

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Kansas State Wildcats

Jerome Tang

Desi Sills

Markquis Nowell

Keyontae Johnson

Postgame Press Conference

TCU, 80 - Kansas State, 67

JEROME TANG: First of all, I want to thank the good Lord for the opportunity He's given me to coach these guys and this program and playing this incredible event. I want to thank our fans because they did a great job of showing up. Probably the most disappointed in that, letting them down tonight. We, and this is on me, I didn't do a very good job of preparing these guys for how physical and what force that people play with in the Big 12 Tournament. That will not happen again.

Q. Desi, where do you get that talent of being able to block so many shots like that?

DESI SILLS: I don't know. I just have a 46-inch vertical, I had to time it right. I just say get out of the way, I'm going to try to get it every time, try to make energy play and get the crowd going and get it going the other way.

Q. This Big 12 tournament, what was your experience in the game tonight?

DESI SILLS: It was a beautiful experience. It ain't the outcome like we wanted to. We are going to go in the room and execute what we need to do better to make a run at the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Turnovers got up into that 20 range tonight. How important is that for you guys to keep that down to 12 or so?

MARKQUIS NOWELL: It's big time. Especially when you're playing teams in the Big 12, it's even more



important. But you can't win a game with 20 turnovers. It's hard to do that. We've just got to take better care of the ball, including myself. I had five turnovers, which is unacceptable. We just got to find ways to move the ball and get each other the ball and play like we know how to play.

Q. For all of the players, what's your confidence level now? You're going to be going to the NCAA Tournament next week, but you've past couple. Are you shaking at all confidence-wise?

KEYONTAE JOHNSON: No. It will be all right. It's a new season. We'll get better from this. But you know, we will handle adversity pretty good. We have a mature group of guys, me, myself, Desi, Keyontae, so we will make sure that the guys keep their head up. The year is not over yet. We've got one game left, and we're going to play our hardest, and we are going to fix the things that we need to fix.

Q. You bumped your head pretty hard there. How are you doing after that?

KEYONTAE JOHNSON: I'm good. I'm fine. I had to keep playing for my team, get the win, but came up short.

Q. You jumped out to that 11-2 advantage early. In your mind what was the biggest thing that they changed that let them come back and tie it to 13?

MARKQUIS NOWELL: I feel like they turned it up a lot on defense. You have to give a lot of credit to TCU, the way they played. Chuck O'Bannon and Mike Miles have pretty decent games, and they out-toughed us tonight. They was well prepared. And like Coach said, our team didn't really realize how tough it was going to be, but I'm pretty sure we'll get better going forward.

Q. Desi, you've been on teams in the past that made a run in the NCAA Tournament. What lessons can you share with your teammates that have not been that fortunate to go this far in the NCAA Tournament at this point in the season?

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DESI SILLS: We have to stay together. You know, what I mean, it ain't a one-man show, no two-man show. Everybody got to come and execute. We have some of the best players in the country, and somebody got to help them, so I am willing to step up and everybody else got to step up.

Q. Can you explain further about what makes it more difficult to win at this time of the season than it is in December or January or any other time of the year?

DESI SILLS: Everybody knows you want to survive, and nobody want to go home, and that's one of the big keys. We want to win, and they want to win. So we all end up with the toughest teams.

Q. What is typically the cause when you guys are turning the ball over when it gets into the 20s?

MARKQUIS NOWELL: The closest, usually trying to make a play for ourselves and not for the team. A lot of the guys today had a couple turnovers doing that, including myself. But like I said, if we get the ball moving side-to-side, and we get multiple paint touches, we are a pretty good team.

So we just got to lock in on that, not turn the ball over and not give teams second-chance points like we did today, and we'll be fine, but we just got to lock in.

Q. We've seen you contribute coming off the bench and being able to contribute as a starter. What's been the key to your success this season?

DESI SILLS: Stay consistent, stay in the gym. My teammates believe in me. Whatever they need me to do, I do. If I score zero points, I don't care, I got to score 15 plus. I want to do that. I'm all about my team. I obviously want to win at the end of the day.

Q. Any common denominators in the injury; you've given up a the low of three-pointers and perimeter shooting?

DESI SILLS: We got to step up. We have to play tough. We have to lock up on defense. If they don't score 80 points, they don't win a game. That's all on us. We got to execute. It ain't on the coaching staff because they ain't out there playing. It's all on the players.

Q. In the previous two meetings with TCU, they made six total threes. They made 11 tonight. Them making those big shots, were those the biggest blows?

JEROME TANG: No. I think the offensive rebounding was.

Q. You mentioned maybe not having the guys prepared for what the Big 12 tournament was going to be like. How do you prepare the team for the NCAA Tournament where you've had success as an assistant, what's that preparation process like and how much confidence do you have that if you didn't have them ready for the Big 12 tournament you'll have them ready for the NCAA Tournament?

JEROME TANG: I'm extremely confident because we as a staff know what we need to do to get our guys prepared. So that's not going to be an issue. The great thing is now we get three or four really good days of practice before we play another game.

And the guys now have that feeling of the season could be over, and that changes things. And we get to play a team that doesn't know us as well as this team that we played today.

Q. I asked Markquis about the turnovers, and 20 is not acceptable for you like it was for him. Does it worry you so many times when you get into that range of turnovers they are unforced or just careless turnovers? You had one on an in-bound pass tonight?

JEROME TANG: All turnovers worry me. Okay, so how they come about, you know, yeah, that's important.

I felt like most of our turnovers today were guys trying too hard. We had a few careless ones, but most of those they were trying too hard. We have to show them and just really buy into making simple plays. But you're not winning -- we are 1-5 or 1-6 when you have 19 or more turnovers. And I mean, they know that. I know that. We all know that, right? So we've got to take care of the ball.

Q. What has Desi Sills meant to you guys this season?

JEROME TANG: From day one, I've said Desi is a winner. He does whatever you need him to do to win. He really cares about his teammates. He has a high-care factor. You greatly appreciate him. There was a time we were subbing Keyontae out of the game because of bad body language, and Desi went and checked himself out of the game so Keyontae would stay in the game and really just took over the huddle and did a great job.

So the experience that he has, the experience in winning that he has, you can't put a number on it, a value amount on it. He's just so valuable to you.

Q. You've talked about the crazy faith and just how



everything is about life lessons in the game of basketball. What lesson do you take away from this type of game going into the NCAA Tournament?

JEROME TANG: That's a great question. As a staff, we've battled back and forth with how much is doing too much and not enough. It's a group of guys that you just can't tell them they need reps, so that's the lesson we learn basketball-wise.

Life-wise, man, like nothing's promised, right. Like, I mean, just because you beat a team before doesn't mean -- it takes effort. You have to give a certain amount of effort in order to make anything work, whether it's your marriage, your relationship with your children, whatever it is, you have to give a certain amount of effort.

And tonight we didn't give enough effort to win a basketball game. Hopefully the guys walk away and realize it takes a greater effort when there's a greater challenge.

And I don't think we quit, but I do believe they paused us, and that's something as a staff we have to figure out how to make sure that doesn't happen.

Q. Keyontae fouled out with six minutes to go, what's the biggest thing he needs to focus on to make sure he is able to contribute late in games like that?

JEROME TANG: You know, both he and Qwan -- I mean, Qwan plays five minutes in the first half because he's in foul trouble. Keyontae, you know, they have to -- and they are a bunch of tick-tack fouls, little touch fouls. They are not getting their money's worth on their foul.

If you're going to get a foul, make it worth something. They both have to learn to play with their chest and move their feet and stop slapping so much with their hands, but both of them we need them on the floor. We are a better team when they are on the floor.

Q. Earlier you talked about trying too hard. How do you make sure this time of the year your players don't try too hard and don't get too tense in the biggest moments?

JEROME TANG: That's a really good question. I really don't know how to make somebody not try too hard. Hopefully as a staff we'll be able to put them in positions where we make the plays simpler for them. We'll watch film and show them where the more prudent thing to do is maybe move the ball rather than trying to be too -- and they know this.

I mean, these guys know this. We have a stat. We keep

paint touches and what we score when we get to the paint in the first half; we are scoring 146 points when we got a paint touch; and 136 points and 100 possessions when we got a paint touch and passed it out; and it was 36 points and a hundred possessions where we didn't get a paint touch. They know this. So how do you get them to just stay on track and doing that? It comes with experience.

But hopefully the finality of things, right? You lose, it's over, right? And we are not thinking about losing. It's about doing whatever we got to do to survive so we can advance. We have a really good basketball team in there, and they got beat by a really good basketball team today, and every team that -- in the quarterfinals is an NCAA team in this tournament and can win multiple games in this tournament.

So there's no shame in losing this game today. I am disappointed that I didn't do as good of a job as I could have done or should have done to have our guys ready to do a better job here today.

But I'm very thankful for our fans because they showed up. That's probably the thing that's most disappointing for me because our fans showed up today, and I didn't have the team ready to play.

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