

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

UConn Huskies

Coach Dan Hurley

Tristen Newton

Cam Spencer

Postgame Media Conference



TRISTEN NEWTON: No, not really. That was a whole different game, whole different team. Like Coach said, we kind of -- he warned us before the game that they were going to come out like that and stay with it, we had to start guarding and execute our offense. And we didn't really think about the last game, we just executed and played defense, rebounded, and got out in transition and came back from that.

Q. Donovan didn't have the best first half but then he scores 11 straight points. What did you say to him?

DAN HURLEY: We got -- he's a gentle giant, you know. He's a Jolly Green Giant. Sometimes he's to get that intensity level up, get that nastiness. He's such a sweetheart of a guy. And, yeah, he turned it up and got pissed off.

But just with the combination of those two guys, it gave us -- tonight it looked a lot like what we were getting from our centers last year. Samson was fabulous and when Donovan turns it up, he impacts the game like few players in the country.

Q. Samson looked particularly energetic tonight. Did you notice that as well?

DAN HURLEY: He's been playing -- I think he went through a stretch of games where he wasn't being as effective as he was when Donovan was out in that early part of the season. I just think he's gotten back to the things that he does well. He's learned to handle the physicality of these games, and he was a major difference maker. What he's doing ball screen defense wise too, just kind of backing those guards up and keeping them from getting downhill. And then the pressure he puts on the rim when he's rolling is -- it opens a lot of things up.

Q. Looking at some of these numbers, they're phenomenal. You were up one at the half, you guys outscored them 54-24 overall in the paint, 29 assists. When you were only up one at halftime what did you say in the locker room to get the guys to come out on fire like they did in the second half?

UConn - 80, Xavier - 67

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

DAN HURLEY: Obviously thrilled to advance here. Felt like Xavier would have the advantage having played in the Wednesday game. I think the first couple media timeouts maybe they had a higher level of comfortability, having been in a playoff game yesterday here. But obviously our defense, the last 30 minutes, and the 29 assists, thrilled the way we responded to some early adversity.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. (No Microphone.)

DAN HURLEY: That's their -- off stops is their time to play. So it's an opportunity for them to be aggressive and just kind of look to play in the ball screen game or just go make plays for each other, get lost in offense. And then obviously off of stops or in dead ball situations, then we're in a situation where we got to execute actions that we like to run.

So when we're getting the stops like that and we're getting transition opportunities and with the way we execute offense in the half court, we're tough to guard when we get rolling.

Q. When you came out and they started with a 10-0 run into that first TV timeout, 10-4, did you reflect back on your last home game -- I mean your last away game against Providence where they were up 15-2 on you?



DAN HURLEY: A little bit of it was like raise your intensity level. This is a playoff game. When you're trying to end the other team's -- either like their Big East career or their Big East season or you're trying to end a team's season, period, you've got to be absolutely on point. The execution's got to be on point. The effort and the intensity and the attention to detail, it's all got to be there.

Just I think it took us a half to get going, but also credit Xavier. They played I thought a really, really good first half.

Q. Coach, I understand that Billy Donovan is something of a mentor to you and now as you're getting on the eve of the NCAA Tournament, were there any lessons that he imparted about going back-to-back like he did with Florida and any takeaways that you tried to implement this season?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I talked to him a couple times in the off season and leading up to the pre-season. Coaches like Coach Calhoun and Tom Izzo and Coach Donovan are like my college coaching idols, coaches that I idolized. Yeah, he said, really, like, don't make it about that. Don't chase a repeat. Like improve in the off-season as a coach, serve your players well, stick to the formula. Don't pursue the achievement, just do a great job, improve as a coach and serve your players well and let the chips fall where they may. But don't obsess over that accomplishment or else it's going to make you crazy.

Q. Your team had 29 assists on 35 made shots tonight. What can you tell me about your team's chemistry going in as you prepare for the NCAA Tournament?

DAN HURLEY: I can tell you they should have had 34, because that one stretch of three or four minutes when we were -- our lobbs were a little bit off and we bricked some 3s and stuff and we had some sleepy shit going on out there that I didn't like.

It's a testament to the group. There's not many teams in the country with this level of talent. NBA players, I mean starting five of all guys that are NBA players that are willing for it to be other people's nights on a given night. For Tristen who is an All-American and AP Player of the Year in the league and for him to go get 13-7-5 and only take 10 shots and allow others just speaks to -- and Cam's done it -- just got a team filled with guys that bought into the culture and all about winning.

Q. Tristen and then Dan, if you wouldn't mind commenting as well, talking about your passing game,

how much of it is kind of organic and how much is coached in, just you guys's ability to find open players all the time?

TRISTEN NEWTON: I mean coach, they drop the schemes and plays and we go through 'em every day to see what read we need. Obviously you have to read the floor, but our coaches do a good job of putting us in positions to make great passes and have multiple options. So we got great shooters, great lob threats. So it's pretty easy to give our shooters the ball. Cam is like a 45 percent shooter. AK, Donovan rolls to the rim. Sam is pretty much easy. So credit to the coaches for their schemes and helping me out with that.

Q. Most of the teams you're playing are on the bubble playing for their lives, not necessarily the case for you guys. So how do you kind of get that feel that you want this badly enough that you're going to play like you're fighting for your lives?

CAM SPENCER: We're playing for a championship. This is one of the biggest goals that we set for ourselves at the beginning of the year. If you don't want to win now, then you probably shouldn't be playing. Coach said it, it's very tough to end anyone's season, but then to add in the fact that they're fighting for an NCAA tournament spot makes it even greater. We got to come ready to play tomorrow again.

Q. You talked about the assists and unselfishness on this team. Cam's become a better passer this season. How much of that has he worked on in the off-season and how satisfied are you with it?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think when we watched him some on synergy, you saw a two-way player, you saw a guy that could really pass the ball, and I just think the offensive system fits him perfectly. He's good in the ball screen game, he's good off ball movement, he can go get his own shot. These two guys right here, this is the best back court, the best backcourt in the country right here. So these guys make it easy for their teammates. But, yeah, we did not teach Cam how to pass. Did we?

CAM SPENCER: You did. You did. A lot.

DAN HURLEY: Thank you, Cam. (Smiling).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports...

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®