

Allstate Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 22, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Lazar Stefanovic

Postgame Press Conference

Gonzaga - 69, UCLA - 65

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started.

MICK CRONIN: We'll get it rolling.

THE MODERATOR: Okay.

MICK CRONIN: We'll get it rolling.

Obviously hard-fought game. We got behind early. I thought the first, I don't know, whether it's eight minutes, whatever it was, our intensity wasn't what it needed to be. From there, we started competing a lot harder and gave ourselves a chance.

So, obviously give my hat -- take my hat off to Watson. I think he made three threes last year. He was 3-3. 14-15. So he was dominant, carried his team to victory.

But there was a lot of positives because obviously Dylan had an off night, third game in three days. Young kid like that, first time starting, playing big minutes, asking a lot of him in a game like that. Lazar had 16 and eight, obviously, but I thought Ilane Fibleuil showed a lot of heart tonight. Brandon Williams gave us positive minutes.

So we got a lot to fix, but I like the way our guys never gave up, despite the fact that we didn't make a lot of shots and Watson was having a career night. They had guys making threes that don't make 'em. So I'll take that, I'll take that, and we got to get better, but if you want to ask these guys.

Q. Lazar, how hard is it to get a rhythm with all the fouls going on, to stop and play constantly, both sides?

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: I mean, it's part of the game. It



happens to everybody. So it's the same for us as it is for them. So the call was made, get over it, next play.

Q. You guys were right there, you hit that three, did you feel like you guys were going to get it done at that point?

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: Of course. You always keep believing. We were down, but we were coming back. We kept getting good shots. So the ball went in, we were down three, I think, but --

MICK CRONIN: We got the steal.

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: Yeah, we got the steal. We had a possession. You believe and you play. You just don't believe, you try to -- you think you're going to win. So do your best to execute, we did execute, and we had a pretty good look, it didn't go in, and that's basketball.

Q. Ilane had eight rebounds in just 17 minutes. How much of a boost did he give you with his energy and rebounding out there?

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: Well, yeah, Coach talked about it. He gave a big boost and he helped us a lot. That's Ilane that we need every night. It doesn't matter what happens, we need him, we need him like that.

Q. How do you feel now, three games in the tournament? Do you feel like you know more about this team than you did when you arrived here?

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: UCLA? Yeah, of course. We're growing as a team. We're still getting to know other. It's a new team, but these are good games that help us come together even more and learn more about us, who we are and what we need to do to win games. So as the season is going on, I think -- is passing, we should get better and better and get to know other better and better.

Q. How hard is it to play in a game with 51 fouls and just trying to establish an offensive rhythm when it seems like there's a whistle every other possession?

MICK CRONIN: You know he just asked that, right? You



guys got anything else for him?

Go ahead. Get a shower.

LAZAR STEFANOVIC: Thank you, guys.

MICK CRONIN: Oh, my. It's late and I'm hungry. I mean, she can't believe it. He must play for me. I got guys don't listen, too.

Q. Adem, you seemed pretty frustrated with him early in the game. Was that defensively he just left his -- guy got cut free to the basket, that kind of stuff?

MICK CRONIN: You forget -- I forget at times, he's so talented, that he's a sophomore, he's not a junior, he's not a senior. Sometimes his intensity -- he can't think because he's just too intense. That's why he dropped a few balls, because he's anxious to dunk it. But we needed those points. That happened twice. He had a couple times defensively where he left Watson twice, gave him -- what happens is you get the breakdowns early, a kid like -- any guy can see the ball go in the basket, and his confidence grows. You start to feel like it's your night. Yeah, it was very frustrating.

Also, I thought he fouled -- he had a foul early in the game they didn't call, right in front of the bench. It was just two hands on a guy for no reason. He's got to play smarter. This goes back to the whole thing about young is only a detriment to you, and inexperience is only a detriment if you don't play smart. Remember I said it doesn't do any good to be an experienced team, a couple years back, and you don't play smart.

The other thing is the older you are, you're able to play harder longer. You don't break down physically or mentally. But I thought we're playing hard, which my goal for this tournament was to get us to learn how hard you have to compete. We just didn't play hard enough early on the backboard early in the game, and it hurt us. Then we got the guys in there that -- we had to get some guys out and get some guys in that would physically compete to give yourself a chance. On a night obviously where Dylan's 2-15 and he's on the back of a three-game stretch he's fighting off cramps, Watson has a career night, we still have, we get -- and we come out of that timeout and we get a steal, execute the trap, get the steal, and have a chance to -- I think Bas got a pretty good look at a right hand shot that didn't go in to cut it to one where we could have called timeout. We fought. We found a group of guys that would fight back, so that's important, and, but, again, hat's off to them and Watson. He looked like Timme.

You're not going to ask me about the fouls, are you?

Q. I was about to ask you about the fouls.

MICK CRONIN: You were smiling. I thought it was coming.

Q. As you said Watson, had a night, was there a reason why you didn't decide to try to take it out of his hands or --

MICK CRONIN: Oh, we didn't tell anybody not to guard him. Give the kid credit. I mean, he hit some tough ones. Yeah. He hit some tough ones. I said, early on we left him a few times and the ball went in and it got his rhythm. He hit a couple really tough jump hooks. If you can make a jump hook from outside the paint on the baseline, that's almost like a 10-footer, man. I mean, that's a hard shot. But he'll be right-handed tomorrow, too, so maybe you don't want to let him turn to his right hand after he's got it rolling. Berke stayed too long on a show and recover -- he actually stayed forever, he never recovered -- after he had made a few. But that stuff happens, because, look, you can say, well he had all them points, but Graham Ike didn't score. So we had our chances. We just didn't play well early. We were just digging out all night, and we didn't make enough shots to dig out. But we never quit. That's because we got the guys in there that I talked about that got it going, that kept fighting for us. So that was important. But it's going to be hard for us to beat the 11th ranked team in the country or whatever they are with Adem playing 21 minutes at this point in the year for us. He's our only returning guy. So guys got anything else? You look tired, Andy.

Q. You went away from Adem -- I know he was in foul trouble, but did you just not like something you saw -- I know he had foul trouble.

MICK CRONIN: Just trying to win the game. Just got, he's got to get better. Great kid, he's got to get better. You look tired. Somebody get Andy out of here.

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