

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Cincinnati Bearcats

Coach Wes Miller

Jeremiah Davenport

John Newman III

Postgame Press Conference

Houston - 69, Cincinnati - 56

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Cincinnati.

COACH MILLER: Well, I told the guys this in the locker room in my own way, but I'm really proud of our guys. I thought they fought like absolute crazy tonight. And yesterday and given the way that we finished the year and the win-loss column, I think you have to recognize that.

I think it's expected when you put this uniform on, to fight your tail off and play with great effort and play with great togetherness. I think that's part of the standard of having this C-Paw right here. But it doesn't mean that you don't recognize it's not easy for young people to do that.

But this group has been admirable throughout the last four weeks through a tough stretch to keep coming back and figuring it out.

I thought there was times tonight we played some of our best basketball. I hate that we came up short. Give Houston some credit. Shoot, I wish we could work a little bit more on getting the ball inbounds, that play -- we burned a couple timeouts, the run-out play, that hurts.

Boy, I thought we had some really good looks there in the second half. I thought we missed some open looks, and I'm not one to talk about misses and makes a lot. But we work to break them down on offense a little bit and got some really clean looks. And if a couple of those go in, then maybe it's a different game in the last two minutes.

But I'm just extremely proud of the way our guys fought



and the effort they played with and to kind of have a -- I think it was a double-figure lead in the second half against one of the best teams in the country, a team that will be seeded really high in the NCAA Tournament. I think that shows twofold. It shows that, number one, we were capable of playing better than we did down the stretch. And that's the part that's frustrating.

But also that we belong on the court with anybody. And I think we can take some good things from tonight. And I think we can let it burn a little bit and take that into the offseason as well.

Q. You did a good job getting them in foul trouble, scoring at the line in the first half. Was the plan to come out aggressive and have a short rotation, maybe put them in foul trouble? Or is it just ended up being the way it played out?

COACH MILLER: We talked about it with the guys. We certainly talked about it a ton as a staff. You have to get into their bench. There's no secret there. Everybody in our league knows that. And you gotta match -- everybody says you've got to match their physicality.

You want to exceed it if you want to beat them. I thought our guys -- I thought they played great. They were quick to the ball. I thought they were in really good position defensively.

We had more offensive rebounds than they did in the first half. I think it was six to five. And I thought some of that stuff, the physicality, the nature of the game was really good. And I thought we did it with better discipline than we did it at Houston.

I thought we had a really good stretch there for 20 minutes at Houston a week or so ago. And we were physical and fighting but we were a little undisciplined.

I thought we did a much better job with our discipline tonight. I think that got them in foul trouble a little bit. And that certainly helped us build a lead.

Q. Kelvin said the offense they ran in the first half was

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BS, his words not mine. He said the biggest adjustment at halftime, he told the team they need to play through Fabian. Can you talk about seeing that and the challenges of them playing through him?

COACH MILLER: You've got to tip your cap to Fabian White Jr. We had a ballot to play for the player in the league and that's who I would have voted for. He just wasn't on the ballot. You can't vote for your own players. If I had a chance to vote for anybody I wanted, I'd vote for Fabian White for player of the year in this league. Tip your cap to him.

He's a kid other young people can learn from. I don't think Fabian White two, three years ago looks like Fabian White today. He's improved every year. He's added to his game and he's become a really difficult mismatch because he takes it out and shoots it. He drives it so well from the perimeter. He's an elite offensive rebounder, and he's a problem in the post.

I'll say this, we didn't come with a double team, and you've watched them get doubled all year. And they're elite attacking out of double teams. I thought Jeremiah did a fantastic job on him tonight. I thought Jeremiah was phenomenal, was in great position. He made some really tough ones over the top.

And then he makes that big 3 in the left corner. But I thought we did a nice job. He made some great plays over the top. I think that's something, as a coach, you've got to look at is maybe we've got to bring some more help in the future and give him a different look.

We try to do that with some zone changes and things, but it wasn't as effective as you wanted it to be.

Q. I think there was a seven-minute stretch in the second half you guys didn't have a field goal. You mentioned some of that was good looks that just didn't go down. Did they change ball screen coverage or anything in the way they were defending you at halftime?

COACH MILLER: I don't think they made any adjustments in how they were defending us. I think they were aggressive with Dave and the ball screen, honestly with everybody.

They were making it really hard for us to run through our secondary break. We made a couple of adjustments to kind of create ball reversal. But I thought with the 18-hour prep or whatever it was and no practice, our guys did a pretty nice job of getting in position to get good shots.

I think we'll watch the tape. And there will certainly be a couple of possessions that you'll want back offensively. But we got really good looks, especially in the second half even though the shooting numbers went down a little bit.

Q. You've played Houston three times now. How do you think, how tough will they be as a tournament out? Even with their depth issues, what do you see for them?

COACH MILLER: They're going to be really tough for anybody in the country to beat. I think obviously in the NCAA Tournament it's a one-game deal. And we've all been a part of that in some regard.

I think matchups will be important. But they can beat anybody in college basketball, and I think -- I have the most utmost respect for Kelvin Sampson and what he's built there. They'll be tough. They'll be a tough out. That's a team that can play in the Final Four and certainly they showed that a year ago.

Q. You started with the big spark to start this game with two quick 3s. What were you looking for aggressively, was it something you saw earlier in the game to get two wide-open 3s, get a 6-2 lead for you guys.

JEREMIAH DAVENPORT: Definitely. Try to make the right plays for my team. So definitely.

Q. John, you've had a lot more activity and success over the past two weeks or so. Is this -- I know you've had a lot of injury stuff pop up throughout the year -- is this what a healthy John Newman looks like? And are you glad to be able to show that going forward, this is who you are?

JOHN NEWMAN III: Yeah, I don't think I've seen the best of me yet. I don't think anyone has. So I just tell my teammates in the locker room it's going to get a lot better. I've started to hit my stride towards the end of the year. I just lock it in the gym more. That's what I'm going to keep doing. I'll get better. So we haven't seen the best of me yet.

Q. Coach, offensively you talked about you had a lot of opportunities for good looks that didn't go down in that second half. Did it feel like this offense was getting close? And is it frustrating that you're kind of at the end of the line now and you were starting to come together and get some good looks?

COACH MILLER: I'm going to make sure I preface it this way because I don't want to be misinterpreted. But we

went through that stretch, we played so many games in a short period of time. And I'm not using this as a crutch or an excuse, because you have to be good enough to overcome a lack of practice or whatever it may be. And that could be a stretch that makes your year. So I'm owning that we didn't do a good enough job.

But this team just needed practice. And the more we've had an opportunity to practice -- because give credit first to our guys. They practiced hard. They want to do it right. They listen. And the more we've practiced, the more success we've had.

We got away from practicing in February. You saw the little things go. You didn't see the will to want to win. You didn't see our effort, with a few exceptions, drop it all. You didn't see our togetherness drop at all. That talks about our guys' character. But we didn't have a chance to build the habits that we've been building over the last five or six months. And you saw some of the results fall a little bit.

We got a chance to get back to practicing this week. And that means we were going to be sharper in our execution. We were going to be sharper in some of our -- I thought our defense looked like it did back in January at times, over the last two games.

And we also looked a little healthier. I'm not saying that's an excuse, because that's college basketball. You've got to overcome those things. But this team, the more it has a chance to work, is going to be better because they're willing to work. And we saw that this week a little bit.

Q. When you were up 39-30, and you touched on it a little, but you were up 39-30 and they go on a 12-0 run. What did they do different there? Was it a combination of things? How do you view it?

COACH MILLER: It was a couple of things. I thought they had some success going into the post. We talked about that a little earlier in the press conference. And I thought Fabian was really good there. I didn't think we were bad. I thought we were in some pretty good position.

I thought one time we got too deep of a catch on an out-of-bounds play. Threw it in, reversed it. Got a deep catch on the right block. I thought we were in a position, he made a couple. We let them get behind us in the roll on the ball screen a couple times.

We failed to then convert on the other end. I think this is the sixth four-minute segment of the game. It's the second four-minute segment of the second half you're referring to where they make a 12-0 run.

And then the play out of bounds, we call timeout. I think Mika, to start the half, I could see they blew something up. I thought it was a good decision. I wish we could have got the ball in when we could have when Mike called timeout. Then we come out, don't execute out-of-bounds play a couple of possessions later and turn it over for a layup. It was a combination of things. But you are playing against a great team; they're going to make runs and you've got to figure out a way to weather them.

Q. John, Coach talked about how you guys were able to stay together and keep fighting through an even really tough stretch. Internally, as players, how did you guys manage to do that, when probably would have had every excuse to pack it up these past couple of weeks and not play as well or as hard as you did?

JOHN NEWMAN III: It's like Coach said, the character of the guys in the locker room. I try to be a testament to that every day by the way I approach things. I'm just somebody, I just don't give up until it's over. It's never over until it's over.

We had that approach every day. We came in ready to work every day. We didn't get the results we wanted, but I think there's a lot of progress on that. I think we grew as people, because sometimes you go through a tough time, and you need tough times, you know what I'm saying, to get better for what's next.

And I think a lot of the struggles we went through over those weeks, I think it prepared us even better for coming into this tournament.

And then the result that we got, the guys returning, it will make us better for next year. So I think it's just all about having a growth mindset and just continuing to get better every single chance we get.

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