

# CBS Sports Classic: Kentucky vs. UCLA

Saturday, December 17, 2022  
New York, New York, USA  
Madison Square Garden

## UCLA Bruins

## Coach Mick Cronin

## Jaime Jaquez Jr.

### Press Conference

UCLA - 63, Kentucky - 53

MICK CRONIN: Obviously big win for us. Long week. We're looking forward to getting home. It's going to be 75 on Christmas. That's my recruiting spiel.

I would say that became a bloodbath. At some point, I don't know, it became a Big East game. Back in the Garden, it was great to be back. We were really tough down the stretch on the backboard and loose balls, and that was the key for us.

I was shocked that we had 35 at half. Watching Kentucky on film, they're just so good defensively. They're so big. They're so strong. They're always so well prepared. They had a whole week to prepare for us.

So it became a chess game of trying to get Jaime in some positions to score and Tyger in positions to score, but they're two great players. That's why they're Player of the Year in Pac-12 and First Team All-Pac-12.

Again, Jaylen Clark was great. Got a lot of freshmen. It's a tough game for freshmen. It's a tough one for freshmen. Our veterans have got to carry in a game like this.

### **Q. What does it mean on this trip and this week, both games against topnotch competition.**

MICK CRONIN: We know what we're capable of if we play with the toughness we played with this week. We take care of the ball. We had a few more turnovers than we're used to tonight, but we're still plus five in that category.

We also outrebounded Kentucky by one. So we've got enough talent, but what we've finally got to a point -- it wasn't that we were selfish. I think sometimes our



confidence and our talent, early on when we went to Vegas, we're going to win because we've got these players. We pass the ball, and we're unselfish.

You've got to be able to defend the other team. It's really hard to win when you give up 79, 80 to ranked teams. It's hard to get a lot of points on Kentucky. I mean, it just is. They're so big around the rim. They're so athletic on the wings. The game becomes a rock fight, bloodbath, whatever you want to call it. It's just hard to get buckets.

So you've got to be hard to score on. So we got to a point where our guys are embracing that. They know we're going to go win the game with defense. If we have a great night offensively, we'll win by 20, but we're going to win. You've got to stop the other team.

### **Q. You told me when you got this job other schools were negative recruiting against your defensive style**

MICK CRONIN: I don't, but --

### **Q. Does that still happen even when you're averaging 82 points a game?**

MICK CRONIN: Oh, yeah. The new thing is tempo. Look at their tempo. Look at their tempo. You know what I say? Look at the temperature. We're going home, and it's going to be 75. I'm grilling out on Christmas.

### **Q. Has your coaching style changed?**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, I've got better players. Way smarter. A genius, him (Jaime Jaquez) and Tyger playing a two-man game. It's amazing, isn't it?

The thing about being at UCLA, you have a chance to get guys who can really score. You also can try to pick a little bit and get guys who care. We got both this year.

Because even our freshmen, none of them played great tonight, but they're all great guys. I mean great guys. And they're all going to be big parts of our program.

But everybody's a better coach when we've got Jaime and



Tyger. Jay Wright was texting me about it tonight. He had (indiscernible), it wasn't the same. He got a lot smarter when he got them other guys. It's amazing, isn't it?

**Q. They missed their last 11 shots, what went into that?**

MICK CRONIN: I think the key was we rebounded. We start with -- we were talking in the locker room, we got like the last 10 rebounds and loose balls.

I'm not going to talk for Coach Cal. He had a couple young guys. I think they rushed a few. I know he didn't want them to. After they made a rebound, and they took some quick ones.

**Q. Jaime, what is coming in here as a West Coast -- I mean, grew up in Camarillo --**

MICK CRONIN: You've never been.

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: I've never.

**Q. What does it mean to play in here and the atmosphere? I don't know how much of the history you're aware of.**

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: First of all, I've been in New York a handful of times, six, seven times, and I love it here. The city is amazing. Every time I come is always an adventure.

MSG is something I've always wanted to be a part of, always wanted to play in. When I found out we were coming here, this was marked on my calendar. I was excited, ready to go, ready to play. I'm just so happy we won here.

**Q. Coach talks about the defensive buy-in. Obviously you guys are the ones that have to buy in. How difficult is that to do?**

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: Really it's just a mental thing. You say you're bought in, and you're in the game, it's a lot different. A lot of it's not really effort, it's really just being aware of where you are on the floor and really just kind of lock in, to being in the right spot at all times. The effort is always there, it's just sometimes you've got to be really smart about it.

MICK CRONIN: Game plan and scouting reports are big for us. He had eight steals this week.

**Q. The stuff Coach was talking about with tempo and how you're a defensive oriented team.**

MICK CRONIN: We're third in the nation in offense. They changed. When I was at Cincinnati, they called me to clinics to talk on defense. Now I'm going to get called for offense.

**Q. When you hear that stuff --**

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: Honestly, I don't --

MICK CRONIN: I'm not speaking to anything.

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: All I hear is him every day at practice.

**Q. Carolina was in a little bit of a similar situation that you were in last year.**

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, very similar actually. When I watch them, I see -- we had more players though last year. They have no bench when I see them. I mean, that's what I see. We had more depth.

So like if a guy gets hurt or in foul trouble, it's hard.

**Q. What's that like, though, with trying to work through --**

MICK CRONIN: It's not easy. Expectations are crazy. I felt last year like my thing was we were -- you can't just wait till March. Like we're going to come back and try to win it.

It's like, well, you've got to play the season. So I dealt with that all year.

I don't know if -- it's just human nature. It's not that the kids don't care. It's not that they don't try. But it's kind of like we want to get back.

In their case, we got beat on the half-court on a bank shot. They got beat (indiscernible). It's not easy.

**Q. You say that game planning and scouting reporting...**

MICK CRONIN: It's huge.

**Q. Which is not like reinventing the wheel. Why is that?**

MICK CRONIN: It's not anything different. You can't stop teams if you don't play small. I'm not a big talker of all the technical stuff we do. I worked for Bob Huggins and Rick Pitino. They're two of the best six coaches in the last 40 years. So scouting, game plan, playing smart, how to win

a game -- I've been doing that for 27 years under those two and carrying on what they taught.

There's a reason people win. You've been around. Certain programs win because they're committed to the things it takes to win, and they're uncomfortable. You've got to eat your vegetables.

Jaime knows like he made a mistake, he closed out -- he took a step and closed out on top and blew by and fouled. He knows right away I'm going to say something to him. Why are you closing out on him? There's a way to win. There's a commitment level to it.

**Q. And the learning curve like --**

MICK CRONIN: Oh, yeah. They've got to be accountable. Yeah, you've got to be accountable. You're going to try to win with offense, you're going to be a .500 team at best. You've got to win when you score 63.

**Q. Tough defensive game, right?**

MICK CRONIN: A bloodbath.

**Q. Can you comment on what Coach is talking about, the bloodbath. How physical was this game when compared to some of the others you've played in?**

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: This one was really physical. Really physical. They've got big Oscar. That man is a tank. Seeing him play is different than when you actually play.

I wanted to shout out our big men, Kenny, Mac, and Adem. I thought they played tremendous. They did a tremendous job getting around him, listening to the scouting report. I thought Mac played amazing when he got his minutes in. Big ups to those guys because they played great in my opinion.

**Q. Where has this team grown the most since that Vegas trip?**

JAIME JAQUEZ JR.: I think just put an edge on our shoulder. We had a lot to prove this trip. We knew that we dropped two in Vegas, and we knew we were a much more capable team than we showed. We were on a mission to get better every day and prepare for this and show the world what we can do.

**Q. You talk about closing out the first half, but what was different from the first half and the second half and weak side help in the second half?**

MICK CRONIN: I thought their defense was going to be a

lot better in the second half. It was going to be harder for us to score, and I was right.

I would have liked to have seen -- if we could have -- they had 21 offensive rebounds, but besides we weren't trying. I would have liked to see us push the ball.

When I go back and look at this film, we've got to push the ball a little bit more. I knew -- he didn't sub in the second half, and neither did Jaylen Clark.

You've got to get some -- we pushed it in the first half. If you play half-court against Kentucky the whole second half, it's going to be hard to score. But these guys were a little bit tired and we were going to have to win with defense. It was not easy to score.

Around the rim, the way the game was being played, it was a bloodbath, man. But you listen to this guy talk and realize how easy my job, why I like Westwood so much. Right? Not only can he play, the first thing he does is compliment his teammates. Thank you guys.

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