

CBS Sports Classic: Kentucky vs. Ohio State

Saturday, December 21, 2024

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Ohio State Buckeyes

Coach Jake Diebler

Press Conference



Ohio State 85, Kentucky 65

JAKE DIEBLER: First off, just really proud of the togetherness we showed throughout the course of this game against a really good team. I have a ton of respect for Coach Pope and what they've been able to do so far this year. The theme for us leading into this game was we've got to figure out a way to solve problems throughout the course of a game together. We've got to figure out how to attack together.

I thought we did that.

I'm just so thankful to God for the men we have in our program and in that locker room. Hopefully this can give us an opportunity to get some consistent lineups and stuff moving forward so we can get ready for what's next.

Q. Jake, what was the key to attacking especially the paint there in the first half, and is that something you thought maybe you could exploit them on in the early going?

JAKE DIEBLER: Well, we felt like we've been pretty good in ball screen situations this year. We felt like that was something we could utilize. But we also felt like we've certainly built a reputation, I think, from the three-point line.

But when we're clicking, a lot of our threes come from inside out. So we've been conscious of attacking the paint and playing with poise when we're in there, and listen, there were times it didn't feel very poised because they're really active when you do get it in the paint defensively. Butler has elite hands and instincts in there.

I was proud of our guys for kind of keeping the game plan, staying in that attack mode, and we were able to get some good things from it.

Q. Kentucky has come back a couple times this season and got victories. When they started to go on that run, I believe they cut it to 6 and then Harrison missed the pass coming down the lane, what did you do to stop those runs?

JAKE DIEBLER: Well, I felt like we tried to shrink the game a little bit with some of our offensive possessions and felt like we needed to make them guard longer in the half court in those moments.

Again, that's a respect to what they've been able to do, but I thought we were able, and Bruce Thornton led us in that. We were able to get to the free-throw line some of our own, and we were able to come up with a couple timely offensive rebounds, too.

That was kind of the strategy in that moment. We wanted to take our shots early in the clock when we had them, when we had an advantage, but when they were making a run, we felt like we really needed to have some poise, offensive possessions, and I thought our guys executed really well.

Q. How big was the part of your game plan in terms of tempo and not necessarily trying to get into a game that was north of 75, 76 possessions and kind of going counter to what's been your philosophy?

JAKE DIEBLER: Yeah, we felt like we needed to adjust. We've wanted to play with great pace this year, and I think we're getting better at it, but this game required some specific moments for us to control the pace a little bit more with our offense, and it takes a mature team and really mature backcourt to do that, and one of those guys is a freshman, and I thought he was really impressive, even though job Mobley didn't shoot it as well as we all know he's capable of, I thought he did a good job of managing some possessions.

Bruce did what we know Bruce is capable of and love about him. He can manage a game but also do it with scoring.



So it's a great comfort as a coach to have a point guard like that.

But absolutely, we felt like we needed to be able to take advantage when we had it, but when we didn't, we needed to have some really good executing possessions. We couldn't get sped up. We couldn't take tough shots. I thought we really did that.

Q. Aaron's return kind of got more attention, but Quez Walker also gave you a pretty big lift. How much of a boost was getting those two guys back?

JAKE DIEBLER: I thought it was a significant boost. We felt like going into this year depth was going to be a real strength for us, and we haven't had an opportunity to play with that depth much of this year.

It's also impacted practice and building because there's still a lot of newness in this program, new staff, new players, new system, and it's impacted, I think, our growth a little bit.

But our guys deserve a ton of credit because they've stayed consistent with their approach on a daily basis. You've got to have really good veteran leadership to do that, so I think Micah Parrish has done that, Bruce Thornton has done that. I think you're seeing some younger guys emerge in that regard. Devin Royal has done that for us.

But it was nice to have some depth tonight, and those guys certainly stepped up. But Evan Mahaffey has continued to get better and better. I think Sean Stuart in foul trouble again, but his poise late for us to be able to trust him down the stretch defensively, today was a really good step forward for us.

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