

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Houston Cougars

Coach Kelvin Sampson

L.J. Cryer

Emanuel Sharp

Postgame Press Conference



Houston - 82, Texas Tech - 59

KELVIN SAMPSON: Both teams just had a ton of injuries. We all have our share of injuries. I don't know that we ever talk about it or worry about it. Either win or lose, I don't get why you need to talk about it a lot. As long as we have a chance to put five on the floor and a sub or two, you just keep playing. What's the worst thing that can happen to you?

People act like if you lose, they're going to put you in jail or you're going to get some kind of penalty -- and I just never looked at it quite like that.

But I thought we got off to a great start. Our line of scrimmage on our pick-and-roll defense wasn't what I expect. We had some guys that I thought let off the accelerator a little bit. We needed to get some adjustments made that I know how to make, for lack of a better explanation.

Once we got them together, we felt like we could get into the paint. Once we got into the paint, we have good shooters, we've got guys that can make shots.

I thought L.J. was aggressive from the get-go today, except for the 15-foot runners he was shooting from 8 feet on the baseline. Oh, yeah, took you a while to get that one, didn't it?

And then Emanuel, who is a -- you just never know, a box of Cracker Jacks -- you never know what you're going to get with Emanuel.

When they're flying at him, I like his chances. Some of the other stuff drives me nuts. But I love them all. So that's

kind of -- we'll go from here.

Q. With that said on injuries, do you have an update on J'Wan, and the two times he went into the game, was that just to sort of feel it out to see where he was with it?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Pretty much. I don't have an update. It's not his knee. The knee's bothering him all year, but it's not that. It's kind of around his calf, shin area. But I don't know.

We just won a game. I don't run around and ask what the injury report is after we win. I kind of get excited about that. I mean, dang, why don't you just throw some water on the fire. Can we not enjoy the win?

Q. Your thoughts about possibly playing Baylor in the final?

L.J. CRYER: I mean, it doesn't really matter who we play. We're happy to be in the championship and we're looking forward to whatever the match-up is.

Q. Prefer to face a team like yourselves in Iowa State?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't care who we play. It doesn't matter. It's going to be a really good team. Those are two really, really good teams. The championship game of any tournament, you're going to have to play a really good team.

But we played them both here recently. I think who we're going to have available is more important than who we're playing at this point.

Q. Emanuel, at the end of the game, you had a chance to shoot it, but you found Ced a lot. Tell me about that.

EMANUEL SHARP: I've had opportunities all year to score. It means more to him than to me at the end of the game. So when I get in situations like that towards the end of the game, I'd rather look for maybe Myrio (phonetic) or Ced who haven't had that many buckets all year so they can get a chance to score.

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Q. You're 30-3, some people thought Houston might not keep winning 30 games when it switched conferences. You obviously have more games to add to it. What do you think this team has demonstrated?

KELVIN SAMPSON: While everybody was talking about the Big 12, the Big 12, and our local media who has just been awesome the entire time I've been at Houston, I never really thought about the Big 12, not because I coached in it 12 years or I've been in this tournament 12 times, it's that I was really worried about this team because of who we lost from last year's team. I think I spent more time, so June, July, August, August we were in Australia for ten days. The timing of that trip is never a bad time, but this year especially because of who we had to replace. The No. 8 pick in Jarace Walker, the No. 25 pick in Marcus Sasser. Somebody who is really solid for us the entire year, started every game, Tramon Mark. And then my security blanket, a kid I absolutely loved and still miss, who passed away, Reggie Cheney.

So missing those four guys superseded moving to a new league. I just never worried about it, never thought about it. We just kind of rolled up our sleeves and just got in the gym and went to work.

Jamal Shead was -- I hate to be repetitive -- but Jamal Shead when we beat Illinois, who was the Big Ten champ, he was the starting point guard on that team. And then we turned around and beat Arizona, who was the Pac-12 champ. He was the point guard, went to the Elite Eight.

L.J. played on a team that went to the national championship. Emanuel backed up a team that won 30 -- I don't remember how many games we won last year, but 30-some, and he played a lot of minutes.

I knew we had a good team coming back in any league, but it was just a matter of could I get them together, could I get them to play for something bigger than themselves? Could we be a team? That's something we've always taken pride in is getting our kids to be a team.

L.J. had to learn how to do that. They all have reasons why they want to come to Houston. But eventually you've got to -- everybody's got a scrapbook, man. I'm not interested in your scrapbook. Everybody's got an ego. Everybody's got that, but I don't care about any of that. If you come play for us, you're going to do it our way.

There's nonnegotiables. There's things we're not going to sit around and discuss. It's going to be the way it's going to be done.

I think if you have high-character kids, it's a lot easier for them. They handle adversity better. Low-character kids have a hard time with adversity. They're usually immature. They're the kind of kids that struggle when things don't go their way. L.J. had some tough days. Emanuel has for two years.

They all did, but they all came together and became a really good team, and this is the end result. But we just played the team that was in front of us. Didn't really matter to us what league we were in. We kept getting bombarded about the Big 12, and we just worried about getting our team together.

Q. You talked about the rebounding disparity yesterday. It's a little more even today. Is that playing a guard-heavier team, or something you guys did differently on the boards?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Guard-heavier team. TCU was playing sic 'em. They just threw it up there -- even this morning, even though -- what was the score in the game yesterday? I don't remember. It wasn't close at the end, but all I could think about was we just played a team that got 73 shots. How in the world is that possible? We're usually that team.

But they punked us. But that was not the story. In tournament play, win the game, move on.

So we get a chance to play tomorrow and go home tomorrow night. That's one of the good things about the Big 12. In the American we were always playing on Sunday and getting back late Sunday night.

Q. Mylik plays 31 minutes, Damian 16. Also yesterday they got a lot of minutes. How much does that help when you can put those guys in there like that, especially with the state of how things are on the bench?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Mylik's value probably is a little more because of rebounding. He's a really good rebounding guard. And his athleticism is a factor, too. And Mylik's a talented kid. He's just gotten better. You ask me what all these kids have in common is they've all gotten better as the season's progressed.

But Mylik is a wonderful human being. Just a sweetheart of a young man. Easy to coach. Love being around him. I'm happy for him. I'm happy his decision to come back has worked out for him, which is what you wish for all of them.

Q. L.J. and Emanuel, this game was tied early in the

second half. Three-and-a-half minutes later you had a 13-point lead. What do you feel like happened in those three-and-a-half minutes?

L.J. CRYER: I mean, we just fixed our attitudes. We had people not really in the game, and I don't know, whenever you fix your attitude and change your effort, good things happen. We came out with the right focus, and that's all it was.

EMANUEL SHARP: Same thing. We just had a different mindset coming out of halftime, a better one, a more intense one. We were more connected, and helped us go on a run.

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