

CBS Sports Classic: UCLA vs. Ohio State

Saturday, December 16, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

UCLA Bruins

Coach Mick Cronin

Adem Bona

Press Conference



Ohio State 67, UCLA 60.

Q. Just Adem, in the final minutes the team wasn't able to finish off the game. Talk about not closing out games.

ADEM BONA: Yeah, as a team we got to be able to close out games has happened multiple times now, and it's frustrating. We have to play together as a team. Like we have to keep our conditioning in.

In the last couple minutes we've got to stay solid and finish the game out. It's frustrating that we can't do things we do. As a team we've just got to grow and get better playing the second half and get our conditioning better.

Q. Adem, I know you've been working on not fouling as much and it seemed like you were trying to get out of the way of some of those fouls today. Was that frustrating to you?

ADEM BONA: Yeah, I've got to be smarter than that. I've got to know the refs are going to call calls like that on me. I've got to get out of there quickly and just get my hands out of there and know they're going to try to get fouls on me, so I've got to be smarter with that.

Q. It's a young team; how are you guys keeping your heads up right now as a team?

ADEM BONA: We've just got to do the tough stuff. Like it doesn't matter if we're younger or older. Just got to get the job done, work hard, toughness. Doesn't matter what age we are or what grade we're in. We've just got to get the job done.

Q. Ohio State's players said preparing for your team

was a lot of preparing for the physicality --

MICK CRONIN: (Laughing) I'm sorry. I needed a laugh.

Q. What did you see from Ohio State as you prepared?

ADEM BONA: We knew that they have a bunch of guys that shoot really well. They have physical bigs. We tried to take away their shots and make them take the shots we wanted to take.

And also we tried and make (indiscernible) our identity and we try to (indiscernible) out there.

Q. (Indiscernible) second half obviously got going a little bit. What took so long for you to get going offensively?

ADEM BONA: I don't know. Just got to get better shots. Getting to spots where I know I can make shots. Not rush in, taking my time. (Indiscernible) but in the second half Coach told me to take my time and take better shots.

Q. Obviously three-point shooting (indiscernible) both teams; I think 2 for 24 from beyond the arc. But after Will had that three-point make in the second half, he made five of your next eight shot attempts. How did that influence the offense a little bit in the second half?

ADEM BONA: Obviously a true (indiscernible) is team energy, and I think it just went through the whole team and made a show that we're going to play better off that.

Q. How much does this young team have to learn how to be tough down low (indiscernible)?

ADEM BONA: We're not even close to where we want to be. Playing with guys I played with last year, I get a little glimpse of it. Not a little, I got a lot, tough guys that can play all day, and now we're playing with young guys, and it doesn't matter.

Like I say, it doesn't matter young or old or experienced. We've just got to play tough the whole game and be a team

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at the same time, us playing tough.

Q. Did you ever cross paths with Bonner before?

ADEM BONA: Yeah. I played against him three times in high school, and obviously he's Nigerian, so I knew him.

Q. Coach, the final minutes sink in --

MICK CRONIN: Oh, I wouldn't say it's the final minutes. What I would tell you is what I've known. Young players break down faster. We can't impose our will. Really, really good teams get better defensively in the second half; we get worse.

The only way to solve that is to be deeper, because nobody is going to become a sophomore or a junior until next year.

You've got to lessen guys' minutes so their fatigue lessens so we won't break down at the end of the game.

As soon as the guys we got out there start to get fatigued, we can't get stops. There was a time I think Ohio State scored five straight times in the second half. I could be wrong, but it seemed like -- it could have been four, could have been six, but just like no life and toughness on the ball.

We've got great kids. To me, it's ability to play minutes at a high level, and the reality of it is Jan, Illane, some other guys got to play, because if we don't lighten those guys' minutes, it's not going to change. To me, it's not going to change.

We got 45 points in the second half. Now, coming into today, I'll just give you -- we'll have all our stats first half the second half. We were giving up 26 percent in the first half from the three-point line, 36 in the second. That's before today. Today we gave up 34 percent field goal percentage in the first half, 56 in the second.

I think this is the fifth team to score 40 or more on us in the second half of a game.

Look, we played good enough to win. The problem was you want to take me out of it, and if you're watching, like if I was you two and I was sitting there, I'd say, they should be up 10 at half and they're up one. That's a problem.

They missed three free throws, one of them on the front end of a bonus, so really four, and five lay-ups, and Ilane for blue on a two on ones just gets stripped. I mean, you hold Ohio State to 22, you've got to make some lay-ups and you've got to be up eight or ten.

You've got to be up eight or ten in that scenario because you're not going to shut them out forever. They're the fourth best offense in the country, the fifth coming in.

When you should be up eight or ten or 12, you should be up eight or ten or 12. We're not good enough to overcome all those missed lay-ups. I don't know if you're seeing what I'm seeing, but our chart had us down for seven missed lay-ups, and on the game we missed seven free throws, two for sure front end of the bonus.

Q. So many new players, young players. You cited fatigue, but it's still a process of learning who's going to be playing --

MICK CRONIN: However you want with them, whatever word. You're alluding to like rotations and developing offensive rhythm because we're all playing together for the first time. Sure, that's part of it. But we're improving.

Look, man, we missed lay-ups. Games come down to lay-ups and free throws. I really believe that. When you get two teams battling, you've got to make your lay-ups and free throws, especially in a war like that. It's like a conference game. It will be a conference game.

You've got to make some lay-ups. You can't miss lay-ups and free throws. It comes back to get you.

Q. Did Sebastian come out okay?

MICK CRONIN: He went to break his fall and he scared himself because he sprained his wrist, but he came back in.

Q. (Indiscernible).

MICK CRONIN: I'd say he's doubtful for the next game, but he's starting to move better. Again, though, when Berke comes back, you start to change dynamics of rhythm and flow and who's playing, and getting him to where he's comfortable. He's not going to -- he's not the reason that we lost today. Sure, it would be nice to be at full strength, but everybody deals with injuries.

To me, guys, we should have been up 10 at half. Like if I'm sitting in the -- I knew going into halftime, like we should be up 32-22 right now.

Q. Trying to take a little bit of a positive, in the second half the rebounding really improved. It struggled in the first half --

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, look, we weren't getting any

offensive in the first half. Brandon Williams got in there, and he's not afraid to mix it up. He had two in the first half or we'd have had none, I think.

We got the ball moving a little bit. We got the ball inside to Adem some.

Like I said, we're learning. It's a process. We both knew this was coming.

Q. What did you see as you prepared for Ohio State?

MICK CRONIN: Good team, Bruce Thornton is one of the best players in the country. I'm not talking about NBA. I don't know about NBA, and I honestly don't care. It's hard to watch, to be honest. There's about 2 percent of the league which has humility, which is hard for me to watch. I can't take it. But he's a college player. He's really, really good.

Chris is a great guy, does a great job, did at Butler, does at Ohio State.

I know they were young last year, and look at them now, right? But to me, I mean, you asked what I see watching them. I see a guy coming in today -- he reminded me of Tyger Campbell. The guy comes in with 45 assists and seven turnovers maybe, something like that? I could be off by one or two. Gets to the foul line and just -- he's good.

Q. Was there --

MICK CRONIN: He doesn't need you to call a play. He can just go get you a basket or get himself to the foul line when your team is struggling.

Q. Was there anything you felt that you did that caused him to go 1 of 15 from three? Did they miss open looks?

MICK CRONIN: Look, our defense wasn't terrible. It got worse as the game went on. Their only make was a desperation that we didn't step up because what goes up sometimes does come down in the basket. We should have stepped up and defended it better. So we defended the three pretty well.

Look, as far as our guys, you've got a team like this, we don't have the will right now to close out games like this. Especially outside of our building. Sometimes when you're at home, it's a little bit different. We'll find out this week, though.

But there's a lot of positives. There's a lot of positive -- the result is not, but the reality is it's very easy to look at and

see what it is. We just can't impose our will.

You've got a guy that was sitting on the bench last year trying to guard a guy that was starting last year, Bruce Thornton versus Dylan Andrews. You've got guys out there that weren't on our team last year trying to stop guys that started, whether it was at their school or another school last year, Jamison battle, in his fifth year.

We've just got to keep pounding nails, keep getting better, keep pounding.

The film is going to be hard to watch because we had a lot of good passing and execution, and like Aday Mara doesn't miss those shots. Ever. I see them every day. He took a bad hook shot. That was a soft move. But the other ones, the elbow shot, the five-footer in the lane, he never misses those. Aside from all the lay-ups. That's going to be frustrating to watch. It puts so much pressure on your defense to try to pitch shut-outs.

But I give their kids credit. They had a lot of one-on-one buckets late in the game where they just sized us up and went and scored on us. You've got to be able to guard the ball, got to be able to get a stop at crunch time. Good look to them for the rest of the year.

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