

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Utah Utes

Coach Josh Eilert

Keanu Dawes

Gabe Madsen

Postgame Press Conference



JOSH EILERT: I think we were settling a little bit. We were being a little tentative. I went right at 'em a couple of times in the huddle and was like, put pressure on the rim. These shots are not always going to fall. But we were tentative around the rim and I challenged several guys, including Keanu over here, KD, and he turned it up.

Top to bottom, I don't think we had quite the sense of urgency in that second half. A couple guys did and we got production out of it, but the runs that they kept making we didn't have answers for.

Q. Josh, when did you know you wouldn't have Ezra and what impact did that have on the game? Also, on Keanu's big game.

JOSH EILERT: You know, KD, he's a special player. I'll never forget coming into this program and thinking -- questioning a lot of KD's value. He has just continued to improve each and every day. He's got the right mindset. He's got that growth mindset in so many ways.

He doesn't force the game, but he's playing with so much more force than he did when I first got here in June. So he's a special player. He's gonna -- his value keeps on skyrocketing. I look forward to seeing him blossom and develop in the next couple of years.

I think he had three, another double-double tonight, I think he had the last five games, three out of the five games have been a double-double, so I think that's going to be his forte moving forward.

Ezra, you know what? We were monitoring the situation. Kinda got his knee buckled up there in Provo, so they did an MRI on him late that night. So we were trying to work through that and night and day, 24/7, we were pushing to get him ready, but he just wasn't quite there yet.

We were hoping to get through this first game and have him for tomorrow. It certainly played an impact because he's been playing really good basketball for us and probably our leading scorer, I'm imagining in the last five games.

UCF 87, Utah 72

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is Utah Head Coach Josh Eilert, joined by Keanu Dawes and Gabe Madsen.

Coach?

JOSH EILERT: First of all, congrats to Central Florida. I thought we had a great start to the game and a real sense of urgency early; but the way we shot the ball tonight, you know, 4 for 26 from three, and in a lot of ways that's our identity and the shots didn't fall.

Consequently, on the other end it seemed like they were throwing it in the ocean. Congrats to them. They made a lot of plays and a lot of runs especially early in that second half that we couldn't counter on.

Sometimes that's the way it works in basketball.

But certainly proud of our guys in terms of how they have handled all the adversity in the last three weeks and how they come to fight and battle with me.

They didn't choose me as their leader, but they didn't skip a beat. They continued to battle for me each and every night and I'm certainly proud of them and their efforts the last two or three weeks.

Q. Josh, second straight game we've seen you stay close at the half and then it kind of gets away from you to start the second. What were those contributing factors that you saw help them build that big lead early in the second?



Certainly not having him and that force at the rim and put that pressure on the rim, that hurt us tonight.

Q. Gabe, how would you describe the emotions for you right now? Obviously it's been a tough few weeks with the coaching change, but a lot of the talk these last few weeks has just been the togetherness of this team and how you guys have bonded together.

GABE MADSEN: Yeah, I mean, this team, I still stand on is a really close team, one of my favorite teams I've played on. It's tough. I don't know how to feel right now. Obviously there's a chance for us to play in the Fox Tournament, and so if we can keep playing I would love to keep doing that, but we're not going to force anybody to keep playing.

Just kinda hard, you know, you want that closure, you want to know if it's the last one. It's just been -- like you said it's been an interesting final few weeks to the season. Just tried to enjoy it and obviously I -- I've had quite an up and down year the whole year.

Not much to say about that, just a little frustrating. Like I said, I love this group a lot and if that was the last one, then, you know, it will go down as one of my favorite groups.

Q. Keanu, how would you rank that performance among your college career so far? How did you do it?

KEANU DAWES: I would say it's definitely up there, but at the same time we didn't really win, so in my opinion it doesn't really mean anything. Yeah, there's really not much to say. We didn't win. Yeah, I had a double-double, but we didn't win so it doesn't mean anything.

Q. Keanu, can you talk about your interactions with Alex Jensen so far, what his message has been to the team and your overall impressions?

KEANU DAWES: First impressions are good. Seems like a chill guy. Haven't really talked too much. He was at the hotel the other night. Just kind of a formal introduction, getting to know him. He hasn't really talked much basketball or his plan for the future so far.

Q. Josh, Gabe touched on this and it may be too difficult to ask at this point. If there was the opportunity to extend the season, what's the vibe, the thought process behind that right now?

JOSH EILERT: I think it's hard rate now to ask that question. I'm 100% all in, you know? I'm excited about it. I know players have to make decisions, but I think it would

be special to have another opportunity to battle with these guys.

I told them in there how proud I am and how excited I was every day to jump on the floor with them.

There's been a lot of years, your know, you walk out there and it's just a drag to be out there. I talk to a lot of coaches and they say that this time of year, but I have none of that, whatsoever.

They're a joy to be around. They're a fun group. I don't want it to end whatsoever, and I want to, you know, go to battle with them, you know, in Vegas and string some more wins together and have that opportunity.

They're a special group. They're a special group. You know this guy right next to me, what he's done, you don't see it very often, the loyalty. And Gabe personifies loyalty. He gave four years to Utah, University of Utah and his contributions will go down in the record books. I'm more proud just of the person he is. Right? He's a heck of a player but the person he is and the teammate he is.

I certainly don't want it to be the last time I get to coach him.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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