

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Cincinnati Bearcats Coach Wes Miller Ody Oguama David DeJulius

Postgame Press Conference



Houston - 69, Cincinnati - 48

COACH MILLER: Yeah, first off tip the hat to Houston. It was not our best shooting night. Thought we turned it over a little early, thought we missed shots early, we didn't share in transition early. And we certainly it was a tough night not to make your free throws. Outside of the free throw shooting -- you know, because that's on us -- give Houston credit for making it difficult. Obviously the number one ranked team in the country for a reason. And they are a difficult team to score on. It was a tough night for us, because we didn't score and we didn't defend well. So, you know, that's how you get that lopsided margin. When you're in these positions and you lose in the Conference Tournament, especially knowing we're not going to be in the NCAA Tournament, you feel for the guys that have no eligibility, and that's the first thing I always think about as a coach. And Dave DeJulius, and Kalu Ezikpe, and Rob whose year ended prematurely, you feel for those guys. As I told them, I hope we put ourselves in a position to keep playing. We find that out tomorrow night when the NIT bracket comes out. Down, frustrated. I know these guys are, too. It's been a year where you're proud as a coach of how your team has responded over and over again. And I liked the way we responded coming out in the second half tonight. I thought they came out -- I knew they would -- came out and played their hearts out to try to come back in the game. We dug a pretty good hole and it wasn't quite enough.

Q. Coach, it seemed like you had a lot of confidence after yesterday's game. What was the mentality from your perspective heading into this and maybe the response when Houston jumped out to that early lead?

COACH MILLER: Yeah. The preparation was good. The kids were really locked in film last night. Conference Tournament. You don't have a lot of time to go through a lot. We played them twice. I think especially at Houston, I think our guys felt like we can not just play with them, but we're capable of beating them. So I felt we good coming in. As you mentioned, didn't get off to a good start, some defensive breakdowns. They make a couple tough ones, we struggled on the board to start the game. You finally get them to miss a couple and then you give up offensive rebound put-backs and a couple open floor opportunities where you have advantages early, and we don't make the right decision, turn the ball over, don't convert. And that digs a hole. And this group has never been a group to lay down, so you know we'd kind of find a way to rally back and we at times. But, again just a big margin to make up at halftime for sure.

Q. How difficult is it to prepare for Houston in that short period of time? I mean, like you mentioned they are the top team. And it seemed like those guys have three arms, each of them.

COACH MILLER: It's tournament play in March. Everybody is dealing with the same thing. You got one-day preps. You are playing a team for the third time. No, that's not what it's about. It's not about that. Listen, it didn't break our way tonight. We didn't shoot it well. I think we're 7/15 from the free-throw line on the first half. We had trouble securing the ball and holding on to the ball and silly turnovers. I don't think that's preparation. Again, give Houston credit. I'm not making excuses. But I don't think it's our guys weren't prepared. We've played them twice now. And I thought we had a good game plan and good execution playing them down at their place. That's just tournament play. And it was a tough night to have a shooting night like we did. And our ball security wasn't good. And it kind of snowballed on us a little bit.

Q. Coach, last time these two teams played, Jarace Walker dominated in the paint. Tonight it was J'Wan Roberts. What made him so difficult for him going early tonight, made it a difficult match-up?

COACH MILLER: He's difficult. He's really good getting to



his left hand, he's really good in the pocket versus some of our drop coverages and our ball screen stuff. Again, we struggled with that. And we played them at Houston, we struggled with that again tonight. He got us on the glass. I can't remember. I looked down at his numbers, he had 2 offensive rebounds. He was effective on the board too.

Q. David, I'm sure that's not the past couple of games that you would have liked to have to end the season. What was your emotions going through at the end of the game there on the bench?

DAVID DEJULIUS: It was a mixture of emotions. Half of the emotions were me just taking accountability. I wish I would have played a lot better. I feel like we had a great game plan going in. We had a great film session as Coach said last night. And we had a great and extended walkthrough today and everyone was locked in and focused. I wish I would have played better for sure because my team needed it. I take full responsibility in that regard. Then the other half is appreciation. Appreciation to be able to play for a great coaching staff that believe in me and great teammates who believed in me, and to be a part of something bigger than me. I'm just excited for the future of this program.

Q. Dave, can you talk about your growth under these past few years under Coach Wes?

DAVID DEJULIUS: Like night and day. I did a full 180. That's a credit to Coach Wes and his coaching staff. They believed in me. I told this story a couple of times. I think we were playing Miami Ohio. Not this season, but the past season. And he pulled me in the ballroom along and told me how much he believed in me. And told me he would be there through the ups and downs and through the failures. He is a man of his word in that regard. I most definitely wouldn't be the player or person without Coach Wes and the coaching staff or this team. Great to be a part of this place and the great city of Cincinnati. Going to continue to try to pay it forward because they gave me a lot.

Q. It's not what you were after, NIT bid. That is something I'm sure you would like to have one more game after tonight or more.

DAVID DEJULIUS: Always sucks to end that way. Whatever is supposed to happen will happen. And we'll go from there. The future of the program will be great no matter what.

Q. Coach, how would you assess the season so far for you guys?

COACH MILLER: Well, I just am proud. I'm proud of our

team and proud of our guys. You always want more. I mean, you are Cincinnati and the standard is to play in the NCAA Tournament. There's no escaping that. But with that aside, you know, you're proud. You're proud of the way this group has responded time and again. And it's kind of like echoing David's remarks. It says so much about the people in that locker room and the guys that show up to practice every day. You know, like, David -- I'm not just saying it because he's sitting up here. His leadership and his resilience and toughness, this season could be a disappointment in so many ways and it hasn't been. It's something I'm proud of. It says a lot about those guys. It says a lot about these guys to my left, and specifically David, he's been the leader of this group. This group has responded to him all year, and that's why we've kept fighting. There was times it looked difficult, especially early in the year we would lose John and Rob and we finally figure it out a little bit, then and Vik and Rob go down within a 4-minute segment of Tulane. And this group kind of just kept coming. Do I want to be playing in the NCAA Tournament? Yes. Probably a couple games -- we've lost some really close games. We have been in some close games against teams that will be in that event. We are probably a couple wins away from being seriously considered, so you are disappointed about that. But you are proud of the guys you are coaching. And proud of what you have done.

Q. Coach, Ody got better as the season progressed. Can you talk about their development under Coach Roberts.

COACH MILLER: Ody's improvement is remarkable. Sometimes when you sit in a press conference and talk about guys' growth and improvement, you feel bad singling one guy out because there's so many guys in our program that have grown on and off the floor. But Ody's improvement is absolutely remarkable. I think he would tell you -- we had a meeting at the end of the season last year and we talked about -- we needed to be a better defensive team when he was on the floor. Because of his role threat we were a better offensive team and his offensive rebounding. And he's turned into one of the premier defensive guys in our program and in this league. It's amazing. He went from the guy we were worried about a year ago to the guy we put on the best matchup on the front court every night, whether that's a perimeter-oriented swingman, to a big strong center. I think early in the year he had some offensive whoas and the way he has corrected it, it's remarkable. I'm really proud of it. And I'm proud of the way he competes every night. He competes night in and night out with anybody that he matches up with. And that improvement has meant a lot to our program, along with Vik's. It's been documented pretty well, from last year to this year.



Q. Coach, looking at these first couple seasons for you in Cincinnati, how do you reflect upon what you are building and the things that have gone right up until this point?

COACH MILLER: Guys, I appreciate the question. Reflecting is hard for me right now. Like I told the guys in the locker room, I'm still hoping we're playing basketball. My focus is on this team. We'll reflect whenever we're done. If they say we are done, we'll be done. I'm hoping tomorrow night we get a bid in the NIT and we are still playing basketball and when this is over we'll reflect. I'm proud of this group and proud of what they have done this year, and I hope we earned the right to keep playing.

Q. Quick follow up to that. What you can say about the two guys representing the team next to you. What it's been to have their leadership this season and to have the opportunity at more life at hopefully an NIT bid.

COACH MILLER: Yeah. It's difficult as a player and as a coach. I mean, we all want to play in the NCAA Tournament. And again, we understand that we're not on the bubble or anything of that nature. So we're playing this weekend to play in the tournament. So we lose today when you could kind of see some light to that, you know, like, that's hard. Right now we're still processing this loss. We're still down about this loss, and I think these guys are too. If they get a chance to play again they are going to be excited. As far as these two guys, I mean, come on. I've said it in every press conference I can speak in. David DeJulius is the reason this program is still standing. I mean, people told me -- and I've told him -- I don't know if I even told him this. A handful of people told me not to keep him. We have been who we have been. And we have been damn competitive. And this program was in a bad spot a couple of years ago. We have been who the heck we have been because David and others have said we're going to fight. We're going to fight. He could have left. I wasn't the guy who recruited him. He had options to leave. He could have left after last year and he stayed with it. Incredibly proud of him we'll reflect more on that when it's over. I think he still has basketball left. I know him. He's not going to be happy with the way he played as he said. He will respond. Ody Oguama, come on, we talked about his improvement and his leadership is by example. Every day he works, he doesn't complain, whatever we ask him to do as a team he does it. His role, his skill set. He's playing forward now. He was playing center last year. It's amazing, his development. His leadership has been by example. He's a guy everybody can look up the way he approaches it every day, as does David.

THE MODERATOR: Cincinnati, thank you.

