

CBS Sports Classic: North Carolina vs Ohio State

Saturday, December 17, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Ohio State Buckeyes

Chris Holtmann

Justice Sueing

Press Conference

North Carolina - 89, Ohio State - 84

Q. Justice, a game with so many swings, what ultimately was the difference? Why were they able to withstand at the end and hold you guys off?

JUSTICE SUEING: We missed down the line a couple key stops that were vital. These type of environments, these type of games come down to one or two possessions. They had (indiscernible) on a couple of them, especially on some O-boards and gave them an extra chance to score.

I think it was that board where he had an and-one. Just down the stretch, we've got to be more locked in.

Q. You've had games like this where you've had a lead and a team made big runs and you were able to withstand. Did you think these were the type of lessons this team had already learned, or did this feel different in some way, in that regard?

JUSTICE SUEING: You're talking about UNC?

Q. You as a team. You've been able to hold teams off when they've put runs together. This time obviously Carolina overcame it. What was different about your approach today in some of those moments?

JUSTICE SUEING: I think it just came down to stops at the end of the day. It's a little bit of a new group, but we can't keep using that excuse. We've learned in the past how important it is to be able to start second halves off strong or get stops down the line.

At the end of the day, we just didn't get the stops we



needed to get down the line, and it cost us.

Q. You mentioned stops, but some of the turnovers in regulation with the full court press put on you guys, and obviously to end in overtime, there was that. Why was the press giving you problems?

JUSTICE SUEING: Just taking care of the ball, that's always been a key emphasis for us. The other team took advantage of us towards the end of the game to make a little bit of a run and close that gap and make it a one-possession game to get into OT.

It just comes down to stuff we can fix easily and stuff we've got to work on and build. Unfortunately, we took a lot today from it. We've got to learn from this, and later in the season there's going to be many games like this where we need to come out with a win.

Q. It took Armando Bacot a long time to get going. Eventually he did. What was working early and then what changed to allow him to get going?

JUSTICE SUEING: We'll look at film tomorrow, but I think he was just able to be going just because of some board stuff, some O boards, getting a couple stops. They kind of fed off of that, as well we weren't taking care of the ball sometimes.

Their push in transition probably helped a lot. I think that's where he got some points going.

Q. (Brice) Sensabaugh seemed like he went and got you really important baskets, one in regulation and one in overtime. What have you seen out of him and the way he's starting (indiscernible)?

JUSTICE SUEING: Brice is going to continue to develop and become a really good player. He's been great for us being able to handle the pressure, especially towards the end of the game. But Brice is going to continue to grow, and we're going to continue to have our confidence in him and, likewise, so will everyone else on the team. He had it going for us today.

Q. Having Ice (Isaac Likekele) back but not playing, what was it like having his presence back? I saw you talk to him before the game started. What was it like having him in uniform?

JUSTICE SUEING: It felt great having one of our leaders out there. Even though he wasn't out there, he was out there vocally. He was able to talk us through things and things we might not see on the court. He was able to help us out there.

Q. What's the primary emotion coming out of this game?

JUSTICE SUEING: Just disappointed because we were right there. We had a tough shot at the end of regulation to force OT, but just, like I said, there's always those one or two possessions that we really could have locked down on and taken care of the ball a little bit better that could have prevented that.

That's what it comes down to at the end of the game. It's a one- or two-possession game. That's why I was most disappointed because we were right there.

Q. As a captain, going forward, how do you try to learn from this? How do you try to teach these guys that what happened today, we've got to learn from this and be better next time?

JUSTICE SUEING: Just having this feeling, after losing the game, especially this big of a game for us, it's an important feeling to have and carry with us throughout the season so we know we don't want to feel like this ever again.

Continue to grow on it with film, but ultimately, we have to move forward and get ready for the rest of the season. We have an upcoming game, I think, Tuesday or Wednesday.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: All right. Give Carolina credit. I thought it was a hard-fought game by two good teams. Give them a lot of credit for kind of finishing in overtime. We just couldn't seem to get enough stops, couldn't answer the bell enough there defensively or offensively in overtime.

Hard-fought game. Give them credit. Nance made a tough shot there with over a second to go. Give them credit for that and finishing the game.

Q. Those last two seconds of regulation are the things you strategize for. What goes into the decision as far as how to outline your defense and inbound?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: That's exactly how we played it. We were concerned about their guards getting loose, and we've always played five-on-four. So that's kind of how we practice it.

Q. And what did you see -- I guess how did you see your guys react to that? Obviously you're going into overtime, but you still have a chance. How did you see your guys?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Good. You put a guy on the ball right there. I don't know if you saw the pass. He's not impacting the pass. It's a 6'9" player throwing over the top. There's no impact on that pass.

What you're basically doing is losing an extra defender. I thought Justice did a really good job shadowing it. I thought Brice did a good job challenging it.

Then our guys, you've got to move forward in a situation like that and be ready to compete in overtime. I thought we were -- you know, we had a pretty good mindset there. I just think they made a few more plays.

Q. The impact of the full court press late in the game forced a couple of turnovers. What would you want your guys to do differently?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I thought we've got guys out there that we've got to play with that a little bit. I thought we just made some poor decisions with the ball, but we'll get better with that.

Q. UNC had 27 points off turnovers. How much of that was just the transition elements they had going forward?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I mean, it's part of the game. I think we had some careless turnovers in the open floor. I think that was most disappointing, that led to some of their scores. Just fumbled the ball, uncharacteristic with a couple of our guys who haven't done that all year. So we'll get better with it.

Q. This is a case where they have a team that played in a National Championship last year, the veteran guards, and they just went out and took this game from you guys the last four or five minutes, whatever.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Well, listen, they're a good team. They're a good team. Their guards are really good. Their guards put a lot of pressure on your defense. I think what we did see is their ability to make plays there late with a couple of those guards was the difference.

We struggled. I thought we executed really well in the last really 2:30, but it was difficult to get the ball where we needed to, and their guards were just able to go make plays, which is what they've been able to do. So give them credit.

Q. Brice and Bruce (Thornton) just coming of age, making tough shots and tough plays in a game against a really good team. Is that something (indiscernible)?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, I thought Felix (Okpara) was really good too, and I thought Roddy (Gayle Jr.) had good moments. It was really good growth for those guys. I thought Justice had some good moments as well. I thought our guys as a group had some really good moments.

Obviously a lot to learn from and some good things to take from it for sure.

Q. Coach, you controlled the tempo the first half. The second half you just talked about the guard play. Guards started pushing the tempo and kind of threw you off of the rhythm.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: The difference in the game was the start of the second half. I thought -- I just didn't think we came out with -- that's my fault. We just didn't come out with the necessary understanding of how the game was going to be changed when you're -- not just in tempo, because we'll play fast. We don't talk about tempo.

It was more just our defensive energy wasn't what it needed to be.

Q. Bruce Thornton, seasoned point guard out there today, freshman. What did you like about him specifically?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: He's a good player. I think what he'll be most disappointed is some of the uncharacteristic turnovers. We've got a lot on Bruce right now. It's a lot on all four of our freshmen, but it's a lot on him. I'm worried he's going to wear down, to be honest with you. He's a heck of a kid and a heck of a player and an absolute warrior. I know, if you asked him, he'd like a couple of those turnovers back.

Q. Is this the perfect test for your team?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: We got tested a lot this year. This is a good team. A lot of late-game situations, a lot you can learn.

It's December. We've got a group that hopefully will

continue to grow and get better; but a lot we can take from it, a lot we can learn from it, good and bad.

Q. You've got Ice on the bench, obviously not in uniform. What is he going through? What is his status going forward? Update on what he can or can't do?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: One of the things I've tried to do and I think I've learned in this is there are physical injuries and then there are emotional things that players go through. There are mental challenges for today's athlete. It's our job as coaches to recognize that there's both.

A pulled hamstring is pretty easy to see. A sprained ankle is pretty easy to see. But someone grieving over difficult things and challenging emotional things in their life needs the support of everybody around them.

It will be on his timing, if and when, and we'll support him regardless.

Q. We talked about not wanting to put too much on Bruce and worrying about Bruce wearing down. Is this a game where -- just like a regular game, or if you had Ice, probably a little bit less on Bruce?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Sure. But I think we've got to get Roddy and Tanner (Holden) to have the flexibility to play Justice more at the one, as we did today. I think we've got to continue to grow those guys.

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