

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Wichita State Shockers

Isaac Brown

James Rojas

Craig Porter Jr

Postgame Press Conference

Wichita State - 81, Tulsa - 63

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then talk questions.

ISAAC BROWN: I thought it was a great effort by our team tonight. They played for 40 minutes. We got off to a good start. Tulsa being a good basketball team, they battled back. They cut the lead at halftime. We came out in the second half and we just focused on fundamentals, defending, rebounding, playing with toughness, playing inside out.

I thought our veteran guys, Rojas, Craig Porter Jr, those guys took control of the team. We built up a lead and we held on at the end with our young guys defending, rebounding, and playing with that same type of toughness.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. What was working so well there at 48-26 there in the paint? It seems like you guys were just dominating inside early. Was it a mismatch or was it just something they were playing, size advantage? What played into the role of you guys dominating inside here tonight?

ISAAC BROWN: Our offense has really been flowing the last 10 games of the year. We're trying to play inside out. James Rojas is doing a good job of scoring with his back to the basket and he made good passes when he drew double teams. Kenny Pohto, Isaiah Poor Bear-Chandler, those guys are veterans. They can really score with their back to the basket and when they're scoring it inside, it makes it easier for our guards. They can make stationary



threes and that's what we wanted to go to in the first half.

Q. In the second half 11 different players score, the offense just looked totally different. Was it just a lot of fun when so many different players get involved? And what kind of went into the spark in the second half?

CRAIG PORTER JR: I would say, I mean, Coach just getting on us, telling to us stick with the game plan. We followed it the first half. It was just the intensity wasn't there. I feel like the second half we just wanted it more, we picked up our play, we got it inside out and just got everybody easy looks.

Q. Tim Dalger went for 21 tonight. What was he doing to be able to get that going? He was 6-13 from the field. What did he do to get that Tulsa team going?

ISAAC BROWN: We were tagging on ball screens, trying to stop Betson from driving the basketball. We tried to flood the paint on ball screens. When we were flooding the paint, our guys were trusting the fundamentals and the principles we've been practicing all year long. Their guards made some great skip passes and he knocked down some threes and they were contested. But he's a good basketball player. He knocked down some tough shots.

Q. James, Craig mentioned the intensity level increased at the start of the second half. You had that big dunk right out of halftime. Take me through that and how much do you think that kind of set the tone?

JAMES ROJAS: I mean, honestly, we just started off the second half just focusing on defense and we just got it going. Then when the dunk happened everybody else just sparked up an extra level. So I definitely think that it turned the page and everybody just started going.

Q. I think you had nine of the assists in the second half. A lot of different players. That Tulane triple double, a lot to JP, but this one did it feel like you were just spreading the ball around a lot more and just like everyone was just contributing in that second half?

CRAIG PORTER JR: Yeah, for sure. I just trust these



guys more than anything, Rojas, Kenny, really everybody on the team. I mean, if I pass it to you, every time I tell 'em, if I pass it to you, I think you should shoot it. So they were prepared and they were taking the good shots that we've been looking for and they were just knocking 'em down.

Q. You looked to tweak that knee a little bit there late in the first half. Just how were you feeling after that heading into obviously a big conference stretch? Was it just a tweak? Cramp? What was going on there?

JAMES ROJAS: Just a little tweak. It's nothing. It happens every day. Just another injury I got to go through. But I'll be good. Nothing to hold me back, so on to the next one.

Q. Craig mentioned that you got after 'em at halftime. It felt like it was just a first conference game, not a ton of people in the crowd. Did it feel kind of low energy? And what did you see the difference in just the intensity and the energy the second half?

ISAAC BROWN: Yeah, we talked about it at halftime. We wasn't scoring the ball well in the first half, but we wanted to turn up our defense. We only had seven deflections. I didn't think we were playing hard enough. In the second half we talked about defending, being disruptive, running through some passing lanes, getting more deflections, and we did that in the second half and we were able to get out in transition and get some easy baskets. We didn't go against a set defense a lot in the second half.

Q. Now turning this page to Tulane tomorrow night. This is a Tulane team that you guys played very well this season. 1-1 on 'em. What are you guys looking forward to with that Tulane team and what makes them so special? Obviously, you guys took one from 'em on the road. What makes that Tulane team and this matchup so special?

ISAAC BROWN: Yeah, good team, you know, they play that matchup zone, which is difficult. You got to play inside out. You can't settle for threes. They got the big three in Cook, Forbes, and Cross. We got to do a good job of defending those guys. The last three times we played 'em it's been really close games and we expect that tomorrow. We just got to defend at a high level. I think when you get to the tournament it's not about your offense it's about the defending, rebounding, playing with toughness and that allows you to get easy baskets in transition so you don't have to go against a set defense.

Q. Craig, I know you didn't play last year, but this is the same setting, same matchup as last year and you

guys kind of got stunned by Tulsa and the season was over. Did you kind of stress that message to these guys this time around? Like, hey, we can't take anything for granted?

CRAIG PORTER JR: Yeah, definitely told 'em that in the huddles before the games, just not play down to the competition or really take anything for granted because of that loss. I feel like they responded to it well. So I'm just proud.

Q. To get so many different players involved, to shoot a good percentage the second half, just to get that first game out of the way, how much do you think this benefits you guys going into tomorrow?

ISAAC BROWN: I think it benefits us a lot. Just the fact that our veteran guys didn't have to play 35 minutes like they normally do, to get those guys some rest. I wanted to get the young guys in the game because in those games against Tulane the last two times we got in foul trouble and the young guys had to play. I thought they did a tremendous job. I thought that the defense today was the difference in the game. Again, we just got to defend. You got to defend at a high level when you are going up against a Tulane big three that's averaging 60 points or more by themselves.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you guys.

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