

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Tulane Green Wave
Coach Ron Hunter

Kevin Cross

R.J. McGee

Postgame Press Conference

Tulane - 82, Wichita State - 76

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Tulane head coach, along with Kevin Cross and R.J. McGee. Coach, we'll just get your opening statement, your thoughts on the game please, and then we'll go through.

COACH HUNTER: Yeah, it's always hard to win the first one in conference tournament. I think that's always the hardest to win. I thought we got off to a great start. We talked about that the last time couple times we played Wichita, we got off to poor starts. Wanted to make sure we came out with a better start. And I woke up this morning and great article in the New Orleans paper about R.J. McGee and I read it. I hope he has another one tomorrow morning. And I can read it. And he can play like this. His last two games, he's really playing well. And so is this guy Kevin Cross. I really wanted to mention R.J.

Q. You mentioned the good start, really you weathered all their storms. Do you feel like, with the exception of the last 20 seconds, really good team effort from mostly from start to finish?

COACH HUNTER: Yeah, we knew at the end of the day it would be close. Every time we play Wichita State it's like this. Last two three years it comes down to two or three possessions. We're ready for this. Again, we were are upset when we lost at home to them. That was great motivation for us. We talked about that all week. Making sure we take care of business.

Q. The intensity there was no defensive possessions taken. Did you like what you saw from start to finish?



COACH HUNTER: Some of it. Some of it. You know, we score the ball pretty well. And so we get a little lazy sometimes on our defensive slides. But again, we played a good basketball -- I think one of the hottest teams in the league was Wichita State outside of what Houston is doing. They have been playing good basketball. That was a good win for us today.

Q. Kevin, you had probably your worst game of the year last time you played Wichita State. Looked like you were aggressive from the start. How much was that a conscience effort?

KEVIN CROSS: I was thinking about it all week. And knowing that this was going to be our first game, first stepping stool, honestly.

Q. R.J., I think you had a career high. Tonight you said you had a good mind set. What does it mean to have a game like this on this stage?

R.J. MCGEE: It means a lot to me. I have to give credit to my teammates. They did a great job getting me the ball in places where I could be effective. I tip my hat off to my teammates.

Q. Kevin, you started 5/7 from the field in the first half. What seemed to be working for you there early on getting the momentum going?

KEVIN CROSS: Honestly just me trying to start inside-out inside of trying to start outside-in.

Q. Craig Porter took over the second half. You looked at the stat sheet, he finishes with nearly 22 I believe and then a good second half. 11 assists, 6 rebounds. What makes him such a dynamic player, and what was he able to do to cause problems tonight?

COACH HUNTER: I thought the first half we did a good job. He's a good player. You are not going to hold good players down like that for a very long time. We actually even tried to trap the ball screen, and we did a poor job of that. Again, he makes Wichita go, and we understand that. That's one of the things we talk about. There are three or

four really special point guards in this league, and he's one of them. I'm going to send him a graduation present, and I think -- so I never have to see that guy again. He's a really, really good player.

Q. Coach, they have been so good at points in the paint, shots at the rim, I think you held them to 32 percent. What's the credit go there? 13 blocks. How well did you protect the rim tonight?

COACH HUNTER: Yeah, I thought we played with more energy. We played them at our place right after the Houston loss. Everybody knows we lose every game after Houston. No idea why. Coach is doing a really nice job with their program, and I think he's doing a really really nice job. They are so different now than when we played them a year ago. They are organized. He's done a really, really nice job. And so we knew that we were going to have our hands full. He did a great job, and I feel like he outcoached me when he came to our place with it. I wouldn't have let him do that back to back games. That wasn't going to happen.

Q. Kevin, kind of the same question. How important was protecting the rim, and what did you do a good job of to force a lot of contested misses?

KEVIN CROSS: Honestly sticking to the game plan and knowing they play and how their players play and stuff like that, honestly.

Q. Coach, Sion stuffed the stat sheet tonight. Didn't have his best shooting night, just had 7 points but 5 rebounds, 8 assists. Just talk about about his performance and how he rolled this team on the offensive and defensive end.

COACH HUNTER: He is in my opinion the most underrated kid in this country. What he does for our basketball and what he does overall for college basketball, he is the most underrated player. I know we have great players. We do and they do a great job. Sion James is amazing. You know what's crazy, even better? He doesn't want any of the credit. The kid is just special. He's a special, special human being. And as I keep telling him, one day he's going to get his due. We aren't where we are without Sion James.

Q. Stretch of three possessions in the first half where Jaylen Forbes scored 9 points. Although you never really put the game away, that gave you the separation that you were able to hold on. How important is it to have that kind of a stretch?

COACH HUNTER: Well, it's important. He is a great

shooter. He has the freedom to make shots and even the last one he missed. Thirteen seconds on the shot clock. I would have him take that shot all the time. When his mind is free, he can really make shots. I think that all our guys, outside of -- we have to remember, this is Cook's first conference tournament game really in college. I think he was jittery early. But he settled into the game, just like the rest of our guys.

Q. Now you got a quick turnaround with Memphis tomorrow. A team you guys have beat twice this season. Very close battles. Tomorrow is going to be another big battle. How are you going to prepare for that? Obviously a late night tonight. How are you going to turn the page and get ready for Memphis tomorrow morning.

COACH HUNTER: Every kid is going to come into my room, and I'm going to give them a bathtub, a scrub-down, cooldown. But they come into my room and make sure I rub them down, make them feel really good, have a glass of wine and a beer on each hand, and make sure we get ready. That's the way you get ready for games inside of 16, 17 hours. I can't wait to rub them down and get my boy ready here.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

