

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 10, 2023

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Xavier

Sean Miller

Souley Boum

Sean Miller

Jack Nunge

Postgame Media Conference



Creighton, 60 - Xavier, 82

SEAN MILLER: Well, I thought our team was really ready to play here tonight. We obviously had a complete performance, where I thought our defense was outstanding for most of the game. I thought really Souley Boum and Jack Nunge, they really led the charge defensive.

I thought Souley, his effort level was pressure against the ball against a very good point guard, Ryan Nembhard. Ryan was 2 or 12. Souley had a lot to do with that. He really gave tremendous effort on that end. Jack not only dealing with Kalkbrenner in the post, but so many different times, Jack saved us with his rim protection and his help. He got stitches in halftime. In March, you need players to give everything for the cause. We really were locked in, both on defense and offense.

Certainly one of our, probably our best performances of the season.

Q. Souley, the last time that you guys played Creighton, Ryan Nembhard sort of locked you up a little bit, held you to a season-low two points. Did you think about that at all in preparation for this one?

SOULEY BOUM: I like how you say he locked me up last time. No, I definitely had that memory in my mind. It's March. I know I had to show up for us to win, and I kind of took that personal.

So I know I wanted to come out and accept the challenge. He's a good point guard. We had great games with him. I just came out and took the challenge, accepted the

challenge, and did what I did for my team on both ends of the floor tonight.

Q. Sean, you had a lot of praise for Kalkbrenner in Omaha. I'm sure he thought he had an advantage with Kalkbrenner, Kaluma and Nunge. What do you think went right today?

SEAN MILLER: We did a better job executing the scheme. You're right. They put their big on Jerome, and the power forward. They're fortunate because Kaluma in particular is not a small guy. They're able to play him on the post.

I thought Jack did a good job. He had eight offensive rebounds against Creighton when we played him in Cincinnati. He had four tonight. That's the other part of that. He can get offensive rebounds and second shots against a smaller player.

And then, you know, I think we've learned that using Jerome as a screener for Souley, again, Kalkbrenner is on Jerome, so we kind of flipped it, some of the things we normally do with Jack, we put Jerome in that situation. It sounds good. The player has to come off the screen and make the shot. We've got one of the best in Souley. He comes off clean without any defender on him, the ball's going to go in. He had a big night tonight.

Q. Jack, you've got one more game to really accomplish, helluva accomplishment. Win it tomorrow night. 82-60, it does register as one of the most surprising scores on the day across the landscape in college basketball. Though you're not as deep as you once were, how much pride is in the locker room that you guys do pull off a fairly dominant win against a squad you feel is capable of making the Final Four?

JACK NUNGE: We've got some warriors in our locker room. Since we've had guys go down, we have had a lot of dudes have stepped up. We've had the next-man-up mentality. We offer each other -- the dudes who can't be out there with us, we want to win for them. They're part of the whole process. I feel we have to play for each other down the stretch.

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Q. Sean, we've been talk about Dez and what he gives to you guys defensively. He had four steals in the first half tonight. How much did he change the game and help you guys separate?

SEAN MILLER: These two guys will vouch for this. Dez has continued from early November just to be a better player. When you're a freshman, sometimes leaving high school and coming to college, you want it to happen right now. And if it doesn't happen right now, sometimes, you know, you lose sight of how important practice is an improvement. And you end up not having maybe as good a freshman year as you're capable.

In Dez's case, his attitude is his greatest gift. He's accepted coaching, sometimes hard coaching. He's learned to play multiple positions early. You can ask Souley. Dez had the tell him to be a good defensive player. He just didn't realize all that it entailed. Right now, Dez is one of our team's best defensive players. And the four steals is one thing, but he allows us to have size and flexibility on our defense to help us.

Offensively, his ball handling and ability to get to the basket, I think, sometimes gives us a different dimension.

Q. Sean, for those of us sort of like catching up to your -- for those of us catching up to your team a little bit, without Freemantle, you've played great. What's been the adjustments, and why have they worked so well?

SEAN MILLER: With Zach, we were 17-5. Certainly a high-powered offensive team. We were a team learning to be better on defense. When we first lost him, we didn't know how it would go. So kind of like Jack's point, it wasn't just Jerome Hunter, who I do think deserves a lot of credit. He stepped into Zach's role. But Desmond Claude has emerged and Cesare Edwards has emerged.

I think our overall team, the four other starters have improved. Each is more confident in their role. Last night, I think what upset the three of us about the DePaul game, DePaul has firepower, and they made some great shots. But we weren't at our best on defense, and we're lucky to be standing today to learn that lesson.

You can't say that about our team here tonight. You know, we came out, we played some really good defense and offense, and that's when we're at our best.

Long-winded answer to your question, I think we're a better overall two-way team now than we would have been through the first 22 games.

Q. Coach, you got Marquette next. What kind of problems do they present?

SEAN MILLER: Many, many problems. They're an outstanding team. All the awards that they won this year, they certainly deserve it. I will take you back to our game in Milwaukee. I think Marquette would probably say the same thing. It was a great game. Things didn't work out in that game. And in many ways, that was the difference in the regular season conference championship.

The fact that we're both here in the championship game in Madison Square Garden, I think, is a testament to both of our teams.

Their offense, their ability to score at the rim, they're incredibly hard to defend, and we'll have to have the same defensive mindset tomorrow.

Q. Last night verse DePaul, you only led for less than three minutes and still found a way to win. Tonight, you let Creighton lead less than three minutes. What does it say about the way you can win in multiple fashions in March?

JACK NUNGE: Goes to show the team we have, I'm going to say the same thing. The game isn't determined by one segment. You have to push through for all 40. We have a resilient group that keeps fighting. No matter what the score is, at any moment in the game, we'll give it our all.

Q. We talked about the benefits of Jerome as a screener, it felt like life got harder for Nembhard with the screens. Obviously, what did you like about the way you played there?

SOULEY BOUM: I mean, that's the way that they play their defense. Last game, last time we played them at their house, I didn't do a good job of making Nembhard come off the screen. So this game, I made sure I was coming off tighter so I could have that spot to shoot or hit my man on the roll or the pop.

This game, I made sure I did that. Last time we played them, I didn't do a good job. He was able to get over the screens. I wasn't able to get looks or make plays. This game, I made sure I did that. It worked for me and my teammates.

Q. Sean, as a player at Pitt, you never got the opportunity to play in a Big East final. How special is it in your first year back in the league as a head coach to have this opportunity tomorrow night?

SEAN MILLER: It's incredibly special. It's special to be here at this podium talking to you guys as a member of the Big East and competing in Madison Square Garden. Like I told these guys at the end of the game, you really understand here once you get here the pageantry and why everybody makes such a big deal about the Big East tournament.

There is a big difference between advancing in the tournament and just playing in it. As a player, that's what I did, I played in the Big East Tournament. You're playing for the championship. That's more sacred ground. That's legacy for guys like these two guys. We have to be ready. All we can control tomorrow is can we be the best that we can about be? If so, I think what you'll find tomorrow is it is going to be a great game. That's what we're hopeful that we can do.

THE MODERATOR: Xavier, thank you.

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