

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Houston Cougars Coach Kelvin Sampson Marcus Sasser Jamal Shead

Postgame Press Conference

Houston 60, East Carolina 46

KELVIN SAMPSON: Just seemed like it was a struggle today making shots. I'd like to congratulate Coach Schwartz for his first year. He's done an awesome job establishing a culture. His kids play hard. They play the right way. They defend you. They block out. Do a lot of good things.

Going forward, we're just going to have to play better.

**Q. Kelvin, Jamal forces those two quick turnovers to open the second half. Did you sort of need somebody to get you going like that, to play your way?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Not you, we. We needed somebody.

You know, sometimes you have kind of a celebrated season. Look at all the coverage we're getting. Look at all the people that's here that haven't been here all year. Everything changes this time of year. We haven't changed. Everybody around us has. You've got more media coverage, you've got more outlets.

These kids sometimes, they're human beings.

But you focus on what you can control.

I thought we were kind of out of character today on a lot of things. We'll get it back, I think, but I thought we were out of character on a lot of things.

Shooting 28 percent, that's hard to do, especially considering we have a guy that went 9 for 15 and our second best guy was 3 for 10.



But the shooting percentage isn't what bothered me. We missed 41 shots and got six offensive rebounds. But we had one of our -- somebody on our team had six misses. That's what disappointed me.

But you know, we live to fight another day. Hopefully we can come out and play better.

**Q. Kelvin, beyond the shooting you had 10 steals, seven blocks, just 10 turnovers. How significant are those numbers in a game like this?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, we also forced 17 turnovers. I think we scored 19 points off of their turnovers, but we usually had 15 to 19 points on second-chance points.

But that's attitude. We had breakdowns defensively.

But you know, we know how to correct our mistakes because they've done it all year. I mean, I'm just kind of looking at our record here. Our record is 30-2.

**Q. Marcus, talk a little bit about your second half. I think you had six in the first half. What did you see out there to get the confidence back and take the team on your shoulders there?**

MARCUS SASSER: We really just got out in transition. We got clean defensive rebounds second half, and just got open shots in transition and then just really getting downhill, being more aggressive, and teammates just doing a good job finding me when I was wide open. That's really it.

**Q. Coach, comment on Ezra Ausar's game for ECU.**

KELVIN SAMPSON: He was really good today, wasn't he? He's a tough kid. 19 rebounds, 18 points. That's impressive. I was impressed with him. He's a tough kid.

**Q. Y'all came out of the locker room really hot, about 8-0 run to start the second half. Was there a special message you told them in the locker room to refocus them because they came out on fire?**

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KELVIN SAMPSON: Not really.

**Q. Kelvin, you experimented with a few different lineups --**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I wasn't experimenting. You experiment in November and October. The lineups I had out there, I had out there. That's not an experiment.

**Q. What did you see from that, when you had freshmen --**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Trying to get somebody to play Cougar basketball. That's all. I didn't think the guys out there were, so I took them out and put somebody else in that would. It wasn't experimenting.

**Q. Marcus, it seemed like everyone struggled with shooting but you. Did you like these rims? Do you care about rims? Do you adjust during a game? How do you approach that?**

MARCUS SASSER: Yeah, just really adjust. I was off in the first half really, like everybody was, but I just felt like second half I was just more open. That's why the shots started falling second half.

**Q. Marcus, like Coach said, things are different this time of year. You've been part of this a couple years ago, but how good did it feel to be back out there after having to miss the run in the post-season last year?**

MARCUS SASSER: Definitely. It felt good just to be back out there during March. Missed it last year due to injury. But just being back out there with my teammates during March is always a good experience, fun experience, and hopefully we can try to ride this ride as long as we can.

**Q. Jamal, even though you struggled to make shots, of the 16 baskets you made you had 13 assists off them. Would you say that the offense struggled with much more just not being able to make a shot, or how would you categorize it best?**

JAMAL SHEAD: I felt like we had a lot of open shots. We were moving the ball pretty well. Sometimes it just doesn't go down. But like Coach said, we need to get back to our culture and get back to offensive rebounding.

We had a lot of good open shots, especially in the first half. We were moving the ball pretty well. But sometimes the ball just doesn't fall.

**Q. Non-game question: Since we talked to you last,**

**there's been a couple of developments in the coaching ranks with Jim's retirement and Bill being out for the Big 12 and being in the hospital. I know you're close to those guys. Have you had a chance to talk to either one of them or been able to reach out to either school?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Not Jim. I texted Bill. I'm sure he had hundreds and hundreds of texts.

Jim has been a tremendous guardian of our game. I've been on several different committees with him over the years. I listened to what he had to say. Everything he always talked about was what was best for the game. He helped grow this game, his winning.

We played them a couple years ago, the year we went to the Final Four, but his National Championship year we played them in the Elite 8 that year with Carmelo Anthony. We lost to them in Albany, New York, and they went to I think it was New Orleans and won a National Championship. So I saw his best team up close.

Then Bill, who's not one of the best coaches in this generation, Bill is one of the greatest coaches ever. When those two guys go down, that's a hit for their universities but also a hit for our game.

**Q. Jamal, how big was it for Marcus to have the kind of game he had even how things were developing?**

JAMAL SHEAD: It just shows his character and the type of person he is. He never lets a lot of things get to him, and just showing how good he is that second half, he kept shooting, things started to fall.

One thing you notice, he never took a bad shot. Everything was just open for him. He took what the game gave him, and that's just a confidence booster for us going forward.

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