

# State Farm Champions Classic: Michigan State vs Kansas

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

## Kansas Jayhawks

### Bill Self

#### Press Conference



Kansas - 77, Michigan State - 69

**Q. Bill, you're obviously playing at a very high level. How do you assess today's performance?**

BILL SELF: To win a lot of games, you've got to win the games that you're supposed to win. You've got to win the games where you play great, but you've got to somehow figure out how to win the games where you're not your best.

We weren't, but they weren't either. It was kind of a brick contest there at the first half and much of the second, but we hung in there. Hunt did some good things. We missed five layups, I think, the first half. Zeke never got going. AJ was in foul trouble.

But I did think we rebounded the ball better than I probably thought we would because that to me could be an Achilles heel. I thought our transition defense was actually better except for late on a couple of plays, and I thought we did, when the score was about tied with about 12 left, I thought we did play well down the stretch.

So there were a lot of good things, but it's nice to have a big guy you can throw it to and get a basket.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

BILL SELF: KJ hasn't done anything since Friday. We didn't know he'd play. He shot today and said he was fine, but you could tell he wasn't himself tonight. I actually thought, since Michigan State played two bigs, we'd be better off playing those two together.

And we did, we practiced it for 20 minutes one day, so we should be pretty adept at doing it. I actually thought they did pretty well together.

**Q. How do you get your guards going? Is it any kind of challenge when everything is built around trying to get Hunter the ball?**

BILL SELF: That's not how we practiced at all. We haven't practiced on trying to get Hunter the ball. We practiced on playing four around one, playing him on the perimeter a ton, and utilizing him to help space the floor. We practice that way all year long.

I will tell you this, today wasn't an intense pressurized game from an intensity standpoint, but it's a different pressure for some guys playing here for the first time, just like in the Carolina game. It's different. We need to get through some stuff. Fortunately, we've been able to get through it with a couple of wins.

But I don't see any negatives to what's transpired at all so far.

**Q. You talked a little bit about Phog Allen stuff, but you actually passed him today. You got the Gatorade bath in the locker room, and Hunter said you were the best basketball coach.**

BILL SELF: If Hunter said it, it has to be true because he's an expert on everything. What was your question?

**Q. I was going to ask how does it feel to have accomplished it and having the players express their appreciation?**

BILL SELF: I didn't expect anything like a water bath after the game, and I certainly -- it was great that Frank and Rio were there. But that stuff, that really doesn't mean a lot to me. It's nice. I guess I'd rather have it than not have it.

That to me doesn't really drive me by any way, shape, or form. I'd much rather figure out a way to just get better through it. I've always thought, if you take care of your business, all those things just take care of themselves at the end.

Let's not get this twisted. Phog Allen coached there for 39 years. The building is named after him. He recruited Wilt. He got Allen Fieldhouse built. He won a National Championship in '52. He recruited and coached the two best big men in the world. There's a lot of things that he did in his time that goes unnoticed because it wasn't near



as popular as what it is now and as recognizable. So I'm not getting too carried away with it.

**Q. Just looking at Zeke's play, 10 boards and 7 assists. How did you like him overall tonight?**

BILL SELF: I think to C.J., that's what C.J. was saying. He's got to score the ball. He's got to shoot it. He's got to score. AJ and Rylan have to do the same thing. Diggy can be a guy to make a couple of 3s a game.

I thought Zeke's floor game was really good. I thought the made the one bad play late. But other than that, it was good.

**Q. Last year's Classic, Hunter finished with 27 points, 21 rebounds. This year he finishes with 21 and 12.**

BILL SELF: 26 or 28 and 12?

**Q. Yes, 26. Is there anything about this event or just the competition this early in the year that brings out that level of play in Hunter, do you think?**

BILL SELF: I would say probably not. He doesn't like Michigan State a lot. In large part just because he went to Michigan, and I'm sure they're trained to dislike the other at a pretty significant level.

I think Hunter's playing better than I expected because, as you guys saw against Carolina, he should have had 30, and his timing is all off. He just hadn't practiced much. When he gets his rhythm and gets in shape, he'll do better things. But I did think he was really good.

One thing he's got to start doing is making free-throws, though. But Hunter is playing at a pretty high level.

**Q. Rylan, AJ, Zeke, those are all guys that where they lacked before, they all took those shots in moments of adversity. Is it going to take time?**

BILL SELF: I think so. With Rylan, though, Rylan made the biggest shot in the game, and he'd been sitting on the bench, and he was cold. When he doesn't think and just shoots it, he's pretty good. I got him a little screwed up where he's thinking too much. Hopefully we can get him out of that.

I still think our team isn't a square peg in a round hole. It's more like an octagon type piece that's round but it just won't fit in the round circle. It's close, but it just doesn't yet.

When those guys figure it out, hopefully it will be sooner rather than later, we'll look a lot different.

**Q. What will that look like?**

BILL SELF: React instead of think. I honestly think when you think, when you have to think and you're an athlete, you're slow, and you're always hesitant. There's no reaction to it right now. It's like they're trying to process things because they want to -- they're great kids and they want to do what you want them to do, but doing what you want them to do requires a thought process now instead of reaction.

**Q. Is it coming here (no microphone)?**

BILL SELF: I think that's part of it with both of them but probably more so with AJ. I do think that's it.

**Q. It was announced that the Champions Classic will be renewed through 28-29. What do you like about this event?**

BILL SELF: Every coach in America, if they told you the truth, wishes they could take somebody's place here. Even though there's other big games before this game now, the way the schedule falls, it's still the -- basically, the ceremonial tip-off to the season. So, yeah, we're proud to be a part of it, and we want to continue to play in it as long as they have it.

Certainly -- Atlanta is a little bit harder place for our people, I think. This was by far the smallest contingent of Kansas people that I could ever remember at this thing. Usually it will be us or Kentucky pulling in the most, but not this one.

I don't really know the reason why, but I think our fan base playing in Chicago or the Garden gets them a little bit more juiced to actually be a part of it. But it's a great event. We're proud to be a part of it.

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