

Allstate Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 22, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

Kansas Jayhawks

Bill Self

Hunter Dickinson

Kevin McCullar Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas - 69, Tennessee - 60

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. We have Hunter Dickinson and Kevin McCullar Jr. with us.

Questions for the players.

Q. You guys answered the bell early morning game. What were the challenges and what did you think of the game the way it developed?

KEVIN McCULLAR JR.: Yeah, we knew it was an early start. We had to create our own energy out there. The fans traveled well for us, but really it was just on us to get back in the gym, bounce back after a short turnaround. I was proud of the younger guys stepping up and making huge plays down the stretch, and us older guys just tried to create some energy.

Q. What did you think of the showing of your bench? They had a lot of good moments today.

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, no, that's what won us the game right there. We needed that uplift from guys, especially Jamari. I think he was the difference-maker and the X factor out there. He guarded, he hit a big three, hit some big free throws, but especially on that defensive end, I think he was the X factor out there today.

Q. How eager were you to kind of atone -- I don't know if that's a fair word, atone for yesterday's performance and the rebounding? I think you guys out-rebounded them 45-35 today. How happy are you to see that?

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, I knew I let my team down yesterday with my performance. I wanted to come out here and give them more defensively. I knew that's where



I let 'em down yesterday. So just trying to come out here with some more energy and really try to affect the game on both sides, but I just tried to go out there and do whatever I could for the team.

Q. Can you just talk about how this three days went? Because obviously when you play the tournament, you get a day in between those games. You still have the same level of talent as if it were a Final Four here, but three games in three days, is this maybe even harder?

KEVIN McCULLAR JR.: Yeah, it kind of brings you back to, like, the AAU days. You got to wake up and get to it. There's not really too much scouting or knowing your opponent too well. It's really going out there and guarding and playing hard and playing for each other. Yeah, I think we did a great job and it was a fun tournament. It's great competition.

HUNTER DICKINSON: Yeah, this tournament was crazy, you know, just to be able to go against the No. 4 team and then the No. 7 team right after, the next day, in less than like 12 hours, it felt like. It was great for us. I think it was really good for the young guys to really experience some high-level basketball early on in the season because when you get down to the tournament and you keep winning, there's only going to be really good teams left. For them to be able to experience that this early and kind of grow from that will be big for us down the stretch.

Q. You had the first two baskets in that run that gave you guys the lead coming out of the 49-49 tie. What was going well for you guys during that run at the end?

HUNTER DICKINSON: My teammates just finding me. We have a really unselfish team. Coach draws up some good plays for me, but it's really the guys out there being unselfish, being willing passers, and getting me the ball in spots and just trusting in my abilities.

Q. You guys played Tennessee last year in the Bahamas. Describe what it's like playing against them with their physical approach. It probably feels a little bit like the Big-12 but a little more so just because they're across the board big, strong, collapse on you.



What's that like?

KEVIN McCULLAR JR.: Yeah, you know when you play Tennessee, it's going to be a physical game. You're going to have to box out. It's going to be a lot of hand-checking, different things like that. You got to play through contact, and we knew that. Playing 'em last year we got a taste of that and we knew coming in today what it was going to be like. So, yeah, they're a very good opponent and it was fun out there battling with 'em.

HUNTER DICKINSON: It was more like a Big Ten game out there.

KEVIN McCULLAR JR.: Big-12 still runs the nation.

Q. Kevin, Hunter called him the X factor. Did you expect this from McDowell and what kind of a player was he today and what made you think he could do this?

KEVIN McCULLAR JR.: Yeah, Jamari, he comes in the gym and works every day. He's staying in the gym, getting in extra work all the time. He's just trusting the process. He's a young guy, he's learning his way, and he's out there. He's guarding, he's taking caring care of the ball and knocking down open shots, and that's what we're going to need him to do for us to win big games and that's what he came in and did today.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Guys, thanks. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take some questions.

BILL SELF: Well, it was a great win for us today. We struggled last night, obviously. To bounce back in 13 hours to play a team as good as Tennessee and to hang in there under some fairly adverse conditions for some of our players, it was just a terrific win. One that we'll look back on in February being very thankful we got it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. What did you think of the showing from your bench today? It felt like it was a step up from what we've seen.

BILL SELF: There's no question the bench was -- players 5 through 9 were much better today, led kind of by Johnny and Parker, and Jamari, obviously. But I thought they did great.

Granted, now we're going to have to continue to develop some guys and that kind of stuff, but for Jamari to play 27 minutes in a big game, playing the 7th ranked team in the

country, was pretty special.

Q. You talked about the quick turnaround. You compared it to AAU. How do you feel like the players dealt with that?

BILL SELF: I thought they did well. I thought we had good energy. I've never been much of a morning person, but going to bed -- finishing the game last night and getting to the hotel at 10 or whatever time it was -- or 9:30, whatever it was, and, you know, you got walkthrough at 5:30, that's a pretty quick turnaround.

But the guys handled it. We talked about being mature and everybody's got a job to do. You got to do your job. I thought they did a really good job. I thought my coaches did a good job getting 'em enthused because, even though the game was tied at halftime, we played pretty good the first half. I thought other than that early stretch when they went up seven, I thought we controlled the first half and didn't have much to show for it. We felt pretty good at halftime.

Q. I asked your guys about just the three games in the three days and certainly like in a Final Four, you get that same level of talent that we had here for this tournament, but you also get a day in between if you play that final game. Is going through this and preparing for something like you just went through --

BILL SELF: I think this prepares you more for your conference tournament than it does for the NCAA tournament. The thing about it is -- I'm sure Rick was the same way, and of course everybody does their own deal and do it differently, but, you know, teams take a lot of pride in scouting opponents. We said, okay, here's five things Tennessee does and let's just worry about that. We didn't do the 25 things that they do.

So I thought today was more about players than it was anything else. ESPN, I mean, they're awesome, they promote our sport as well or better than anybody else, but, God, it seems like to me if you played the last game, you shouldn't have to play the first game the next day. But that was the case.

Q. What did you think of Hunter's performance today? He told us he felt he let the team down yesterday defensively.

BILL SELF: Well, the guy that he guarded yesterday had an unbelievable game. He was great. Had an unbelievable game. I don't buy into his thinking at all. But I thought he did well today. Got to make his free throws. You know, we can do a lot -- we get five offensive

rebounds total, but they only got nine on more misses. So we actually did a good job on the defensive glass.

But you know, that's two games that we played against two really good teams where a guy's got 20 and 21 rebounds in games. If you were going to evaluate Hunter from Michigan, I would say that's one of the biggest areas he could improve in, was not only rebounding the ball in his area, but outside his area. So he's definitely getting better at that.

Q. What happened to Timberlake?

BILL SELF: He just, there was a scrum and he hit his head. So I think somebody may have fell on his head. He's fine. No concussion or anything.

Q. What are you going to do as a team the rest of the way in Hawaii, and when do you go back?

BILL SELF: I think our flight tomorrow is 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock, something like that. So we'll have the rest of the day -- that's one advantage of playing at 6 a.m. in the morning is that you have the rest of the day free to watch whatever or do whatever you want to do, so that will be good. Then we'll eat a Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow afternoon as a group, and then we'll get on back.

Q. How would you assess the 2-1 record here?

BILL SELF: Whenever you play a tournament, exempt tournament, everybody wants to go into it thinking 3-0. In this field, I guarantee you all the coaches were thinking 2-1's a good trip. Now the two that are playing now, neither one's going to be happy if they go 2-1, because they have already won two. But I don't think there's anybody this field that would walk away from here saying 2-1 was not a successful trip.

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

BILL SELF: Thank you.

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