

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Kansas Jayhawks

Coach Norm Roberts

Jalen Wilson

Gradey Dick

Postgame Press Conference



West Virginia 61, Kansas 78

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin our news conference with the Kansas Jayhawks with Coach Norm Roberts and his two student-athletes this afternoon Gradey Dick and Jalen Wilson.

Coach we'll come to you first for an opening comment.

NORM ROBERTS: I thought it was going to be a tough, tough game obviously. Coach Huggins is a Hall of Fame coach and West Virginia has been a hottest team in the league over the last two weeks, and, you know, I thought our guys came out with great energy.

We really defended well. Kind of took them out of what they wanted to do and never really let Stevenson get going, and that was a big key, because he's been playing lights out.

So really proud of our guys. Our guys did a great job rebounding the ball and sharing the ball in the second half. I think probably what happens in this tournament is the team that plays first sometimes can get tired, and I thought they got a little bit fatigued which probably helped us a little bit.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Let's go to questions and direct them to our student-athletes first, Gradey and Jalen.

Q. Just when did you find out Coach Self wouldn't be here, and what kind of effect it have had when you found out he was in the hospital and you were going to be playing today without him? Jalen first you and then Gradey.

JALEN WILSON: With him not being here it brought us together even more through the adversity we've been through the entire season. That makes us come together more and play as team. It's bigger than us. We played for our entire family across Kansas, and just another moment to prove how tight this group is and no matter what's going on the outside noise, that we're a team and we're family.

GRADEY DICK: Exactly what Jalen said. Just coming together through it all, and Coach Self would obviously want that. A lot of what he preaches is what best players, when some guys out or whatnot, he's always preaching next man up, and in this case it was coach. It's kind of a little similar to the start of the season. It's a little more serious now with Coach Self, but we're here and it's all good and just pray for him.

MODERATOR: Other questions? Right side toward the back. First in the back on this side and then the front.

Q. Gradey, wanted to ask you, first action here in the Big 12 tournament, what was it like for you? How did you think you settled in into the game?

JALEN WILSON: Actually, me being from here got the chance to come to these with my family -- actually a lot of them -- so I just know when it gets to this point in the season it's just a ton of excitement in the city not only, but just with teams, just when you know the competitive spirit comes on full display with every single team.

A lot of it is some of these teams' last time playing, so we just know we're coming in it's going to be a lot of excitement from the fans around here. Yeah, like I said, and the competitiveness is up, so that's what we love to do.

Q. Jalen, great game today. You've been through this experience before last year. As a senior leader in the locker room, what's your message as we head into March?

JALEN WILSON: First, it's important. All these games is win or go home now. A lot of them, mistakes we've made in conference maybe play being down ten or 15 at the half



and somehow coming back.

May not be possible now. Teams are amped up and a lot of teams are playing for seeding and different things like that. So it's important to get off to a good start and understand what wins, and that's playing defense, starting off with that, and playing team ball not letting any outside distractions -- March Madness comes with a lot of things, and we continue to play as a team and we'll be fine.

MODERATOR: In the back.

Q. For both of you guys, you get much time to be happy about beating West Virginia. You got Iowa State tomorrow. What can you take away from your two battles you had, very close games? What do you expect out of that one tomorrow night?

NORM ROBERTS: It's a great team. Every time we played them this season been a battle. Got a lot of good shooters, great coach, and it's just part of the Big 12 that it's always going to be a battle no matter what's going on.

We just gotta continue to play how he we play. Today we showed a glimpse of the defense play we had, and just starting off strong on that end letting everything else speak for itself on offense.

But they're a great team, a great defensive team, and tomorrow have to execute pretty hard.

GRADEY DICK: Yeah, another thing about these tournaments at the end of the season, it's fun times because you play one game and you really don't have any time to think about what just happened. You gotta move on to the next one, and kind of feels like an AU vibe. I played in that last year so I love it.

But yeah, like you said, we gotta go and preparation for Iowa State. Played them two times already and that's just shows the Big 12 competition, night in night out there's great game every single night.

MODERATOR: In the back now.

Q. Jalen, you touched on this about the seeding and back of your mind. Since this Big 12 conference is top to bottom tough, West Virginia coming in here, how is it where you guys are challenged with not looking too far ahead and kind of playing that game that's in front of you?

JALEN WILSON: Staying in the moment, understanding whatever is at stake won't be able to happen unless we take care of whoever is in front of us at this point.

That's the thing about the Big Ten 12 tournament, is it's always one game at a time. And like you said, the amount of competition that's in this conference this year is incredible, and you're not really able to look too far ahead because team in front of you can beat you.

And Iowa State beat us at Iowa State. We know they will be coming for us this time, and no matter what the overall seeding is, at the end of tournament we just got to take of whatever it in front of us.

MODERATOR: Front row.

Q. Gradey, Coach Roberts coached four games earlier this year. How much did that help you guys and will help in the future, depending on how coach is? And was it hard to play a game today knowing how much you guys love Coach?

GRADEY DICK: Yeah, our thoughts were for Coach before the game. It was nice hearing that he's doing good. But at the same time, like you said, we're used to Coach at the start of the year.

But it's easy when the whole staff (indiscernible) the same thing out of all of us, and that is just to play our game and not outplay your role and just really buy-in. When everyone wants that for you, it's just whoever is in that role, we play the same for them.

Q. You shot 66 percent in the second half overall; 52 percent for the game. Did you coming into this tournament put in importance on winning this? You're already the league champions, but winning the tournament, because as was talked about a little bit, you still have a shot for the overall No. 1 seed, and then maybe coming back to Kansas City for Midwest regional. So I know that's too much information down the road, but the way you shot today, is that an example of the importance you put on this tournament, Jalen?

JALEN WILSON: I mean, the shots we took I think were all good shots. We didn't want to come into the tournament and just set up the threes. We wanted to touch the paint every single time. Paint touches has always ended up in our favor, and with a tournament like this that can project us into the No. 1 seed is great, but like I said, taking one game at a time is important, and understand looking ahead can get you beat in this tournament, especially with a great team like Iowa State.

GRADEY DICK: Every time we come into a game, obviously to win is the goal, and the competitive spirit of

the guys on the team, too, the same thing coming into it. Like you said, we got the Big 12 conference, but I think we still have some sour taste in our mouth from past teams, and I feel like that competitive spirit from a lot of our guys is gonna come out when we get a little revenge that's the goal.

MODERATOR: Final questions for student athletes. One here in the back.

Q. Dajuan Harris did a lot of different things for you guys today. What was it about his game that really helped you both get the most out of your games?

JALEN WILSON? Today he showed exactly why he is who he is, scoring the ball, getting assists, defending, even had some rebounds. Just that all-around guys that is a leader on the team and leads us on offensive and the defense end. Dajuan is aggressive and he is looking to score and looking to make plays.

Our team moves so much better with a guy like that looking now for shots and for teammates, it's a pretty good combo.

GRADEY DICK: Exactly what J said. He's been doing this all year, so there's no surprises there. He comes into it the most selfless dude I've ever played with, so it just makes it that much easier when he's running the court or on the floor with the ball and finding open spots you didn't think was there. So it's a great joy playing with him.

MODERATOR: Okay. Gradey and Jalen, congratulations on your victory. We'll let you go back to the locker room. We will see you tomorrow.

Keep coach on stage for question and go on the right side toward the back.

Q. Coach, couple things. Do you expect Coach here this week at all? Are you planning on coaching tomorrow?

NORM ROBERTS: I do plan on coaching tomorrow, so I think it's a day-to-day thing what's going on.

Q. Just take us through your emotions with this. This is a friend of yours, and when you kind of found out what was going on and how you tried to compartmentalize game day from thoughts for him?

NORM ROBERTS: Well, Coach is always preaching to, us get the job done, stay focused on what you can control. There's other things you can't control. So what we could control is getting the team ready and getting them ready to play and locking in and playing the way we needed to to

win the game, and I thought our guys did a great job of being very, very focused, especially on the defensive end early. That helped us get out to a lead.

Q. Can you just take us through the timeline of events? When did you find out and then when did you tell the team and et cetera?

NORM ROBERTS: We talked last night. I don't know exact times and those things, because I was over here scouting and everything too. But when we found out we didn't really let the guys know anything really until this morning, because nothing was concrete on what was gonna happen.

So and then we talked to the guys earlier this morning, and as I said before, we always talk about next man up. You know, faces changes, expectations don't. That's our motto. That's what we live by.

Our guys understand that and I told those older guys, you gotta lock in and be focused. Young guys just understand that this is, you know, NCAA Tournament, Big 12 tournament time, and everybody has got to be locked in, and those guys did that.

Q. Obviously having Bill Self on the sideline is a great asset, but who on the floor really stepped up today to help lead team from the floor?

NORM ROBERTS: Well, all year long it's been Jalen, Dajuan, and then Kevin. And KJ is actually becoming more of a leader as well. But probably those four guys, because they've been around. They know what's going on. They know what it takes to win in a high level.

And those guys did great being leaders today, and they are like that every day.

Q. How did you feel that you guys did defensively against our guards tonight? You mentioned Stevenson not getting his normal numbers. Overall assessment of how you guys go defensively against their backcourt.

NORM ROBERTS: I thought we did really well. We kept Dajuan connected to Stevenson. That's why he's defensive player of the year. He's ridiculous in how he can get through screens and make it tough for guys to score, and I thought did he that. Even though Stevenson made some unbelievable shots, I thought Dajuan did a great job.

And then Kevin, Kevin was able to switch off and guard some, and Kevin did a good job with that. So we've got two great defenders in those two guys. I thought as a team

we guarded them well. I thought that we took them out of some of the things they liked to do, we didn't give them easy dunks and things which made them play more of a perimeter game.

Q. Did Coach Self leave any message for you via text or some way or for the team today?

NORM ROBERTS: No, not really. Not before the game. But the whole thing with Coach is we go over scouting report and we talk about what we're going to do, what we need to do. I've scouted West Virginia for the past 12 years, so I kind of know them pretty good.

So I kind of knew what Coach would want, and we had done some things this week that I knew kind of what he wanted to do. Our whole staff chimed in, because it was a whole staff deal today. We're all connected in what we're doing.

Q. I was wondering if you knew how Coach is doing? And then the second thing was different. You called a timeout, I think your only one of the game, and immediately allowed dunk to Ernest. Did you call that play, and what did you think of the way the guys responded to your coaching?

NORM ROBERTS: I thought our guys did well. Does it mean I get credit because he dunked on (indiscernible)? Yeah, called that play. We did call the play and he did execute it well.

But Coach is doing good. He's doing good. I talked to him on the phone. He's doing well. He's already wants to watch film and all that, so he's doing great. He's doing good and getting better and that stuff.

But I thought our guys did a great job of locking in, executing what we had to out of timeouts, and I thought they were good today. They were good.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

NORM ROBERTS: Thank you, appreciate it.

MODERATOR: Congratulations. See you tomorrow.

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