

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Colorado Buffs

Coach Tad Boyle

Andrej Jakimovski

Julian Hammond, III

Postgame Press Conference

Colorado 73, UConn 72

TAD BOYLE: Well, yesterday, less than 24 hours ago I was sitting here questioning the fight of these guys. I think I said -- I know I said it to them, I can't remember if I said it in here -- that we would find out a lot about our team in the next 24 or 18 hours.

And I think we found out about this team, the fight that they have, and they came back with. I wish we would have played like that against Michigan State. I think Michigan State had a lot to do with it.

But number one, to beat a program like UConn, I mean, that's not easy to do. Coach Hurley is a hell of a coach. They run their stuff so well. They're hard to guard. These guys really battled all game long.

Again, coming down the stretch, win or lose, I was going to be proud of this group. We finally won one there, we got a stop at the end and got a rebound. Andrej made a hell of a shot there on the play we ran. Elijah Malone with a terrific, Julian ran the team.

Everybody that played for us played well and contributed to this win. Couldn't be more proud of this group.

Q. Andrej, can you walk us through what you saw on that last basket, and Julian, what was your vantage point on that play?

ANDREJ JAKIMOVSKI: Coach trusted me to make the last play and he called a good play for me and I knew I had to go down there and finish, and that's basically it. It's a great team win, great bounce-back after a bad game



yesterday. We showed character, and we defended our ass off.

UConn is probably one of the best offensive teams that I've played in my college career. It's a great team win, and way to finish it.

JULIAN HAMMOND III: On that last play, I got on the ball, I saw he had a game, and Elijah did a great job sealing his man down there. Andrej had his guy one-on-one. I saw him get downhill, he got it up, and we all crashed because there was only five seconds left and we were down one, but when it came out of his hand, it looked good.

Q. Andrej, when you made the lay-up, could you see it went in or did you know it went in because you heard the crowd?

ANDREJ JAKIMOVSKI: I fall down and then I saw it went in. I thought I got fouled, but I made the lay-up so we won the game, so it doesn't matter.

Q. Julian, as you prepared for UConn, they got up on you by 11 points, but did you know that maybe they were a little bit vulnerable, maybe lacking a little bit of confidence? They had that intense game against Memphis. I'm curious from your standpoint where you as a team looked to take advantage of that and where their weaknesses might have materialized today?

JULIAN HAMMOND III: Yeah, they did go up 10, 11 on us, but I thought it was more our team because yesterday we went down 10, 11 and we folded. We started playing individual basketball. We played really apart.

I thought today we just started to grind out possessions and make them work because they run a lot of action on offense. We want to make them work as much as they were making us work, and we just tried to wear them down.

Q. For both of the players, last night it was pretty tough, and you had a quick turnaround. What were the conversations like as you prepared to play UConn today? What did you do to rally yourselves?

JULIAN HAMMOND III: It's really just -- we can't get beat up the same way Michigan State beat us up. We thought



they out-physicaled us and stuff like that. We went back, did our recovery, everything that we need for our bodies to feel good for today, and we just talked about it. Like all right, we can't let this happen again. We can't take bad shots. And then we just let it go, got into our UConn start.

ANDREJ JAKIMOVSKI: For us, everything starts on defense. I think if we keep getting stops and rebound the ball, nobody can beat us. We were great there today, and that's why we won the game.

Q. Andrej, this is the second straight game that both of UConn's primary bigs fouled out. You drew personal fouls yourself, obviously, and them not having size at the end was critical. How much of a point of emphasis was it to get them in foul trouble down low?

ANDREJ JAKIMOVSKI: Our game plan was to play inside out, and Elijah has been awesome. He's playing great. At the beginning they were doubling him, so we got some wide-open threes, and then he was going one-on-one, and he missed some lay-ups, but he played great today, and that's why we won the game.

Q. Julian, you talked about some of the conversations that the team had, not wanting to come out and get beat up again today. Take us in the locker room just now, how sweet of a feeling was it? By that same token, you came off such a disappointing one yesterday, a big high today. How do you move on from this one? Obviously one more game to go.

JULIAN HAMMOND III: You know, it feels good. It's exciting, obviously, to beat a program like that. They won the Natty back to back years, so that's always -- they're just a great team, so that's obviously great.

But we know we're going to have a tough game tomorrow either way. We're going to be happy about this now and get back, see who wins at whatever time they play, I don't know, and then just be ready to go tomorrow because we can't beat too up on ourselves because we know we're going to be in for a tough physical game again tomorrow.

Q. Tad, I'm curious from a strategy and tactical approach with their bigs, they fouled out yesterday, now, granted that game went to OT and I think one of them fouled out in the bonus session, but were you looking to exploit that? Obviously not having either of them on the floor for the game winning basket was a factor.

TAD BOYLE: Like Andrej said, we always want to play inside out. We don't go into a game necessarily trying to

foul somebody out. You always want to be aggressive. Look, UConn is an aggressive defensive team.

I mean, they play physical, and it's one of those games where it's hard to officiate because they put so much pressure on the officials. We had a strong crew today that called it like they saw it.

We talk about playing defense without fouling, and UConn, number one, they're deep, and number two, they run their offense as good as anybody in the country. I'm telling you, best offensive scheme I've seen in my 19 years as a head coach, quite frankly.

But in terms of our game plan, we want to play inside out, play our game, take better shots. I was really disappointed in our shot selection last night. I thought it got a lot better today. Still took a couple tough ones.

But definitely going inside to Elijah Malone. He is a weapon for us and he's a problem for other teams, obviously, because he's a load down there. They started doubling him at the end and then he started passing, and if we can start figuring that piece out, we'll be a pretty tough team to guard.

Q. You guys shot 38 percent in the first half, 62 and a half percent in the second half. You mentioned some of the shot selection with the game yesterday. How much of that was correlated with the first half today and what really switched at halftime that enabled you guys to have success?

TAD BOYLE: Yeah, I thought we had good looks in the first half; we just didn't finish them. They beat us up at the rim a couple times. They lead the country in blocked shots, so they really -- we had some curls that should have been lay-ups that weren't.

So in the second half we did a better job of finishing, and that's part of it. We made open shots, which you have to do when you get them against UConn, because again, they are a physical team defensively. That's one of the reasons they foul a lot.

But you'd better be strong with the ball, from the guard position to the 5 spot, and we were.

Q. I remember asking you during the preseason when you get into a late-game situation, who's the guy that's going to take the shot in the clutch. At that time you kind of said the answer was to be determined. Today, first time you're in that situation really this season. Why the play at the end, and why Andrej?

TAD BOYLE: Well, two reasons. Number one, we had a possession a few before that where we got down to the end of the shot clock and we didn't even get the ball to the rim. I thought to myself, well, KJ is not out there, Tristan is not out there, Cody is not out there.

So I saved my time-outs for a reason, and that play at the end, option one is getting Elijah the ball down low. Julian has got to make that decision.

Option 1A is getting the ball to Andrej, zipping up the lane there, and then we clear it out, let him go to work, and he did it. He made a tough shot. It was a make-miss game. Then we came down and got our stop.

That play was designed for Elijah Malone and Andrej Jakimovski. Those two guys, the way they played tonight, their experience, their toughness, their physicality could handle UConn. You had to be physical to make the play that Andrej made, and he did it.

I don't know if we have other guys that are physical enough to do that right now. Trevor made a hell of a play down the stretch, getting down the lane. But he had an angle on that one. That was the thought there.

Q. Two areas where I saw improvement from last night to today was points in the paint and second-chance points. What did you do or what adjustments did you make? UConn started going downhill early but you still controlled that. What did you do to have some improvement there?

TAD BOYLE: Well, UConn is one of those teams, they want a dunk at the rim or they want a wide-open three. We told our team before the game, this is a different animal than Michigan State. Michigan State really struggled from the three-point line.

UConn made 14 threes yesterday and lost. That's tough. Now, obviously that was an overtime game; could have gone either way.

We wanted to guard the three-point line more against UConn. Now, if they got some twos, we want them to be mid-range twos, not twos at the rim, but we wanted to take away threes. We did not do a very good job of that. I don't know what they ended up with from three, but they had 12 of them.

Our goal is six or less for the opponent. Didn't do a very good job of guarding the three-point line. But it was a different game plan for different opponents, and whoever we play tomorrow it'll be a different game plan for them than it was for Michigan State or UConn.

Q. Coming off the loss yesterday to Michigan State, what does it take from a leadership perspective to sort of change the mindset of the team and make sure they don't get too overwhelmed by the upcoming matchup against the two-time reigning National Championship team in UConn?

TAD BOYLE: It takes character. Like these guys mentioned, it takes toughness, it takes belief in yourself, and our guys had that. Again, I mentioned the fact that we're going to learn a lot about this team in this tournament, and we learned from last night and we turned around tonight.

The biggest thing I was disappointed in last night was our fight and our shot selection. This team, we challenged them, and they had better shot collection and a hell of a lot better fight. Really proud of them for that.

But tomorrow is a new day. We've got to be ready to go whoever we play because they're going to be good.

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