

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

UCF Knights

Coach Johnny Dawkins

Darius Johnson

Moustapha Thiam

Jordan Ivy-Curry

Postgame Press Conference



UCF 87, Utah 72

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is UCF Head Coach Johnny Dawkins; he is joined by Darius Johnson and Moustapha Thiam. Coach?

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well, we knew it was going to be a tough game. We know Utah is a really good basketball team. They're really long, one of the tallest teams that we've faced all season long.

Gabe Madsen is one of the best shooters that we've faced, so we knew it was going to be a challenge for us with regard to their length and size.

I'm just proud of our guys for battling. We got off to a slow start. I thought they got out early and we had to battle back, which says a lot about our guys. We've done that all year. We have been resilient. Guys just keep fighting and finding a way.

I'm really proud of our guys' effort. I think it may have been one of the best second halves we've had all season long. I thought our guys really played efficient basketball offensive, and and I thought the defense was outstanding.

Q. Coach, obviously there to start the second half you get out to a 24-3 edge early. What do you attribute that to?

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well, I think it was a few things. I felt we had to make adjustments defensively. I thought our staff did a great job of discussing that at halftime, things we needed to look at doing. I thought that was really good for

us.

And our offense was just very efficient. Our guys started finding where we could be successful within the offensive. We talked about that at halftime, about what we could do and what we could try to take advantage of. I thought our guys did a great job of making those reads and giving us a chance to make high-quality shots.

Q. Darius, could you describe what the mood was like with the group after Keyshawn hit a three right before the half? I think he beat the buzzer on it. It seemed like it gave you guys juice going into the locker room. What was the mood like?

DARIUS JOHNSON: The mood was great. You know, it was a big shot going into the half. Definitely a bucket well needed. We got down early, but as the team got our feet wet we started to find our groove a little bit more.

We just started chipping the lead, possession by possession. I think we cut it to one going into the half, which was big; gave us confidence coming out for the second half.

Q. Darius, just what are your thoughts on the match-up that you've got tomorrow with Kansas?

DARIUS JOHNSON: You know, I'm excited for the match-up. They got us twice this year at home and away so I'm looking forward to it.

I know it's going to be a competitive, high-level game, so, you know, our team, we're focusing on going 1-0 tomorrow.

Q. Coach, Keanu Dawes, No. 8 for Utah, had a good night tonight. What was he doing that was so effective?

JOHNNY DAWKINS: He's a really good basketball player. He's been a really good player in college for a number of years. He's very active. He rebounds the ball well, especially offensive rebounding. He's a really good basketball player. He understands how to play.



I look at the game in its entirety and you think about a guy like Ezra didn't play; that hurts them. He is one of their best players. He is playing terrific basketball all season long, and especially the last five games.

That's a big miss for that. That's just the nature of the game. We understand that because we've had some guys out. That's always a challenge, and I thought Keanu Dawes did a great job of stepping into the role and kinda producing the way Ezra produces.

So says a lot about that young man and the ability to make those plays in an environment like this.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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