

# CBS Sports Classic: UCLA vs. Ohio State

Saturday, December 16, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Roddy Gayle, Jr.

## Bruce Thornton

### Press Conference



Ohio State 67, UCLA 60

**Q. What did it take to find a way to grind this one out as it went on?**

BRUCE THORNTON: I feel like it took everything. I feel like we had great preparation for the whole week prior to our loss to Penn State. Our whole mindset was get better for our self, because the small things, like last game we blew the lead. Just being straightforward with it. This game we locked in on defense and made the right adjustments. Everybody was on the same page, and we got the win today.

RODDY GAYLE JR: I agree. Just especially we closed out of the Penn State game, I think it was a big learning curve just going through the film, and I think we adjusted pretty well being able to close this game out.

We knew it was going to be a tough, gritty game, so I feel like we answered the call when it came to finishing the game.

**Q. Offensively you guys were getting some pretty good looks but you couldn't get a three to fall until the last minute of the game. On a day when your outside shots aren't falling, how do you compensate for that?**

BRUCE THORNTON: I feel like our defense. Our defense really set the tone. We knew it was going to be a grind. We just knew -- you could tell from the score the first half. We told the team mates in the locker room it's going to be one of those type of games where we've got to find a way on defense.

When you find a way with the toughness and having that edge, I think the ball just goes your way sometimes. Jamo

with the big shot at the end. That's the only three made the whole game, but that's what happens.

You just play hard and do everything the right way, the game will reward you.

**Q. Bruce, I don't know if this is your first game here in Atlanta, but how does it feel -- of course you're happy about the win, but just playing amongst family and friends?**

BRUCE THORNTON: It feels great. I live like 15 minutes away, so being able to see a bunch of my family, friends, people I grew up with watching me play. But I was very excited, very nervous coming out to the game, but I knew at the end of the day I had to get the win for my teammates and Buckeye Nation, and I knew coming to the game it would be a very hard-fought game.

UCLA is a great team, give them respect, and I feel like we just came out on top today.

**Q. What did you all see from their film that kept you (indiscernible)?**

RODDY GAYLE JR: Through watching their film, I think they were pretty aggressive, as we see all through the first and second halves. They pressured our catch a lot. Made it very difficult for us to get easy entry, especially on (indiscernible). Guards are very handsy and physical, so it was something that we really haven't seen yet.

Just that style of basketball we seen on film. Bona was probably one of the hardest playing players in the country, so we knew we was going to have our work cut out. No matter what the score was or how the game was going, we knew he was going to play hard. We knew their guards were going to get in here and try to get downhill, and did a great job of getting to their spots.

We just had to withstand that with energy.

**Q. Roddy, it looked like you were attacking the basket early. Was that part of the plan, if you had the right**

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## **matchup that you wanted to get into the paint?**

RODDY GAYLE JR: I mean, when you've got a guy like Bruce, I can't really help off of him. I just thank my teammates. Bruce, being able to space the play, Jamison, Felix, Evan having such good screens, because they were able to get me open and provide driving lanes.

I just used my body and (indiscernible) drive downhill and finish over guards.

**Q. What was the primary focus, like the main point of emphasis coming off of the loss against Penn State? What was the conversation amongst you guys as a team and who was the person that led all of that amongst you?**

BRUCE THORNTON: For the team this year, we're definitely player led, so I addressed the whole team as a leader. Like you just can't blow 18-point games, especially on the road, especially a Big Ten game like that, because you need every single road game you possibly can get.

Me telling the younger guys, like we let this one slip, but only thing we can do now is move on from it. We can learn, we can watch film. We got tired of watching it because that wasn't us as a team I didn't feel like. We didn't play with that toughness and edge in the second half.

But today I told the guys in the locker room, hey, man, we're in the same position. Going to be a grind. Everybody just had to lock in, everybody on the same page, and I seen everybody's eyes in the huddle, and when everybody is locked in it's a very confident feeling that we can go and get the W today.

I'm really proud of my teammates. Everybody locked in, it was a good week, and now we just need to finish out the next one.

**Q. What is the one thing that you maybe haven't had a chance to showcase so far this season, maybe something we haven't seen from this team this season that you guys still feel like you have in the bag a little bit that you haven't had a chance to show the world or maybe even tonight that you guys haven't been able to break through in a certain area?**

RODDY GAYLE JR: Honestly, we played a good defensive game, but I think we have another level. Our goal is to be a top 25 defense in the country. To reach those goals we've got to be able to withstand that effort all season.

Just being able to play with that intensity that we did today,

we've got to be able to play with that all year, especially with conference play coming in.

**Q. You guys both talked about being ready for the physical challenge, being able to turn the page on the game from last weekend. What is it about this team you're able to do some of those things, and it's easy to talk about being more physical and being able to turn the page, but it's harder to do it. What is it about this team that enabled you to do that?**

BRUCE THORNTON: I give thanks to Coach Q, our strength and conditioning coach. Even though like three days out, two days out we still lift and go hard, especially for games like this and games coming up in the Big Ten. Thanks to him because he really put us in the right situation that what we need going forward, because he's been our strength and conditioning coach for a long time, so he knows the ebbs and flows of how the big-time games, especially the Big Ten games in the future.

He prepared us, and as a team we just knew this is going to be like a Big Ten game. We watched the film. They gave us similar Big Ten feeling to like a Wisconsin or a Michigan State, so we prepared, and I told the guys, hey, it's going to be one of them games to be locked in, everybody on the same page.

Even though I'm back home, that doesn't matter, I still try to get the win at the end of the day.

**Q. Obviously this is going to be a team that's going to be joining the conference next summer. Did any of that cross your mind at any point?**

RODDY GAYLE JR: Like Bruce said, it felt like a Big Ten game, especially how post heavy Wisconsin is and teams like Michigan State where they have a big at the rim 95 percent of the time, especially. But tough, physical guards.

It felt like a Big Ten game, so I think them joining the Big Ten will be great, honestly. That was great competition, a great game.

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