

Pac-12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

USC Trojans

Coach Andy Enfield

Kobe Johnson

Boogie Ellis

Postgame Press Conference



USC - 80, Washington - 74

ANDY ENFIELD: It was a tough game. Washington played very well offensively, made a lot of 3s in the first half especially. We're fortunate to come back in the second half twice when they kept taking the lead.

I give our players a lot of credit. They battled the entire second half when they were down numerous times and found a way to win. So very proud of our team and we'll move on.

Q. You changed from zone to man in the second half. Was that in part because of how Wood was shooting from the outside?

ANDY ENFIELD: We were starting the game at man. And they were making 3s, getting transition. Then we just slowed them down with our zone. Our zone was great in the first half. We probably got nine out of 10 stops.

Then we took a four-point lead and they went on a flurry because we turned the ball over in a out-of-bounds play and they hit a 3 in transition and another 3. Wood hit three straight on us. Then Brooks hit the fourth and Wood hit the one desperation one at the end.

We went man most of the second half. We mixed our zone in very briefly. We just had to guard them. It was frustrating because they're really talented offensively. Wheeler is so quick. Probably the quickest guy in the country with the ball in his hands. He's really hard to guard.

Then you have Keion Brooks, who leads the league in scoring. Those guys. And Wood puts a lot of pressure from the 3-point line.

And Koren Johnson's been playing great. He had 26, 21 the last couple of games. Their one-on-one play is very hard to guard. That's why we try to mix up our man in zone.

Second half we had to guard man, and if we wanted to win the game we had to do a better job, which we did.

Q. Looked like you were staggering Isaiah Collier and Bronny in the closing minutes there, Isaiah for offense and Bronny for defensive situations. Is that an alignment you're comfortable with in the closing stretches of the game?

ANDY ENFIELD: Sometimes, we alternate offense defense, and we kept Isaiah in for defense. But also, when we're shooting free throws, it gives us a chance to set our defense when we makes a substitution.

And so part of it was that. Part of it was just staggering the guys. Bronny did a great job with making five straight free throws. And Isaiah made two big free throws with about a minute and a half.

Q. Boogie, you said on the Pac-12 Network, you told your guys you had 20 minutes basically left and you didn't want this season to be over. What was that message to them and to the group, you being a senior, not wanting to go out in this tournament?

BOOGIE ELLIS: Definitely, I told the guys we only had 20 minutes guaranteed, just to come out with urgency in the first half. Coach told us that we were kind of lackadaisical a little bit.

But we fixed it in the second half. But tomorrow we can't come out like that. We've got to come out with a lot more energy.

Q. Do you guys feel in general that you're playing as well as you can at this point? I mean, you've had a lot of injuries and things going on this season. Is this the SC team that maybe you expected?



ANDY ENFIELD: Yeah, we've made a lot of improvements this year. Our team has improved defensively and offensively. And we felt great early January when we had Boogie hurt his hamstring, Isaiah broke his hand and Josh got sick and lost 15 pounds. We lost three guys at the same time.

And when you play without your two leading scorers that happen to be your two playmakers, it became very challenging. We didn't score 70 points for six straight games and lost six in a row.

When they got back healthy, they've been impressive because they've improved quickly, and we are playing well. We just thought we'd play a little better in January and early February.

But we didn't anticipate those injuries so now this is a team we thought we'd have. And we're playing well, I think we won five out of six. We lost two close games in the game at Washington State where we led for 36, 37 minutes.

Our team is playing better, much better, and we've seen a lot of growth. Isaiah Collier, at the point guard position is showing tremendous growth. Bronny James, our young players, Vince, who missed two offseasons, he's improved.

And the upperclassmen, like Kobe and Boogie, have really stepped up -- and DJ Rodman. I think we're in a good place as a team.

I'm really proud of our guys. This is a much better basketball team than we started the season and also throughout the year. And they've improved dramatically on both sides of the ball.

Q. What did you guys like about the way you defended Arizona last Saturday that you think can carry over to the game on Thursday?

KOBE JOHNSON: I think our physicality. I think we came out into that game very physical and we matched their pressure. I think we've got to come out, just apply the pressure and physicality to them right away because I felt like last game we did a perfect job shutting down their best players with physicality. As long as we do that, we'll be in a good spot to do it again.

Q. [Inaudible]?

ANDY ENFIELD: We had great energy. It was our home court. It was senior day and I thought our players played with tremendous energy the whole game.

We were flying around in our zone and our man defense

and we rebounded the ball. Arizona is hard to guard. Anytime you've got a guy that's 7 feet, 260 pounds, as mobile as Ballo is in the middle, he creates so many mismatches. And then they have great guards as well and forwards.

So I think it should be a great game tomorrow. But we just have to play with tremendous energy like we did on Saturday.

Q. Boogie, you had 27 on this stage two years ago and 25 again tonight. What about this stage kind of gets you going, makes you feel comfortable?

BOOGIE ELLIS: Yeah, definitely. It's win or go home. I'm just trying to do whatever it takes to help my team win.

Q. Coach, you were able to hold Keion Brooks for 16 from the field, 1-of-8, one of the best players in the conference. I know he's focused on the scout the whole time. What did you with Keion to hold him down?

ANDY ENFIELD: We try to give extra help with him, challenge everything at the rim. He made that one 3 in the first half, Kobe was kind of there, didn't really challenge it. That was his one 3 that he made. But I thought with a guy like that, you just have to challenge every shot he takes; he's really talented.

Boogie and Kobe both had three steals tonight and had a lot of deflections. Thought DJ Rodman did a really good job one-on-one on with him.

Q. What's been the evolution of this team in crunch time, limiting those mistakes where you guys kind of beat yourself and particularly, with Isaiah running the point and his development there, is he a guy you guys feel comfortable with closing games with the ball in his hand?

KOBE JOHNSON: Yes, of course. We know who to get the ball to at the end of games, either Boogie or Isaiah. Earlier in the season he made freshman mistakes like we expected it. But throughout the course of the season he's really locked in. When we got the ball, and with the league, he's learning how to win games for us, and I think having him being able to develop that leadership as a freshman is going to be very key to us being successful here in this tournament.

Q. What was the message from Coach at halftime. You're down by five, Moses Wood hit that huge 3, what was the message to reverse momentum, get things going in your favor after the break?



BOOGIE ELLIS: Definitely, Coach was emphasizing us, we had a couple of plays where we were walking around lackadaisical. He said lock in on defense and come out with a lot more energy. So that was the thing that we knew if we played with energy and we knew we had a toughness that we would come out with a win.

Q. Boogie, what was your takeaways from your first match-up? You missed obviously the first game in Tucson, but getting a chance to play against Caleb Love last Saturday, what excites you about playing the Pac-12 Player of the Year?

BOOGIE ELLIS: I'm just here trying to get a win. I don't really care about none of that stuff. I just care about winning.

Q. Boogie, you struggled to score, whatever it was, Saturday, I guess, against Arizona and today you were very hot. What was the difference? What changed for you?

BOOGIE ELLIS: Just made shots. (Laughter).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports