

Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Jaime Jaquez Jr

Amari Bailey

Postgame Press Conference



it's a great win for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Did you consciously come into this game wanting to have a big offensive output, especially with Jaylen not available?

AMARI BAILEY: No, if anything, I feel like we can lose a lot just with Jaylen's presence defensively, so I just wanted to come in and just try to make at least some of it up and just play as hard as I can on defense and just flow throughout the game, really.

Q. They made seven threes and shot almost 60 percent. Were they shooting the ball really well? Were there some breakdowns defensively?

MICK CRONIN: No, I think it was them. They spread us out. They play small with no 5 man at times. And they had guys making shots that aren't their best shooters on the year. Like I said, Gabbidon is 2-2 in the first half, and he's 9-36 on the year.

But at tournament time everybody's dangerous. I think it's a smart strategy as good as we are defensively, is to try to spread us out as much as you can, don't let us put you into small spaces and tight gaps because we can be, that's where we can really start stealing the ball. We still ended up with nine steals today.

But I thought their strategy, I thought it was strategy on their part. Give 'em credit. And their kids made shots. It's not always, you know, our defense is awful because we're not ready to play. I don't think that was the case. I think it's Colorado's strategy and they made shots, and when teams are banging in shots, it really spreads you out and now you're scared to help.

So we were able to get 'em a little bit more uncomfortable with ball pressure in the second half, and I think it probably affected their 3-point shooting at least a little bit. They shot 27 percent in that half.

Q. How do you think that your bench did without

UCLA - 80, Colorado - 69

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

MICK CRONIN: Congratulations to Colorado on their competitive spirit. Tad's teams always play like that, especially when we play. It's always a war. They made a lot of shots. I think Gabbidon was 9-36 coming in. He's 2-2 today. He's 5-5 on the season.

But I told the guys, Look, when you're trying to put a team out of a tournament, they could be staring at their last game, you got to expect 'em to play well. So I thought that Colorado played really well. It wasn't anything that we didn't come ready to play, by any stretch. So they hit a lot of tough shots early. Give 'em credit.

Our guys, as usual, get tougher as the game goes on. That's what happens when you got winners on your team. That's what we try to recruit, and that's what they are, so they do whatever's necessary. We're not always perfect, but nobody is. We find a way to win. So that's 28 of 'em on the year. It's not easy.

But when you got guys like this on the team makes, it makes it easy. Obviously, Amari had a big day scoring the ball, and I know he's got that in him, and I've been trying to figure out how to get it out of him. It hasn't been his fault. It's been mine. We're trying to figure out ways to get his confidence going.

I thought this game got going up-and-down and he was able to get a lot of touches early to get into his rhythm. When you're a young player it helps to get your confidence going. Got him to the foul line too. So the way he drives the ball, we got to continue to get him to the foul line. So

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Jaylen Clark?

MICK CRONIN: Well, they played a lot of minutes. I don't always put bench production on points. Will McClendon had four rebounds in the first half when we were playing with Adem and Amari with foul trouble. So he gives us a lot of the same attributes as far as toughness and rebounding and things of that nature. Look, Dylan gave us 12 minutes. So it was a normal game for us as far as minutes played when you look at the stat sheet.

Q. Jaime, we have seen it over and over again the last few minutes you guys have just kind of been super clutch. What all goes into that? You've done it so many times this season as a team.

JAIME JAQUEZ JR: I think it has to do with just how comfortable we are. Like you said, we've done it a bunch this season. I've got a lot of games under my belt here and I know a lot of my teammates do as well, like Tyger and David, and we just know when we get in those situations, we know how to win, and we understand that in crunch time, you got to get stops and that's what we did, that's what we did this game.

Q. Jaime, there's been a lot made about how this team is built for March because of the veterans, but how big was it to have the two freshmen, Amari and Adem step up the way that they did today?

JAIME JAQUEZ JR: It was huge. I think Amari had a good case of Freshmen of the Year as well. He's just a talent and production, defense, I mean, he does it all as well.

Adem was also great for us. That block that he had, it was like at the top of the back board. That was incredible. But, yeah, this is what these guys do, man, that's who they are.

Q. For the players, talk about what was the key to flipping the switch in the second half? You guys were down by one. What was kind of the message going into halftime? And just what really accounted for your ability to flip that switch and take care of business the way you did in that second half?

JAIME JAQUEZ JR: I think we just talked about locking in on defense, having our mind completely solely focused on the defensive end. We scored almost 40 points, so we understood our offense wasn't the issue. We knew we just needed to stop 'em, and our offense was going to do its thing.

Q. How are you different team without Jaylen on the floor?

JAIME JAQUEZ JR: I mean, I think we're still trying to figure that out. This is our first game without him. He brings so much to our team. He brings intensity, energy. He's our X factor when it comes to defensive end as well. On offense he can do so many things.

But with that being said, we got a lot of guys that can step up. Amari just had a great night tonight, and I'm sure that guys like DA, Will, Abramo, when their number's called, they're going to step up just as big. So I'm excited to see what we have in store.

Q. Replacing Jaylen, was today and how you used guys off the bench kind of an indication of what it's going to be going forward or will that depend on matchups?

MICK CRONIN: Depend on matchups. Part of me wanted to start Will just because I like having Dave off the bench. I like being able to sub in a starter. In case you get off to a slow start, you can put a guy in that can immediately bank in a couple shots for you.

But also, I know part of me is like, look, David's been the most loyal player I've ever coached. The guy, my first year I insert him in the starting lineup and we almost win the PAC-12. It turns our season around, just by following orders. Not -- that was his worst shooting year because he was coming off the broken foot.

The next year Johnny Juzang walks in and David doesn't start, doesn't play near as much, doesn't say a word, steps up big, helps us beat Alabama in overtime, we go to the Final Four. So he goes to a nonstarter. Never once bats an eye. These guys will tell you, he's the guy talking in the huddle, he's the guy that says bring it in.

So he deserves to start. Strategically a part of me wants to start Will, just because he's a better rebounder, and I like having Dave come in to make shots. And to your question, offensively we shoot it better from three, obviously, with Dave in the starting lineup, without Jaylen in the starting lineup.

But Dave missed a lot of looks that he normally doesn't miss today. But that's good because I believe in the law of averages, so we're going to need him. So we didn't need him today. If he's going to shoot 20, he's going to make 10, so he's 2-8 right now.

Q. I know conference tournaments can be a mixed bag, but you could potentially be a 1 seed in the West, which would mean potentially coming back here. Is this maybe a dress rehearsal kind of get familiar with

the building?

MICK CRONIN: If we're not familiar with this building by now, I don't know, you know. I don't know. We played four here last year. This was three this year. Tomorrow will be four. So it will be eight in two years if we play again Saturday.

So we would like to recruit Vegas, so when we get up here, I can get more recruiting done and get much better dinners than some of those other places. Obviously travel's more important than all that. I'm being funny, but looking forward to dinner. A lot of options here.

Q. Just the way the tournament selection committee reviews things and what they look at, is there an incentive for you not to address Jaylen's status?

MICK CRONIN: I addressed Jaylen's status as clear as I'm legally allowed to.

Q. But beyond this, or maybe what his status might be beyond this week?

MICK CRONIN: Oh, no. If they ask us, I'll tell them exactly what they want to know. I said that in my press conference, didn't I? Yeah.

Q. Has anybody contacted you?

MICK CRONIN: No. I would think they would probably contact Martin, to be honest with you. I don't know how much they like me anyway.

But, no, yeah, we would be transparent with 'em. But I think that the thing that bothers me is that people feel like -- first of all, I have a job and I have a family I would like to keep, so there's a little thing called HIPAA, okay?

Second thing is, Amari had an injury, I was consistent. He had a foot injury. He was out. There was no details said about it. Adem started wearing a mask. Did I ever say what happened to him?

So kids have rights, they have careers. If they don't want us to disclose their injury, okay, then that's their right. And I'm more concerned with doing what's right for my players than making people in the media happy. So the least of my worries is, you know, is that.

But as far as the Committee, absolutely I would share anything with them. But, you know, I think the people think they have a right to know everything is ridiculous. It's happened already today. Somebody was telling me there's Twitter saying stuff about Coach Self who I've known since

I was 20 and I'm praying he's okay and people are speculating. How about giving the guy some privacy with his family. I respect that people got a job to do, but Jaylen Clark has a right to his privacy, guys, and I would hope that people would respect that. All right. Thank you.

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