

Camping World Maui Invitational

Wednesday, December 2, 2020
Asheville, North Carolina, USA

UNLV Runnin' Rebels Coach T.J. Otzelberger Postgame Press Conference

Davidson - 77, UNLV - 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

TJ OTZELBERGER: I was proud of the competitive spirit that we had as the game wore on. Our guys kept fighting. They wanted to, they really wanted to win that game. They were highly disappointed in that locker room. There's a lot of care factor. I know that we're getting better. I feel like each night out there's been improvement. We have minimized some of the mistakes that caused us challenges each game and when we can put together 40 minutes with the tremendous sense of urgency we had down the stretch in that game particularly defensively, I know we're going to be a really good team.

And we want to win every one, but we're getting better and looking forward to getting back to the practice floor with our guys and really getting to work.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your second half defense where it looks like you guys are playing a zone for half the possession and then switch to man. I guess just how do you describe that defense and is that something you think can be a season-long way to help the defense perform better?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Well, we felt like for sure with Davidson that they have a tremendous offensive rhythm. They're a very cerebral team. When you guard things a certain way, they have a lot of counters and things to take advantage.

So we felt like disrupting their rhythm was going to be important to us getting stops. Our guys did a really good job with that. There was times we would match up on two passes or three passes and go man, and I thought it was good for us. We generated some turnovers. We did a



good job keeping the ball in front of us.

I do think it's something we'll continue to use as a weapon, as the season moves forward, and I thought it worked well and really helped us get back in the game here tonight.

Q. You had a pretty efficient night shooting from two of your top guys, 50 percent in the second half, is that something obviously starting with the next game and on, you hope comes back to you guys with some of the shooting early on?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Yeah, it is. I mean, look, with Bryce, I mean, he just, he makes so many tough shots. He's a really tough cover when you put him in space. He's so gifted at being able to spin and pivot and find ways to score. So it's great to see that.

It was outstanding to see David Jenkins knock down his first couple threes, get a little bit of that swagger back.

I think for us, even though we're going to hang our hat on the defensive end of the floor, those two guys when they have it going command a lot of attention from the opposing defense and that helps free things up for the other guys. So it was good to see those guys individually have good nights that way. It's something we can certainly build on as we move forward.

Q. I'm just curious, how, I guess, tough is it to prepare for this Davidson team on obviously a short turnaround? They have got a lot of sets, a lot of different ways they can hurt you and they have got a lot of really good off-ball movement, so I guess how tricky was it to get guys ready for this game?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Yeah, they're a challenging team to prepare for on a one-day turnaround. They have got those two senior guards that have been with them, it seems like forever, and they run the team. They have those guys as coaches on the floor.

They run quite a bit of stuff offensively, probably as much as anybody that we'll see all year. And I'm proud of -- we didn't get off to the start defensively we would have liked, but I'm proud of how our guys kept coming and kept



fighting as the game went on knowing that they're a challenging team to guard that way and they're really cerebral.

So the positive is we saw three completely different teams here and even though we're really disappointed not to come out here with a victory, we know these games will pay big dividends for us as we move forward.

Q. I did want to ask you in a broader sense, you've had three games here, no fans, crowd noise, fan cutouts, all these weird 2020-type things. I am curious, how much, have you changed anything about how you coach from the sideline with, I don't know if it's an energy thing. Nate Oats talked about tonight that you worry about maybe people hearing your calls when you're communicating with your team. Anything you're doing differently in response to this?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Well, I think the thing that stands out the most to me is generating your own energy. It's important that everybody in your program gives everything that they have. You need to generate your own energy. The players on the floor, but also the guys on the bench, the coaching staff, the support staff, we need to have tremendous energy because you don't have that momentum of the crowd and the fans and that sort of thing.

And to be honest, I don't think we handled it great in our first game. It kind of caught us off guard. And to play in our home crowd, we love our fans, we love the advantage we have when we're at Thomas and Mack, and it's hard at times. We're used to that energy helping propel you through some of those moments and helping you get key stops and get going in transition.

So I think we have adjusted to it now and I think to your point with play calls and things like that, there's a little more thought that goes into it, but it's something we have all got to adjust to because it's the way it is right now and it appears that's what it's going to be for a good part if not all of this season.

Q. When you go into a season with six freshmen on the roster, you know you're going to have to use them eventually and get something out of them, it seems like Tillis and Nick Blake are the two guys getting something of an opportunity now. Where are they now in your eyes and where do you need them to be by the end of the year and how do you get them there?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I mean, it was unfortunate, obviously, not to have a summer with those guys, and then we had also had a trip planned for our team to go to Canada and doing so

knowing that we have got those six freshmen. 10 of our scholarship guys haven't played with us, so having that time would have been really impactful to kind of build some of the habits we're talking about right now. I think we were just cut short on that and had challenges that way.

Specifically pertaining to Devin and to Nick, they have stood out in different ways through the course of the practices that we have had that have garnered them that opportunity.

We need to continue to looking to go deeper into our bench and get more guys opportunities, but I think what's really important as you're building a program and you're building a culture, is that as you're building a program you need young people to come into your program and pay their dues. They need to come into your program and earn it. It's not good if they come in and they're handed things. It's good if they come in and earn those things, and I think each day in practice they earn them and now they have a chance for some on the game floors, and I'm hopeful that a few more can earn those same opportunities because I have confidence in those guys.

And I'm a captive audience right now, every practice, every film session, how we do everything, I'm watching and eager to get more guys a chance.

Q. You've mentioned that you go into film sessions and you work with the younger guys. Obviously, there's a lot more freshmen in there, a couple transfers. Heading into conference play this weekend and for the rest of the season, do you plan on making adjustments during film session or during practices from what you experienced from this tournament?

TJ OTZELBERGER: Well I think we're always looking to be a little more technical, be a little more sound, find something that we see on film that can make us one percent better, so we'll continue to seek those answers, those solutions. Again, there's a lot to learn as a group comes together, what that identity that have group is. And I think David Jenkins gradually stepping forward and having the game he did tonight and building on it really helps that group chemistry, helps us build on your identity. And so to me it's more about, yeah, we're pulling things from film, I know we have an outstanding coaching staff and we're going to teach fundamentally sound basketball, but I think there's a big part of it of bringing a group of people together. This is still much more of a people profession and bringing groups together and molding personalities and habits as a group and energy and I'm excited to keep doing that because I saw a lot of care in that locker room after this game, I saw a lot of care. I know that's something we can build on.

