

CBS Sports Classic: UCLA vs. Ohio State

Saturday, December 16, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

Ohio State Buckeyes

Coach Chris Holtmann

Press Conference



Ohio State 67, UCLA 60

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I'll start with an opening statement. A lot of respect, a tremendous amount of respect for this UCLA team and for Mick as a coach. I think his career speaks for itself. It's just an unbelievable career he's put together.

We knew we were going to -- they're a young team, and I think like most teams, they're a work in progress and they have a lot of new pieces and young players. But tremendous respect, so feel really good about this win.

I think it's going to get better even as the season goes on because I think, as is typically the case with his teams, they're going to get better and better. We figured it would really come down to the last four minutes if we played well, and I know sometimes it wasn't always pleasing to watch, but I give the defenses a lot of credit.

Q. How is your hand, and what happened to the board?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I kind of wish that wouldn't have become public, but I was frustrated with our -- we talked about their physicality on the ball defensively, and I thought we were just too casual and too loose, and I just had a moment of anger and punched the board and split my hand up pretty good.

Q. You saw some response from your team. To make the plays you needed in a physical game and answer that kind of challenge, what did you learn about your team as far as combatting what UCLA was throwing at you?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Yeah, I think it's a mentality game when you're playing a team like this because I think if you get frustrated in a game like this, it can go from a two-point

deficit to a six- to eight-point deficit, and then it can be hard to come back.

So it's a mindset game.

We knew it was going to be a rock fight. That's just the way these games are. He's been so successful the last couple years with a great offense and an elite defense.

We knew this year he had an elite defense and an offense that was coming, so we felt like if our defense could keep us kind of hanging around, we would be able to make some plays.

The funny thing is that we had really good execution, the play out of the time-out, Roddy's lay-up, great execution, exactly what we wanted, we miss it. Other times we had great execution.

The one play where it was a completely busted play was Jamison's three, and we know that often happens. We had poor execution there, and he stepped up and made a three.

Q. On a day when offense is hard to come by and you're not making threes at almost a historic rate, how did your team handle some of that, something that's been so good for this team this year was a struggle today? How did they not get overwhelmed by that?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Well, I think they stayed invested in winning. That's probably the best way to -- if you're invested in your own performance, then I think you can naturally get really discouraged when you're not making shots.

I think they stayed invested in the team winning, and I think at the end of the day, that allowed them to play both ends effectively.

My simple answer was the guys that were missing shots that were open, I thought we had clean looks at them. Outside of a couple threes, I thought we had pretty clean looks.



But they stayed invested in the team winning. When you don't, bad things happen. I thought our guys did that and found a way.

Q. Winning on a neutral site like this where you could possibly come back again, is that something you can go back and draw on?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: No, I think this is good for us. This is good for our league.

I know people like to sometimes take shots at our league. Reality is we're one of the best leagues in the country. It's the third-best league in the country right now. It's one of the very deepest. It's having a good day with Michigan State's win and Purdue is ahead right now. It's a very deep league.

So this helps us, this helps our league, because I do think UCLA will have a good year.

Q. Shaking off the turnovers in the first half, what did it take to take better care of the ball in the second half?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Well, as was the case the other night, when you have halves like that, it can be a lot on you, it can be some on you, it can also be a byproduct of the team you're playing. We are playing another team there, so not every turnover that we made was unforced or was a poor play on our part. They deserve credit.

I think we had to correct the ones that were correctable and accept the fact that there's going to be some plays like that.

Q. After taking the week off, to come back and fight through this, how impressive is it with how you guys approached this?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Really impressed. This is a heck of a win, guys. We struggled making shots. We played a team that is a good team and tough to play. Look at their scores against Gonzaga and Marquette. Who else did they play really close? Villanova the other day. Look at their scores. They're going to win some games this year.

I couldn't be more impressed, but I've been impressed with this group -- we're obviously still young. He's a little more reliant on freshmen right now than what we are, but we're still young, and yeah, it's a really good win for us. It's as good a win as we've had in a little bit.

Q. Bruce was really fighting it seemed like, stayed with it, made several big plays, including that pass to

Felix at the end of the game. What do you say about him being able to stay with it through what was a tough game for him?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Well, I think you've watched him long enough to know that kid has got real special stuff inside. He's got real special stuff inside.

I don't know how else to -- he's just got special stuff that allows him to come back from poor plays. He had to settle down a little bit in the second half. That's why we took him out. But man, he really got to his spots in the second half in the mid-range.

Q. I thought you got some good stuff from Devin in the first half. What did you see from him?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I thought it was his best minutes on the season. I thought it was his best minutes in terms of just creating an extra possession. He forced a turnover on the post trap that we put on Bona that Dale got the lay-up. I thought he was active on the glass. I thought it was his best moments so far this year. He's only going to get better.

Q. The way that you were able to handle their pressure, as well, at the end of the game when they were trying to turn you over and get a bucket, you were able to handle that. What did you like about (indiscernible) break pressure when the game is on the line the final five minutes?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, we had really good execution against their press late. The one where we got it to Bruce and Roddy got to the free-throw line, we got to our spots. We knew they were going to trap without fouling. Bruce is so good in those situations. Did a great job stepping through.

Then after the time-out guys did a really good job executing what our staff drew up. Mike Netti did a great job drawing up the special situation, end-of-game alignment that we had talked about. It's just a little bit of a different alignment.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.