

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Maui, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Ohio State Buckeyes

Chris Holtmann

Justice Sueing

Zed Key

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 80, Texas Tech - 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with the players and then we'll get to coach when he comes.

Q. Justice, can you put into words what this must have felt like for you to open with a dunk, to have plays down the stretch, and to have a game like this back in Hawaii? What does this day mean to you?

JUSTICE SUEING: It means a lot, especially because I was able to play in front of my family. The past couple of games I've been struggling a little bit just trying to get back into the flow of things being out from injury.

But my teammates continue to give me support. My staff continue to give me support and just believing in God and his path for me. It was a big game that we know we had to come in and be ready for. It was a great team. I'm really proud of this team, especially being new, young. It's a great feeling.

Q. You mentioned like just kind of finding your way back a little bit so far this season. You opened this game with that dunk on that play from the left wing. What does a play like that right off the bat do for you? And did that set a tone or help settle you in?

JUSTICE SUEING: Yeah, it definitely set a tone for us. We wanted to come into this game being aggressive knowing that Texas Tech they're a really defensive-minded team. So we wanted to be aggressive and not let them dictate how we play. So opening up with that baseline dunk was definitely key in our jump.

Q. Can you contrast this with being out here for the Maui Invitational back with Cal all those years ago to



start your college career and maybe how different this might feel than leaving the islands under those circumstances?

JUSTICE SUEING: Yeah, coming here it feels a little bit different, but still all the same. Just being able to come back here to Maui to play this. It's a great tournament. It's a challenge. That's what we said coming into this, that we were going to get three really good games, and that's what we got.

I'm really proud of my guys just coming out here battling. It's a lot of the guys' first time playing here at Ohio State, so I'm just proud of them being able to pick up on things and ultimately getting a win against a really good team.

Q. Zed, when Justice has been kind of battling through a few things, getting his feet back underneath him, when he has a game like this, what does it do for this team's confidence, this team's offense?

ZED KEY: As I said in the previous press conference, anybody on this team has the ability to score the ball and to go off. Today, as we saw the whole game, Justice had a dazzling performance. It's good. He's fully healthy. People still question him from the past two games. He didn't really score that much.

But he's vital for this team. He's an older guy. He's a leader. So definitely I'm excited that he had 33 points tonight. It just shows that when people doubt him for the past two games and he comes out and people shouldn't doubt him. He had 33 points tonight. So it's good to have him and a dazzling performance tonight.

Q. For both of you, what did it take for you guys to continually hold them off? You took the lead at 6-5 and then every time they made a run, you guys had an answer. What did it take to keep them at arm's length for basically the whole game?

ZED KEY: Defense first. We strive defense since we scouted 'em. Coach Holtmann prepared us well and said that they're going to make runs. They're a good team. They're ranked. So just got to stop 'em, limit their runs, and we did that consistently and we got the W.



Q. Could you maybe take me through a little bit of what you went through last year with that injury and sitting out almost the whole thing except for the first two. And that was after the pandemic and all that stuff that everyone in college basketball went through. So what has this journey the last, even couple years, been like for you?

JUSTICE SUEING: Yeah, just this past year's been really tough just dealing with injury because I've never really dealt with injuries my entire career. I've been pretty healthy. So just kind of having that.

It was a really, it was as much of a mental battle as it was a physical battle getting healthy. It was definitely the most, it was the toughest time I've had to go through in my career, but at the same time, I thank God for it because it's allowed me to grow in a lot of areas that I haven't, might not have been as strong in before mentally.

Also, it's just, it just shows how persistent I am that when I have something in mind, when I have this goal and this game that I love, I'm going to continue to work for it and get to where I need to be at.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll let you go and then start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Obviously, really good win for us over a good team. Got a lot of respect for Texas Tech and Mark and their players. The way they coach and play is, it's a real, it's a fight, for sure. Tremendous respect for just how hard it is to play against them.

Give our coaching staff a lot of credit. I thought they did a great job in a quick turnaround in preparing our team, offensively and defensively, to play this group. But players win games, and I thought it was great to see Justice. I just told him I got emotional talking about him on the radio because he's been through a lot. You have a season-ending injury. You got a lot of promise going into what we thought was going to be his last year. He's had some struggles this year too. So I'm just really happy for the kid.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach?

Q. You scored on at least three in-bounds plays, like layups or dunks. Was there something that your staff saw in scouting or was it just execution or what happened there?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, they play a unique baseline

underneath that we have seen a couple times and actually played early in my career. My first head coaching job, I played a similar defense, so I had a little bit of familiarity with it and we thought we could potentially attack 'em.

So those were all kind of draw ups and our guys did a great job executing of the.

Q. You talk about being emotional after all that Justice has been through. When you see him putting together a game like this, what is that like as a coach realizing that he's kind of got it and you can keep going to him?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, I think he had a look tonight. Jake did a great job freeing him up early for, on a set play for an easy layup. I think that just gave him a little bit of confidence. He had a look tonight, and I think once he saw a few go in, he played with more confidence.

Our older guys, our freshmen were good tonight, but we really needed our older guys in this game, older bodies. I guess Bruce is not an older kid, but he's an older body. So we needed all those guys.

Q. What did it take to keep them at arm's length? Once you took the lead at 6-5, you held them at bay for the duration. What did it take to keep answering every time they made a run?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I thought our offense was really good tonight when guys made plays and made shots. I thought we were able to get 'em on the glass a few times.

I did not love stretches of our defense again. I just think it wanes. I thought we had a terrible stretch in transition defense in the middle part of the first half, and I told them that at halftime. It just was not good enough. It was not good enough.

The numbers are not great either. So we got to get better in that area, but I think offensively we were able to keep 'em at bay with that.

Q. I know you mentioned that you weren't happy about stretches of defense. But second half you had them 1-10 from the three-point line. It seemed like you were doing some different things. So what did you like about that effort? Because it seemed like you were pretty effective.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Keeping them from the three-point line? You know, I thought we challenged better in the second half. I thought they got cleaner looks in the first half, and that were uncontested looks. I just thought we challenged and got in their air space better in the second

half, and that was a point of emphasis, for sure.

Q. The first game, obviously, you guys lose. You get in the losers bracket, but then you bounce back with a decisive win over a local team, and then you come back today to get a big win over a defensive team. Maybe a lot of doubters out there, maybe a lot of haters in this business. Do you have a message to those haters after such a big win?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: When you asked me that a few years ago, I didn't realize you had asked a number of coaches. We need like a reel of that, of you asking that question to the coaches. Part of the business. Part of the business. You got to love 'em. That's for sure. Thank you for the question.

Q. As far as Justice's progression for you, what specific areas of his game were you hoping to see him take strides in this week and did he do that today?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I wanted him to see a few shots fall. Really, I wanted him to see a few shots fall because he's a better shooter than how he's shot it, and I think he needed that. He's a much better shooter, his numbers showed that, than what he's shown. I think as crazy as that sounds, I wanted to see him take care of the ball better, but mainly just see a couple shots fall to feel good about that, and obviously he did tonight.

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