quit, but we just haven't been able to get the wins we wanted when we needed it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes. Then we'll come back for Coach.

Q. Seemed like they continued to pound on you guys, kinda wore you guys down.

MARK SMITH: You know, I think they just kinda kept getting to the basket, and Coach was telling us at halftime we have to grab rebounds. And they were just more physical than us inside.

I just think, you know, like, maybe they just kept wearing us down, but I just think it was a couple of possessions we made a couple of mistakes, and it came down to that.

Q. Nijel, how effective were they in chasing you off your spots that you like to shoot from?

NIJEL PACK: When they started locking on the play, their looks in the second half, just things that didn't go my way, some didn't fall, but you obviously -- they were lost and I thought I got the good looks. I just didn't make the shot.

Q. The season looks like it's going to be done. How

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THE MODERATOR: All right. We are ready to begin with the Kansas State Wildcats. Coach Bruce Weber, and our two student-athletes are Nijel Pack and Mark Smith.

Coach, we'll come to you first.

COACH WEBER: I think if you look at the stats, the biggest thing is the bench, 29-5, and our guys, we just told them we appreciate them, we love them. They've come every day. We have been through a bunch, and they keep coming back and playing their all.

Obviously I just said today be special. Don't let your teammates down. Don't let yourselves down. I had a couple of guys, maybe Mike McGuirl especially, instead of being relaxed and enjoying it. I think he played a little uptight and struggled a little bit.

I thought Mark had a few moments like that. I had to hug him and kiss him in one of the timeouts just to get him to relax. Nijel got us going early.

And they're a good defensive team and they're not going to let them get looks, and we expected a lot out of Nijel, but it wears on us, and just needed something from our bench.

We had our chances. We cut it 61-60. Mike 32, 42% from the three, wide open, and if he makes that we take the lead and who knows what happens.

But honestly it went the other way, and honestly, he's made improvement, from not being physical to not rebounding, 13-6, trying to guard big, physical guys, made



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will you look back on this year as you sit here right now? Missed opportunities? Disappointment? How do you characterize it?

THE MODERATOR: Nijel, you first.

NIJEL PACK: I enjoyed the season. This is my first true college season. Last year having COVID, playing on the road, traveling, the atmosphere, this is what I wanted when I was a kid, and I looked up to that.

It's definitely an opportunity. When you fail you get back up. I think we picked up the things we learned from and we gotta do better, and we're going to come back and do better next year.

Q. Nijel, you guys finished. What are you feeling?

NIJEL PACK: We have to be better at closing out games. We have seen every team in this league and we gave every team in this league a run for their money.

We have to close out games. We came to this tournament knowing that our motto was "no regrets," and I think we played that today and left it all out there.

There were moments we could have been better but I think we played really hard today.

Q. Same question for Coach. When you look back on this season, what is the most memorable part of it? What do you take from this group of guys?

COACH WEBER: I told them -- I mentioned it earlier. They're a special group. They came together. I was worried. We got three guys out. Mark is about 28, 29 years old. I mentioned we go to the main event a week ago and he's running around like he's five years old playing every game, enjoying everybody.

He's with one teammate, the next time I look he's playing laser tag with somebody else or doing whatever. That was all fun. They all enjoyed it. They enjoyed each other. They were fun to coach. We got better, and then maybe the whole thing just took a toll, I guess. I don't know.

Obviously we had our chances in a lot of games and we just didn't do it. But, again, I told them I love them, I appreciate them, and it's -- I just wish -- I wish for them, pray every day that something good would happen, and it just didn't.

But after the -- the whole message after is what you are about as a person, your character, and what you're going to be in the future. That's the most important thing when it

comes down to it, so the pain of the loss is as it goes, but having the spiritual belief and character is the most important thing for all these guys.

I know we want to win, and no one wants to win more than I do, but, you know, at the same time, I want to be proud of them just like I am all the other guys, all the guys that have come through Kansas State and graduated and are fathers and husbands and doing things the right way.

Q. Bruce, on the chance that this was your final game at Kansas State, is there anything you want to say or reflect on?

COACH WEBER: No. I'll be honest, I'm very, very proud of my time here. It's funny, some of you guys asked about the tradition and the history.

And it was a long, long time that we had won a championship, and I told the guys the funny part and the sad part, I didn't get much credit for that, and they all said it wasn't my guys, but I would tell you probably the closest group of all of my 40-some years of coaching is that group from Thomas Gibson to Shane to Nino to D.J. to Rodney to all that group. Some only had a year, some two years, but that group was really, really special.

And, you know, then we did it with our guys. We won a Big XII and I'm proud of that. The tournament bids, I wish I had more. Everyone wants more bids. Between '77 and '13 K-State had some pretty good coaches.

Names that come to mind, Lon Kruger, Hall of Famer. Didn't win a title. Then Dana Altman. Got fired; didn't win a title.

Then it's Bob Huggins. Only a year, but Hall of Famer; didn't win a title. Frank Martin. Maybe a Hall of Famer; pretty good coach; didn't win a title.

We won titles. We did it the right way. We did it with our guys graduating, and part of my hair today, guys, I'm on the NCAA Ethics Committee.

I'm in meetings. I was told that they were going to take care of the people in the F.B.I. stuff, so I told somebody I'm going to grow my hair until something happens. Obviously it's still growing. That's the sad part of our business.

Lon Kruger told me the other day all the guys in the F.B.I. except one are in the NCAA Tournament. All those teams are going to be in the NCAA Tournament. I'm proud of these guys. Love them. Love the guys I've coached.

To see Thomas Gibson come in with his little kids and

getting a hug from him, anybody, Justin Edwards, a dad, all down the line, even J.R., he's LeBron's special coach now, but you're proud of guys like that.

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Whatever happens in the future happens and that's fine. K-State is a great place, great people. You know, and I love -- I told you the other day I love coaching here. Love coaching. I love -- you know, I know I'm old and I've got gray hair, but they'll tell you I've got some spunk and I'll kick Mark's ass a bunch of times, and it's -- we'll see what happens.

Whatever happens, happens. That's life. I pray a lot. My faith is very important to me. All along, you know, this dirty -- I wasn't a great player. I told the guys my dad came over and didn't get a high school degree. He made all my family teachers and coaches. My brother, high school Hall of Fame, Wisconsin, Illinois Hall of Fame.

Sisters are teachers and coaches, and I had a whim. I drove nine hours to Kentucky to interview with Coach Keady, and he wasn't there.

I never drove nine hours in my life. I had my leisure suit on. I was ready for the interview, and the secretary laughed at me. I said, Where is he? He's not here. Is he coming back?

No. He's out of the country. He forgot. I remember going back to camp, working camp and calling him, on a pay phone. I put quarters in. These guys would have no idea about that. I called the Coach and said, Coach Keady, I came in, and he said, I'm sorry. Why don't you drive down again.

I said. I'm running camp. I can't leave again. Either you hire me or -- I would have never said that, but I didn't know how mean he was and how tough he was, and he was quiet and he said, Okay, you're hired.

He never met me. I was with him 19 years. Unbelievable years. Gave me a chance to get -- my degree in basketball gave me lifetime experiences that I never dreamed of.

Very proud of them. The guys that I coached 40 years ago, I talk to them and feels like I'm still their guy, their buddy.

It's a crazy business. I have loved it. I hope I get to continue. We'll see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we're out of time, thank you so much.

COACH WEBER: Appreciate it.

