

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Tuesday, November 22, 2022

Maui, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Ohio State Buckeyes

Chris Holtmann

Zed Key

Bruce Thornton

Postgame Press Conference



Ohio State - 81, Cincinnati - 53

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started for questions for the student-athletes. Coach will join us shortly.

Questions?

Q. Zed, it felt like you were able to get, to work a little bit more in this game. What kind of adjustments did you make to kind of get yourself going in this game and kind of helping to set the pace?

ZED KEY: I just had to come out from the beginning with more juice. That was my issue yesterday. I was trying to feel out the game and you can't do that at this level. So I made that adjustment, speaking to the coaches. It just wasn't the coaches. My teammates found me in the right spots and I was around the rim, so I was making shots.

Thankful for my teammates for finding me around the rim and putting the trust in me to score the ball.

Q. For both you guys, the game yesterday was obviously a step up in competition compared to what you had faced in the first three games. What did you learn about yourselves as a team in that game that you were able to use today?

ZED KEY: Coaches just said our defensive effort in the first half was good and in the second half it wasn't really where it needs to be. So just taking that and applying it to today's game. We had some stretches where we had some lapses, but it was definitely better today. We saw the result. We came out with a W.

BRUCE THORNTON: For us, the main thing was just not quitting. San Diego State is a great team with great

coaches and great staff. It was our first battle. So I'm just glad our team and our coaches still believed in us, even when we was down. They just said, Just no quit and just find a way. We brought it over into this game and came with a great outcome.

Q. They played with a lot of physicality yesterday. This team pressures you up and down the court. How have you been able to handle high-level pressure for the first time in your career at this level?

BRUCE THORNTON: It starts off in practice. Isaac Likekele, number 13, me and him go back and forth in practice, pushing each other extremely hard in practice, and it translates in the game. So when I see it, I'm not as startled, and I'm not like really as scared, as I've been doing this the whole summer and the pre-season. So when I seen it I felt comfortable in it. I'm glad we got the W today.

Q. If you guys could both talk about, what was like to play Cincinnati, an in-state team, here on Maui, what, 4,000 miles away? And how familiar are you guys with those guys, if at all?

ZED KEY: It was a little weird. Like you said, they're in state, an hour and a half down the road. But it's just another game. It's another team in front of us. Just trying to get to our goal. It's another game. I was excited to play. I know the team was.

It was a little weird to flying out here to Hawaii and playing them. But excited we got to play them. And the coaches made it very clear that they got us the last two times that they played us, so that definitely fueled us up for today's game.

BRUCE THORNTON: It means a lot. It's an in-state battle. So who is not trying to be the best in their state? So I feel like we showed everybody what we can do, even after a tough loss against San Diego State.

For me, No. 2 Landers Nolley, he was going to a high school I was supposed to go to. So like seeing him, it was crazy because like he was a mentor for me and he helped me out in some ways. But, yeah.

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Q. Landers finished with only two points the entire game. Did you focus on him or do anything differently or you just concentrated on your own game?

BRUCE THORNTON: We definitely had a focus on him. You said Landers Nolley, right? Yeah, because last night I think he had 10 threes or nine threes, and that's very scary in the college game to hit that many threes. So we definitely had to dial in and make sure he couldn't get any comfortable looks for us, and it worked out and we got the success that we wanted.

Q. College basketball's obviously a game of runs, but once you put them, once you got your 20-point lead you pretty much kept them at arms length the rest of the way. What did it take to sustain that lead and hold on to it?

ZED KEY: It definitely started on the defensive end. That was one of the points of emphasis that Coach has stated. As I said before, sustaining an effort and just, even though our first-half effort last game, yesterday's game, was good and it wasn't that good yesterday, so just taking that information that he said and applying it to today's game, and it definitely worked out.

I looked up one time, we was up 20, so I was like, Look, we just got to keep going. Don't let our foot off the gas. And we came out with the W.

BRUCE THORNTON: Just having a consistent defense throughout the whole game. It sounds easy, but it's really not. It's really tough playing against these top-level teams that have a consistent defense throughout 40 minutes.

So I feel like the most team that's most consistent, more disciplined on D, even if they're down on an 8-0 run or how many you down in a run, just stay consistent on defense, and shots are going to fall on offense, but staying the course and staying together on defense is a big thing for us.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, guys. We'll bring up coach next. We'll have coach do an opening statement and then open it up for questions.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I thought it was a good effort. I got a lot of respect for this Cincinnati team. I think, obviously have known Wes for a number of years. I think he's a terrific coach. They have a great staff. I know those guys well. So I knew that we had to play well. I thought that watching their game last night, it was really impressive how they played Arizona. So best wishes to them on a year, on their year.

I just thought it was going to be a really important game for us and was proud of our guys' effort. I thought they responded and we gave as good a defensive effort as we've had certainly all year.

So a lot for us to take from this. Obviously a very quick turnaround with, again, one of the best defensive teams in the country. So we'll get to work here quickly.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach?

Q. Besides the obvious reasons that you want to win a game, but what did you say, or what did you think made this such a really important game for you?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think they're going to win some games. I think they're going to have some success this year. Anytime you can play a team that you feel like is going to have some success and beat them on a neutral floor, that's important.

I just think that our guys needed to see us play well for longer stretches. As you got a new group, they needed to feel that. So that was, those were the reasons.

Q. Were there things that you felt like were maybe, I don't know if exposed or just things that you learned about yourselves yesterday, that you guys were able to execute better today because you had played a higher-level competition?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Maybe our guys would have to answer that. I think we were able to sustain an effort a little bit longer than what we did last night. I think that was the biggest thing is we were able to sustain an effort a little bit longer.

But San Diego State had a lot to do with that. It was a really, really as physical a game as I've certainly been a part of. And we knew this was an important game. Obviously it's an in-state school. Zed had that confused. We didn't tell them we had lost the last couple, because we played them in the last couple years. Obviously you know that. But anytime you're playing an in-state school there's a lot of importance to that too.

Q. Did you guys concentrate on Landers Nolley? He had 33 yesterday. You held him to two today.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah. What did he have nine threes? Eight threes? Yeah, he's going to get a couple stars in the scouting report with those kind of numbers. He's a really good player. He's a really good offensive player.

I just give Isaac Likekele a lot of credit. I just thought he made it very difficult for him all night. Great attention to detail. I thought Isaac was tremendous on Landers.

Q. I asked Zed about this. It felt like his activity kind of opened everything up for you. It felt like, obviously San Diego State with the veterans in the way, but what did y'all say to him last night in preparation for this game that kind of got him going today?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: You know, I thought he had good stretches of play last night, but I didn't think it was the expectation that we have for a player of his caliber and a junior, to be honest with you, particularly on the defensive end. I thought there were too many lapses.

So I think, for him, it was a good moment for him to kind of set the tone. And I agree with you, he did set a physical tone early, which we really need from him.

Q. What do you make of now the challenge that's ahead of you to try to come out of here with two wins and like you said another team that plays some pretty elite defense?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah. I think it's going to be unlike any style we've played in my five years. We've never played a style like this. It's very, very unique. I know there's a number of teams in the Big-12 that play this way.

So we've got a lot of hours of work ahead of us to put a game plan in that's simple for our guys and yet smart. And they're a really good team. They're a really good team. I think, you know, you know if you're going to win, certainly the first or the second game in this thing, with this field, you're definitely playing a tournament team that's got a real chance to advance.

Q. Curious your general philosophy on non-conference scheduling and if in-state opponents ever factor in or if you don't look at that at all and if you view that as any kind of opportunity.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, we scheduled Cincinnati as soon as I got the job and did a home and home with them. It was important for us. They were two really good games. We were fortunate to win both. They were close games.

So, yeah, absolutely. I think -- I've got a lot of respect for that UC program. So many guys, Coach Huggins, to Mick, on down the line, who have had really good teams there.

So we played John one year and played Mick the year before. And, yeah, we want to schedule teams out of

conference, high major teams like Cincinnati that we really believe are going to play in the NCAA tournament. That's always been my philosophy.

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