

Allstate Maui Invitational

Tuesday, November 21, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

Gonzaga Bulldogs

Mark Few

Nolan Hickman

Anton Watson

Postgame Press Conference



Gonzaga - 76, Syracuse - 57

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by head coach, Mark Few, Nolan Hickman, and Anton Watson. We will start with some opening comments from Coach.

MARK FEW: Hey, it was a really, really, really good win for us in lieu of such a quick turnaround and playing in the breakfast bracket early morning. So I was really, really proud of our response. We came out with great energy, came out with great effort, and obviously great toughness, as it showed with the rebound differential.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the players.

Q. For either of you guys, he mentioned how tough the turnaround, how quick it was. How often Anton have they asked you since you stepped on campus to be more aggressive? Because were you certainly very aggressive early out there.

ANTON WATSON: Yeah, definitely since freshman year and, yeah, I've just been working on that since then, just being more assertive. I think the team is better when I play like that. Yeah, just making plays, I feel like that's when I play my best.

Q. Anton, outside of the rebounding, what do you think was the best part of your defense today against Syracuse's crafty guards?

ANTON WATSON: Just making them uncomfortable. They still got to the cup a couple times and made some tough finishes. But, yeah, they were tough and make them make tough twos, no easy threes, and I think we all did a good job of that.

Q. For both of you, about the eight-minute mark in the second half Syracuse came within single digits and stuff, and then you folks hit two big threes in a row. How did you hold them off? Because it seems as if they never gave up and they kept fighting to come back and just didn't get within single digits of you folks.

NOLAN HICKMAN: No, they definitely did. They're a tough team. They put up a lot of fight. So I just feel like we just buckled down, find the right shots, and we knocked 'em down. That's all that was.

Q. Nolan, what was it like to see the threes fall today after missing 16 in a row yesterday and then did it become contagious when everyone is making their shots out there?

NOLAN HICKMAN: How many did you say I missed in a row?

Q. No, the team missed 16 in a row yesterday, not you.

NOLAN HICKMAN: Oh, yeah, I was just making sure. Everybody steps up to the three and has the confidence to knock it down. That's what Coach preaches to us, that's what we practice, so I feel like that was -- it was well needed to see the ball go through the hoop, for sure.

Q. Nolan, the way the offense runs at times, when the turnovers aren't involved, how smooth is it going offensively when those can be kept down to minimum?

NOLAN HICKMAN: Real smooth. That's where we're at our best, I feel like.

MARK FEW: Thank you for the question, though (laughing).

NOLAN HICKMAN: Yeah, definitely (laughing). That's definitely where we're at our best, just making sure we're playing off two feet, making the right reads and everything. It's definitely where we're at our best, yeah. It's definitely smooth, I would say.



Q. In the first half, you and Graham had a lot of easy looks down on the paint. What was opening those up for you guys and was it easy to kind of capitalize on those in the first half?

ANTON WATSON: Yeah, they were playing zone a lot, I feel like, in the first half. It was just opening up a lot at the high post and we work on floaters a lot, so I can get to that. Then Graham was open a lot on the low baseline. So, yeah, I just felt like it was easy buckets for us, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thanks, guys. You can head back to the locker room. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. With that quick turnaround, how did you deal with that? Were you able to watch films or shoot around or --

MARK FEW: No.

Q. What was it like between the two games?

MARK FEW: Again, the biggest thing is you got to get your guys back and get 'em in a pool or in this case a pool, just to get their legs kind of freshened up, hydrate 'em really well. We kept our prep really, really short in the ball room. We had two quick sessions of film and just one abbreviated session of a walkthrough, fed 'em, and got up this morning, had an early breakfast and got 'em over here. That's about it.

Q. You actually had 'em in the swimming pool?

MARK FEW: Yeah, that's what we do. That's the best way to recover is to get in water, so we do that pretty much after every game, when we can, yeah.

Q. I'm wondering, did you want them to shoot threes today? Were you hoping they were going to put up a bunch of threes today?

MARK FEW: Look, if you go back and look at that game yesterday, most of the threes we took were good. When you have big rim protectors like Edey, and even the kid today is a nice rim protector. So I thought we got maybe a little too heavy, especially a couple big pop-outs, but that was actually the game plan.

But, yeah, today, obviously, we knew we could establish Graham a little bit more. It was going to be a little bit easier to establish him and get him some touches. Syracuse did a good job clamping down on him in the second half. But yeah, again, they just got to shoot 'em, shoot 'em with confidence. The sneaky thing yesterday in

the second half was that we had 10 turnovers or something.

Q. I was specifically wanting to know about Syracuse, did you want them to take --

MARK FEW: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q. I should have phrased it properly.

MARK FEW: Well, Syracuse is really hard to keep in front, man. We were really, really hellbent on trying to keep those guards in front. We actually tried, and I thought we did a good job, but they are just so good at sneaking by and so athletic and so quick. We were very cognizant of Bell. He's got a really nice stroke and he can really get 'em up and get 'em in a hurry. I thought we did a nice job on him.

But, yeah, mostly it was just in the gaps, in the gaps, in the gaps, trying to rake and then rotating over. We had some really, really good rotations where we came over and vertically contest all night. So if we can keep doing that, we can get really good on the defensive end.

Q. Yesterday, Rick Barnes said that Syracuse made the right decision by handing the program off to Adrian Autry. What do you think of his first game that you coached against him?

MARK FEW: I think he's doing a great job. We talked before the game. First of all, what you can't forget in these situations is the impact that he had on the program while he was an assistant. That's, I think, the most frustrating thing when you're assistant, you know, is he deserves some credit for all the success that that program's had, and heck, even as a player.

But I love what he's doing. Their man-to-man defense is solid and it's very, very disruptive, it's very active and then switching in and out of zone, I think is really, really good. It kind of throws off your rhythm. With the personnel he has, he's got 'em doing the right thing. Those guards can really, really get downhill and I've been impressed. He's being himself. That's what you have to do as a head coach, even when you play for one of the greatest -- or played and coached under one of the greatest coaches college basketball's ever seen in Jim Boeheim. He still has to be himself. I think he's doing a really good job of that, so big fan.

Q. When you have a quick turnaround, you have the lack of preparation time and you also have just maybe a lack of energy when you wake up in the morning for that. Is one of those dynamics more difficult to

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

overcome?

MARK FEW: Yeah, I actually think it's the mental thing. From the day they walked in the locker room yesterday after the Purdue thing, I was just on 'em to, hey, it's over, quick turnaround and, you know, we always talk about next play, next play, don't dwell on the last play. I was harping on 'em on that. I told them the team that pouts the least wins games like this. It's not going to be an X and O deal on short prep.

So I believe it's more about the emotions, emotional and the mental kind of part of it. Then we got a great -- between Travis Knight and Josh, our trainer. Those two, I knew they would be on the recovery aspect.

Q. How different that offense looks when those turnover numbers are down and then if it's UCLA tomorrow night should we just prepare for double or triple over time or which?

MARK FEW: No, first of all, you nailed it, the turnovers. It's, you know, it's hard, we obviously want to be in attack mode and we have those guards that -- Ryan loves to play fast, and we give those guys a lot of freedom. But we just, I think just I've been on 'em a little bit to look contextually about what just happened, what happened the two prior possessions.

I even kind of jumped up and was a little fired up on -- Anton made a really nice pass to Braden and he traveled or fumbled or whatever. Great decision, phenomenal pass, but the context of it, it came after two turnovers prior to that. So we got to, you know, yeah, we're just starting in this journey, so we got to still process stuff like that.

THE MODERATOR: That will do it. Thanks, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....