

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Kansas Jayhawks

Coach Norm Roberts

Jalen Wilson

Dajuan Harris, Jr.

Postgame Press Conference



assignment today. What do you think of his defense today?

JALEN WILSON: He proved why he was defensive player of the year, you know, picking up guys, coming off the hot game he had yesterday and understanding what he did to us last game for sure.

Dajuan had a tough assignment, and to carry that out and also be the floor general that he is a tough assignment. I'm super proud of him, how he did, and that's what we needed from him.

Q. Guys, Coach said on the pregame that Coach Self talked to you guys on video or something. What was that like? How do you feel about how he's doing?

JALEN WILSON: It was great to talk to him, hear his voice. He was super proud of how we did last game, and I am sure he will be proud of us, how we did today. He said just go out there, continue to play the right way and continue to play Kansas basketball. It was great.

Q. You guys had a halftime lead. Iowa State took the lead early in the second half. What's the team's mindset at that point?

DAJUAN HARRIS, JR.: Staying together like we been doing all season long. We got a lot of veteran leaders like me and JWil, Kev, even though Kev didn't play the second half. We all stayed together. A lot of players stepped up when Kev got out, so we just had to stay together, basically.

Q. After Iowa State took the lead you guys had a lineup out there that included both KJ and Ernest. What does having those line-ups out there do to help energize the team and make you guys play different?

JALEN WILSON: I think it helped on defense, man, for sure, and Ernest came off the bench and sparked us in a great way. Him finishing, making free throws, those are plays we need that gets the crowd involved and energizes our team.

Kansas 71, Iowa State 58

THE MODERATOR: Jalen Wilson has joined us. We will start with questions for the players, and since Jalen is here we will start with him. And here is Dajuan joining us.

Q. Jalen, Dajuan, how much was revenge factor involved today? I know you guys were unhappy after the game in Ames.

JALEN WILSON: It was some, but our main focus and goal is to win a championship while we're here. I think we came out ready to play and set the tone, being aggressive, and it was important to get out to a good start against a good team like that.

They're coming off good wins and they're playing good basketball, so thought we came out prepared.

DAJUAN HARRIS, JR.: What JWil said. He got us to a good start, you know, so we was playing really good defense, and I think we keep doing like that, we should be pretty good for tomorrow.

Q. What was it like playing without Kevin the second half? What does that mean to win convincingly, and are you worried about his back?

JALEN WILSON: When a guy goes down we gotta have his back and understand that times like that are going to happen in basketball. Anyone that falls down, we got to pick 'em up and it's our job to fill the void. Just like Coach isn't here, Kevin goes out, it's our job to go in and play for him.

Q. Jalen, could you comment on Dajuan's defensive



He did everything that we needed him to do, especially when Kevin goes down, like I said, guys got to step up and play, and that's exactly what he did today.

Q. Dajuan, you had some guys step up, including your freshman who came out and seemed like he hit all his jumpers. What's it like when you get everybody involved?

DAJUAN HARRIS, JR.: He was passing up a lot of threes and I kept telling him to shoot the ball because that's what he does best. He's one of the best freshman in the country. He give us energy on offense, and he's getting better on defense, too.

So if we keep getting on him and making sure he's doing the right job and staying together and trusting each other, he'll be pretty good.

Q. Dajuan, Jalen came out with a hot hand seemed like early on in the game. How important was it for you to keep feeding him? And Jalen, how important was it for you to come out fast?

DAJUAN HARRIS, JR.: He's the best player in the country to me in my eyes, and we gotta give him more shots. He started off, what, 3 for 3, 4 for 4? If he keep playing hot and starting out hot, that's great for us.

JALEN WILSON: I was trying to be aggressive and set the tone, and I was able to hit the shots and continue to make the right plays, winning plays, and they just happened to go in. I felt good playing. Good atmosphere.

Q. Beginning of that game, was that the hottest you've been, how confident were you, and how fired up in front of a lot of Jayhawks fans out there?

JALEN WILSON: Yeah, no, I felt really good just to see how competitive it was, not only on the court, but two fan bases coming together. They had a great crowd that travels well, as well.

So it was good to compete against that type of team, and I always have fun out there. It's fun making plays and hearing the crowd, and that's the type of games that I live for.

Q. Guys, feels like whenever you guys are a little bit down you get those Iowa State fans out. Feels like you can see these lobs going up to KJ and Ernest, which really sets the momentum for the team and gets you guys and the fans back in the game. How much do those help you guys get motivated, and getting the big dunks, how have the fans helped you out?

DAJUAN HARRIS, JR.: We played today to the short roll, and our bigs was running today and we found some little gaps to throw in the zone that they was playing, some lobs. But really KJ and Ern was running for us, and that's really what we want from our bigs.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

Coach Roberts has joined us. Coach, congratulations. If you could start us off with comments about the game.

COACH ROBERTS: It was a terrific game. Every time we play Iowa State it's a war. They've got a great fan base when they come down. They always play well in the tournament, and our guys knew that. Our guys were fired up to play and excited to play today.

We really did a good job defensively kinda taking them out of what they wanted to do in a lot of ways. And Dajuan is so effective defensively. Kalscheur had been on a run, a great run playing. He's a really good player, and Dajuan did a great job on him, and then JWil got us off to a good start.

Gradey made great shots at the end and gave us all we needed from him, and Kevin did a great job for us as well.

Q. Coach, Jalen Wilson coming out hot and you stepping in, all of the sudden because Coach Self goes down, how much comfort does that give you that your vets can step up when everyone is kind of in an unexpected situation?

COACH ROBERTS: Well, JWil has done it all year for us and we're a familiar. And our guys know next man up. We talk about expectations, and things change and expectations don't. That's our motto with our team, and our guys have done that all year.

JWil has been great. Dajuan has been great. Kevin has been great. Coach talked to them about stepping up, and they have done that all year. They're pretty comfortable in that role.

Q. Coach, any conversation with Bill since the game is over?

COACH ROBERTS: He's just getting better. He's just getting better. We talked to him today, earlier this morning. Went over the game plan of how we wanted to guard and what we wanted to do.

He was good with that. He talked to us right after the game. He was so excited about how the guys played. You

know, he gets excited about defense more than anything else and he said, hey, we really guarded today, and he was really happy for our guys.

Q. Coach, as Iowa State was making that run early in the second half you guys had the timeout when you were still up three; then Iowa State ended up taking the lead, but only led for 18 total seconds in the game. What was the message to them in the timeout to get them ready for the possibility that Iowa State would take the lead and for them to respond as quickly as they did?

COACH ROBERTS: We say to our guys all the time, hey, they're going to make a run. They're too good of a team not to. So they're going to make shots. That happens. They made their run, let's make our run. We need to get a good set, so let's execute, get back to guarding, and being aggressive offensively.

We've been in that situation so much. This league has been unbelievable all year. You're in wars every single night, so our guys are pretty comfortable in that situation.

Q. Coach, you won without Kevin the second half. What does that mean, and how impressed are you with the other guys for stepping up for him? What's his status for tomorrow?

COACH ROBERTS: Kevin has been dealing with some back spasms, so it's day-to-day, minute-to-minute what's going on and that stuff, but he gave us all he could today and we're proud of him for doing that.

But guys did step up. Joseph gave us good minutes, Bobby. MJ Rice gave us good minutes out there. We told them next man you up, step up in a positive way and help us make a play, and those guys did that.

Q. Do you think this victory got you the number one overall seed?

COACH ROBERTS: I have no idea. We're not worried about that. We're worried about winning the game and who we play next. You can't worry about that. When you get in the tournament, everybody is good. Every team is a champion. You gotta be ready to play, so doesn't matter where you're at.

Q. Coach, you said this earlier this year, look, it's bigger than one man, it's bigger than one player, it's bigger than one coach, and you've downplayed what you've done, but you're 6-0 and you beat Duke and two really good teams here. You guys gotta feel good about what you got going here.

COACH ROBERTS: We're excited about that, but we're a family. I'm at the helm right now for Coach being out, but Kurtis and Joe and Dooley and Case and Fred Quartlebaum. We're all in this together. We all talk, we all have input, and we're all helping each other. And the players are doing an outstanding job. It comes down to the players. Forget about the X's and the O's, it's always the Jimmies and the Joes, and our Jimmies and Joes are playing pretty good right now, so we're happy to get success and enjoying it.

Q. You talked about the guys being comfortable in the game tonight. What about tomorrow's game? How much is that experience that you guys have had over the past couple years with these guys coming to play tomorrow?

COACH ROBERTS: I think it's a matter of tomorrow, have fun. That's what we write on the board. The last thing we write on the board before we go out every game, have fun. I mean, it's basketball. Enjoy. Hey, you got a chance to win a championship. We won the championship in the league, and you have a chance to within a tournament championship. Let's go out, have fun, play to our max, help each other, play free and those things, and I think our guys are doing that.

Q. Coach, how much does it mean to this team to have an opportunity to not only win the regular season title but to follow up with a conference championship?

COACH ROBERTS: It means a lot. Every time we put that uniform on, Kansas wants to win. I don't care if we're playing an exhibition game or regular season game, doesn't matter. We want to win. That's what we're built on. That's what our guys know. They know that's the expectation. So we will go out there and try and play as hard as we can and try to succeed.

Q. Coach, having a home court advantage here in the T-Mobile Center, how does that get your guys hyped? You have the home court advantage in the fieldhouse, but having it here, too, how does that transfer to the guys?

COACH ROBERTS: It's awesome. Our guys love playing in Kansas City. They love when our fans come out. Our fans travel everywhere. We got the best fans in the country. I know some schools say that but they're not even close. Not close to doing what KU has. Our fans really helped us today and really pushed us through today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Good luck tomorrow.



