

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Wichita State Shockers

Coach Isaac Brown

Craig Porter Jr.

James Rojas

Postgame Press Conference

Tulane - 82, Wichita State - 76

COACH BROWN: First, I want to give Tulane all the credit. They played a great game tonight. They came out and made shots early, jumped out to a good lead. I thought we battled back in the first half when the score was 46-40. But we just didn't defend well enough in the first half. In the second half I thought both teams defended. We didn't make enough shots. We came up short. But I want to thank these two guys right here. They are the foundation of the program. They did a great job this year. You know, ten new faces. For these two guys right here, we wouldn't be in the position we were in this year if it wasn't for these two guys. James Rojas, transfer from Alabama. Committed to us without even taking a visit. He wanted to be a part of Shocker Basketball. And he got better and better every day. He went from averaging 6 points a game in the first 14 games to averaging around 14. Craig Porter Jr., he was the leader in the locker room, extension of the head coach. He did a tremendous job running this basketball. I want to commend these guys. James Rojas has already got his degree. Craig Porter, have his this semester. Isaiah Poor Bear-Chandler, another senior, will have his degree. Gus Okafor already got his degree. And these guys are the perfect example I want the young athletes to strive for. Not just basketball but being better men and being better off the floor.

THE MODERATOR: Open up to questions.

Q. Coach, you guys have been so good at finishing at the rim, in the paint for the last two months now, and tonight I think now it was 30% at the rim. Had to be frustrating. Just feel like a lot of bunnies weren't going in that have been going in?



COACH BROWN: Yeah, I thought we missed a lot of shots at the rim tonight. Started in the first half. We talked about it. I think we missed 8 layups. I thought they did a great job of jumping straight up without fouling. In the second half, we missed some more layups. And that was the difference in the game. Give them all the credit. They came out, they were on fire early, our guys battled. But we normally make those shots. The last ten games of the year we made those shots, and tonight we weren't able to make them.

Q. What did you do to make up for that? Just resilience. What did you see from the team the shots normally were going in weren't going in. What did you guys do to make up for it?

COACH BROWN: They kept fighting. They have been fighting all yearlong. We lost some close games early. They came to practice every day with high character ready to fight. These two guys did a tremendous job in the locker room not allowing guys to point fingers. And then at the second half, that's what they did. They started defending, rebounding, playing with toughness, and we came up short tonight.

Q. Craig, just a few minutes ago Coach Hunter called you one of the best three to four guards in the AAC and said he was going to send you potentially a graduation gift because he was happy to not play against you after your performance tonight. Overall hearing that, how do you feel about a compliment like that from a coach like Ron Hunter?

CRAIG PORTER JR.: You know, with a team like that and a coach like that, it means the world. I praise him and his team. He's a great coach. I can't really say much more than that. I just appreciate competing against him my three years here. It meant the world. That comment, it makes me happy.

Q. Coach, I would like to get your thoughts on a comment like that from Ron Hunter. Compliments Craig on being one of the top three to four guards in the conference, setting it's gonna send him a little

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graduation gift because he was happy he didn't have to play against them again.

COACH BROWN: I see it. I'm happy Coach said that. And he's being honest. He is one of the top guards in our league. He did a tremendous job this year. He's the first player in Shocker history to have six games with 6 assists or more. He's the first player -- the second player in 52 years to have a triple-double. Ron Hunter was right on when he made those comments.

Q. Coach, you were in the game the whole way in the second half. You just feel like you couldn't make that one shot that may have turned the tide?

COACH BROWN: Yeah, I think that was the difference in the game. We cut the lead to one point and we had three straight possessions where we couldn't score the basketball and that was the difference in the game. I think had we made that basket, it would have been a difference. But they did a tremendous job defending at the rim so give them a lot of credit.

Q. James, kind of playing off of that. Calls that have been going your guys' way, shots that have been going in. Feel like those things weren't happening tonight?

JAMES ROJAS: I mean, shots obviously weren't falling. We still played with the same effort we do every single game. Second half, we definitely picked it up. Shots just weren't falling our way. We never gave up. We still stayed in the game and defended. But at the end of the day, we never gave up and kept on going.

Q. I know this year meant a lot to you to be able to showcase everything that you have been able to do. What's this last year at Wichita State -- I know it's just been one year. How much has it meant for them to give you a chance and then give you a chance at playing time too?

JAMES ROJAS: Yeah, it was a blessing. I was at Alabama, you know, I didn't put up many stats. Never was healthy. Coach Brown gave me the confidence, just go play basketball again. So I mean, I appreciate him, just giving me a shot to play my game again. I appreciate that.

Q. Craig, obviously you have had a tremendous three-year career here. What's going through your mind after this? Going through your mind tonight?

CRAIG PORTER JR.: I mean, I'm just proud of everything we did this year. I feel like we had a lot of doubters coming into this year, more than we had supporters. So really for

us to finish the way we did, I couldn't be anything more than proud. These guys dealt with everything there is possibly to deal with it. For us to even get to the point we're at, like I said, I couldn't be more proud.

Q. Coach, the last two months you guys have, you know, displayed a lot of progress, especially on offense. What's it been like for you to see a group like this -- so many newcomers come together, progress, it doesn't end the way you want it to. What's going through your mind after this?

COACH BROWN: Coming into it, I felt like we had one of the youngest teams in the league. When you think about new faces, we had ten new guys. Only two guys that came back, one starter. And those guys made tremendous strides. They got better and better every day in practice. We started conference 0-3, and I think we finished 9-6 in the last 15 games. And we're able to go on the road and win some games, and I think that's a sign of a good basketball team, and it started with the leadership from our seniors.

THE MODERATOR: Wichita State, thank you.