

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Cincinnati Bearcats

Coach Wes Miller

Simas Lukosius

Day Day Thomas

Postgame Press Conference



Simas hits big, big, big shots and made all of his big free throws. 8 for 8, you look down. I thought Day Day hit big, big shots. We haven't shot it well over the course of the year, at least not as good as I think we can and they were backing up and really letting us shoot the ball and those guys especially down the stretch made some big ones.

I thought Dan Skillings was really, really good tonight. You know, I thought he wore down, we played him too many minutes, but he had great pop the whole game. He was the one guy that looked like he was moving like himself out there for 40 minutes, and then I thought he made a nice play to find Day Day in the corner in that last out-of-bounds play to put us up 5.

I'm really proud of my group. I did not like how we played for the first, gosh, 28 minutes and I really liked the way they responded the last -- well, that's been the character of this group all year. It's why it's been a joy to coach them.

Q. Coach, you brought up the shooting struggles so far this season. These two guys have had their fair share of that. What is it like to see them keep their confidence throughout the whole season, especially down 16 today and be able to pull off the win?

WES MILLER: Yeah, I think they've been -- it's funny, I don't think either one of 'em have ever lost any confidence. They're confident players. That's why they've had big-time games. I think they have been pissed and frustrated at times that they haven't made some shots that they make every day. They're both really, really talented offensive players and they both can really shoot it. If anything, I don't think they have lacked any confidence. They have just been mad or frustrated at times. You guys agree with that, right?

We see it every day. They put the work in every day. It was nice, when a team backs up on us we get 14 out of these two guys. That doesn't surprise me, but we haven't had that this year so that gave us a big boost tonight.

Q. Coach has said all year that we're going to eventually see a game like this out of you. How much does it mean to you to have this type of game like this

Cincinnati - 90, West Virginia - 85

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Coach. We have Wes Miller here with Simas Lukosius and Day Day Thomas. Coach?

WES MILLER: First, you look down and they get 85 and if you would have told me before the game they would get 85, I would have been pissed because I'd say we're going to have a hard time winning and we are going to have to defend better than that. First off, hats off to Josh. He's been in a tough position all year. We played that game a couple days ago and it really went our way and didn't go their way and it got away from him, and it's hard to get a team to recover that quickly. I think it says a lot about him as a coach that they came out and played significantly today than they did against us Saturday. So give him credit for that. They were really, really good. They shot the eyes out of it. Certainly, I wasn't pleased with some of our defensive effort, but give them credit. We made a mistake and they got a clean look and it felt like for a while there that they didn't miss any of 'em.

We got off to a decent start, but I thought when things didn't go our way, it wasn't like they didn't want to do it right. They just looked a little shell-shocked. I hadn't seen that from this team in a long, long time. And then finally I think we get down 16 and they just said we're going to play our tails off and play the way we practice every day. And they did. And they started playing with a lot of pop and pace and get defending and getting to loose balls and then we find ourselves back in the game. I thought there were some really gutsy performances. We had to play guys for really extended minutes, which you don't want to have to do in a multi game tournament, but you don't stick around for the next day if you don't take care of the first one. But

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in this environment?

SIMAS LUKOSIUS: It means a lot. It means a lot to have this game and it means a lot that coach believed I would have this game at some point. There is no better time. This was win or go home. It was the most important game of our season so far, so, yeah, I'm glad it happened.

Q. Coach, thoughts about quick turnaround having to face Kansas tomorrow. You do face them without Dickinson and McCullar, but just thoughts about doing it quickly?

WES MILLER: Before I answer that, I look down and it's not like I didn't notice it while I was coaching, but I should say something about it. Aziz Bandaogo with 13 rebounds. How about that performance? That deserves to be recognized, too. And we had some good moments for everybody else, too.

I think -- listen, Kansas is Kansas and they're -- they've been at the top of college basketball for as long as the heck I've been alive, quite frankly. What they've done in this league as long as I've been alive is incredible and, you know, Coach Self has another great team that's going to compete to win a national championship. We understand who we're playing against. We have a ton of respect for that. We're playing 'em here in Kansas City. I think it's just an opportunity for our group. I think we believe we can play with anybody. I think we've proven that to ourselves this year, but we have a ton of respect for any opponent that we could see in this tournament.

Q. Simas, walk us through the second half. 26 points, 6 of 9 from shooting. What were the second-half adjustments that you saw to allow you to get going in the second half?

SIMAS LUKOSIUS: I don't know if I saw any adjustment, nothing changed from the first half. I just made a few shots, started being more aggressive and got some free throws to go in. Our offensive started flowing more naturally, we got back to playing like ourselves and not only me, but everybody else got easier shots that are part of their game and that's kind of how we got back in it.

Q. Day Day, you were really aggressive in the first half as well. Was that part of the game plan? Did you feel like there was something you could exploit and maybe when is the last time you felt like the hoop was that big for you, shooting from deep?

DAY DAY THOMAS: That's my job on the team, I gotta make plays for my team, always gotta be aggressive. So just playing my game, having confidence in my team, my

team having confidence in me to get downhill and make plays for each other.

Q. Coach, West Virginia picks up two technical fouls in the second half. Could you guys sense momentum turning? How much do you talk to your guys about keeping composure when things don't go your way or a lead starts to slip away in a game.

WES MILLER: I think our guys came out of the under 12 timeout, I believe we're down 16. And they just played with a different approach those next couple possessions and I think we could feel some momentum turning there. It didn't mean that we knew we were going to come back and win the game, but I think that settled us in, coming out of that under 12 timeout. I believe I'm right that we were down 16 there.

You know, we take a lot of pride and we have made our fair share of mistakes. So I'm not here to judge others, but we take a lot of pride as a team and as a program in just trying to be about the next play. We talk about it every day, we had it on the board before the game today and not responding to things we can't control.

I'm not here -- like I said, I'm not here to talk about the other team or judge the other team, but that was fortunate that we got 4 extra free throws there. And I was proud that my guys didn't respond -- because a lot of times when you see those type of things it ends up being a double technical. So it is something we value and I was proud that we didn't respond.

Q. For both of you, you guys both had career highs tonight. Talk about that feeling. You guys seem kinda mellow right now.

WES MILLER: Off the court, they're both always like this, okay?

DAY DAY THOMAS: Just playing with confidence. My coaches and my team just tell me to keep shooting the ball. So I'm always going to have confidence in myself to keep making plays, keep making shots, shot skills, making the last play, a good one at the end. I hit a big-time shot today.

SIMAS LUKOSIUS: Kind of the same thing, playing with confidence. I think it's funny. The career high that I beat was in the Big East Tournament my freshman year. So I guess I like these types of games. Hopefully I can beat it again tomorrow.

Q. Day Day, a year ago you were playing at the junior college level. How much does this experience mean to you especially in this environment?



DAY DAY THOMAS: It means a lot because when I was at JUCO I was watching this tournament and playing in it, seeing how it is, everything is faster, everybody's athletic, it's a good experience. I'm loving it.

Q. How did it feel to be on the other end of this coming back like that? Were you aware that this was the gym that you had your previous biggest come-back in? I was told this is your biggest comeback as a coach. At least here.

WES MILLER: Yeah, I mean, guys, we come back down 16 and win the conference tournament, feels good. Shoot, I'm human. I love that. It felt good. I think for me, this group has had a certain level of character. When you deal with 'em every day, they have had a certain level of character that's made them unique and different. It hasn't always meant that we have been on the right end of the result, but the character of this group is that it responds, it fights, it stays together. And to see that again in a game where it really wasn't going our way and then for them to come out and be rewarded for that character when haven't felt like we always have all year, that was the part that meant the most to me.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

WES MILLER: Thank you.

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