

Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Utah Utes

Larry Krystkowiak

Postgame Press Conference



USC - 91, Utah - 85

THE MODERATOR: We'll start questions for coach.

Q. I know it's still raw, but to have four guys foul out, another one to have four fouls and for you to take this USC team into double overtime how proud of you of your guys for the way that they fought tonight?

LARRY KRYSWKOWIAK: Yeah, I'm not sure that word really could describe that in an answer form. I think we all know how much hardship that everybody's gone through this year, certainly. Not just our team but the world. I think we're all going to remember -- usually it's a 911 or a JFK assassination, something pretty significant in magnitude and you always remember back to where you were when that happened.

And in this case it's been a year of memories and our guys are always going to remember what they have gone through and I just couldn't be more proud. There's no quit. And you couldn't come and watch practice, nobody could come and watch practice, but it didn't matter whether we won or lost, we had great leadership and guys were engaged, trying to get better, I think we started playing some pretty good basketball toward the end of the year. And this season in my mind is not going to be measured on wins and losses, but it's going to be based on a phrase that we used all year long, where we were a brotherhood and we were brothers and we will remain brothers. And this is one of those games I'm going to remember.

There was just no quit in us. We were outnumbered, we're playing against an elite team, and our guys, there was no quit. We got down 10, got down a number of times and stayed in the fight. And it's, I'm one of the brothers with them and I couldn't be more proud of the way they handled them self on and off the court and pretty special. Pretty special.

Q. I know that the players have gone through a lot as

well, but as a coaches, you normally don't really think about your own self, but just to think about how hard of a year was this for you personally going through all of this and I know you have some things personally, but just having to fight through all of those things throughout this year as a coach.

LARRY KRYSWKOWIAK: Yeah, I told our guys, and this is such an honest statement, usually when a season ends I'm kind of ready for a vacation. And I would love to keep coaching them. I just, I think the hardships have made us individually stronger, but we have learned to depend on each other. So I'm thrilled -- I've got a son that's playing basketball at Dartmouth and they didn't get to have a season. We were lucky to be in an elite league and I think our conference did a really good job and this tournament and when all the logistics of what you have to go through to get to this point and virtually get through a season -- we had a few shutdowns and some games missed, but for the most part -- it's not about me, never has been about me. It's going to make me stronger. I feel like I've always been a fighter and you want to get through some tough times, but I know we're all more resilient and ready to tackle -- and I do believe that when this thing clears and when the coronavirus is in everybody's rearview mirror, there's going to be three different types of the population, and some people have kind of thrown in the towel and be a victim, other people might stay where they are in life and kind of get back in the swing of things, and I think there's going to be some people that take some steps forward and become even stronger and find a cutting edge to get through it. And I would like to be one of those people and I think that the guys in our locker room would like to be one of those people.

So it's been hard, there's no question, but let's say bad for bad I talk to our team about it all the time. I've lost people in my family, people on our team have lost family members, people are unemployed, trying to figure out where the next meal's coming from. Those are bad in this world. And we got to play a game. So I think the perspective of it all is the beauty of the highs and the lows. But the fact that we still got to compete and play a game and do something where we were all connected and we had people that we could lean on. So I prefer to think of it



more as a breakthrough and a glass half full rather than kind of a pity party or being a victim. It's been hard for all of us, right? So...

Q. Get your thoughts on the way Ian Martinez played in tonight's game. He had a career high 18 points and just seemed to have a lot of timely baskets, just wanted to get your thoughts overall on him.

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: I thought he really stepped up. He's in the middle of a freshman season that I don't know if he's ever felt probably as beaten and battered, and it's fun, it's part of the right of passage to the next level. It's never easy to be a freshman and consistency is hard. I was kind of expecting it. I told our coaching staff, because Ian, the one thing about it, we haven't seen the consistent performance. There's been a high correlation with him maybe not playing well in a game, and we had a little discussion this morning and got down and dirty about some stuff and I'm not surprised that he bounced back. And I think that's what you can see moving forward as a young man, who isn't a freshman any more, is that you're going to see a lot more consistency.

But what you saw is what we know Ian can do, and his performance was key. We knew the guys were going to have to step up and make plays and he made some terrific plays putting the ball in the basket. At times he was unstoppable. So there's just a lot of confidence in him and I'm happy that he finished it on a high note. I know he's excited to get in the weight room and keep working on his game and getting ready for year two.

Q. I appreciate everything you said here at the opening. I know it's been a tough year for you. A game like this, it goes to double overtime, guys are spent, guys are playing 40-plus minutes, did you still believe that going into the second overtime, deep into the second overtime, that you guys would still find a way to get over the hump finally?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, no, I knew some things were going to have to line up for us, but I wrote believe on the board before the game. I wrote believe on the board with every timeout. We also believed it was going to be really hard. But we believed we were going to pull it off. We had a very interesting lineup, kind of a hybrid lineup out there, but there's never a point until those last seconds are winding down. That's the nature I think of our team and personally for me, I'm -- you never -- it's really hard to beat somebody that never gives up. And you can't just be throwing punches, you better have a mental capacity to believe that you can win.

So I was, there was a big shot, I, we put Jaxon Brenchley

in the game. Here's a kid that hasn't played a lot of minutes all year, but he's been so engaged, he was in every timeout tonight, and it came time to pick somebody to put in the game, and I called his play. I called that play out of emotion for him because I've got belief that he's going to jump up and knock down a three and unfortunately, he didn't make it, but it's not only a collective belief in our team, but it's a collective belief in everybody, and you're not going to get very far if you ever stop believing.

So, yeah, to answer your question, I was very optimistic that we could pull it off.

Q. When Evan Mobley goes to the bench in the first half with about 13 minutes left with two fouls, would you have liked to have seen your guys take more advantage of him being on the bench for so long?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Well, sure. We knew it wasn't going to get easier when he came back in, but they got a lot of players besides Evan Mobley. He's going to be a lottery pick in the draft. But a bunch of guys on their team, they had multiple guys in double figures and they had guys that stepped up in his absence undoubtedly. But it's staying in the fight. He came back in the second half, they took a 10-point lead, our guys never quit, but you can't control that. You can only control the next play and we did the best of our ability with that and we didn't make plays to build a lead with him on the bench, that's the reality.

Q. Obviously it's still fresh, but where do you see the future of this program going, especially with somebody like Martinez who is starting to emerge, but then also with Timmy Allen and Plummer, who potentially this could be their last time, depending upon what they decide to do with their careers?

LARRY KRYSTKOWIAK: Yeah, I just made it clear in the locker room, would love to have everybody back, coaching, coaching this group again. We can lace it all up, everybody can come back, got a couple additions to the roster. So I remain optimistic. Guys can work on their basketball game, but we can come back as a brotherhood and hopefully play in front of fans. I have no question in my mind, contrary to a lot of the noise, that this is a program that is on the rise. We have got a number of young players that are playing games, we got guys that want to get in the weight room, got a lot of high-character people. So I have no reason to believe otherwise.

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