

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Washington, DC, USA

Wes Unseld Jr.

Media Conference



Wizards 137, Pacers 123

Q. How were you guys able to take control in the second quarter?

WES UNSELD JR.: Well, I thought we came out in the first quarter and had great energy. That snowball effect of playing the right way, playing with the right energy. The ball was moving. I think our guys really bought into some of the schematic things we laid out, and they took hold of it.

Just high deflections, I think we were scrambling around and kept them off balance a little bit.

Against that type of team, you have to live with some of it, but I thought we did a really good job of just pursuing. Even when the coverage wasn't 100 percent correct, just flying around and covering for each other.

Q. It may have been Jordan's best game of the year, at least offensively. What did you think of his night?

WES UNSELD JR.: I thought he was terrific. Make or miss shots, that's one thing. He's put stretches together. But to see him get the payoff, us get the win I think is terrific. I think he was well-balanced, poised, facilitated, made the right reads, kept us organized, and I thought he really defended at a high rate.

It's a tough cover guarding Buddy Hield.

Q. A lot of nice offensive performances tonight. Tyus had a triple-double --

WES UNSELD JR.: Second career triple-double. That is news.

Q. Obviously had a lot of kind of long mysteries to work with on the rebounds, but what did you like from him tonight?

WES UNSELD JR.: Yeah, just guarding Haliburton is tough for anybody, and yes, they missed some shots maybe they ordinarily make, but I thought we made them

miss, too. I thought Tyus was really good at pursuing and kind of mixing his coverages, routes, keeping them off balance, didn't allow them to play with cover and a level of freedom that I think most guards like to play with. I thought they kept them off balance.

Q. You got a standing ovation from the crowd up there, Corey was dancing with three minutes left. How needed was this win?

WES UNSELD JR.: Oh, much needed. We all know what we've been through during that stretch, and to see us play the way we've played and get the win I think is terrific.

But we played the right way, and it's not just because we made shots. I thought we had really good stretches defensively, did some good things, and we were playing for each other. You could tell by the way the guys responded throughout the game to individual plays, but high assist night, and that connectivity I think is going to take us a long way.

Q. You said that for a few close games you had to learn from these games, learn from these losses. Was there a turning point during a practice or watching film or something like that that --

WES UNSELD JR.: I think there's probably several moments. It's been a while since we've been able to get a W. But to our guys' credit, they never lose faith in what we're doing. That takes a level of maturity and character which is oftentimes hard to come by.

But you get kind of mired into it's not going well, let's change it. To their credit, it's we're doing some really good things. We're not seeing the benefit right now, but the internal metrics that we're tracking, some of the things that we're measuring, we're seeing improvement. So just stay the course, continue to do what we think is right, and it'll turn. So I think tonight was a great example of that.

Q. It felt like Jordan was playing more point guard tonight than he has previously, especially to start the

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second quarter with that first five-man unit that went out there and they outscored them 22-5 to start the quarter. What did you think of his play at the 1?

WES UNSELD JR.: I thought he was really good. He was well-balanced, picked his spots to attack and play make, kept us organized, and I think that's something we've seen in stints. He had it going, so he let it go.

To his credit, he kept us well-organized.

Q. I know you started with Tyus on Tyrese, but when Bilal checked into the game, he often drew that assignment. How did you think he did in those minutes?

WES UNSELD JR.: He was good. These are all lessons. Some of it is -- some are hard lessons, but it's going to help him. It's a different guy every night, different type of player, some more dynamic than others, some a little stronger, play downhill, others more finesse, can stretch the floor and shoot the three. But that's a tough cover for anybody. I think using his length and the way they cut, move and make plays off the ball, as soon as they pass it, that's when they're at their most dangerous. Slipping in and out of coverage, very difficult to defend.

To his credit, he did a pretty good job.

Q. I know Bilal's confidence has been something that's been talked a lot about since he first stepped foot into the building, but do you feel that's even grown even more at this point? It feels like he's more confident somehow than he was --

WES UNSELD JR.: I'm not going to answer for him, but he looks that way, and I think he's starting to see the benefit of a lot of the work he puts in. You see the trust that it's garnered from his teammates, so I think that's validation.

Q. On the subject of Bilal, he had another poster dunk tonight. Is that something you knew was going to be like a thing, or is that kind of surprising that he's attacking the rim --

WES UNSELD JR.: Not at all. I think that's one of the things we noticed early. Imploring him to play downhill was just one of those things we talked about in September. He's gotten more comfortable rebounding, getting the kick ahead or outlet, attacking the open floor, making the right play, as well as getting downhill and trying to finish those plays.

Hopefully we'll see more of it, but I think that's one of those things he can lean in on.

Q. You guys won the rebounding battle tonight. I know that's been something that's been harped on for weeks. What went right on the glass, and how big is it to win the rebound battle going forward?

WES UNSELD JR.: It's huge. It's a barometer for success around the league. Those teams that win the rebounding battle, there's a high percentage of positive outcome. We've talked about it all season. It's not just our bigs. Tonight case in point with Tyus grabbing 10 rebounds, I think eight in the second half.

It takes everybody, and volume three-point shooting team, so we know there's a lot of long misses. Some of those balls are getting batted around. It's loose change for our smalls to scoop up, but those are needed.

Q. You talked about the growth of Corey, not just being a shooter but able to drive to the basket, finish with power --

WES UNSELD JR.: Yeah, he's done a really good job of adding another dimension to his game. He's not just a shooter. That's kind of his calling card, and I think because of that, he knew going into the season that he's going to have to work on playing off the bounce. Teams are going to run him off the line, try to keep him from shooting threes, how do you impact the offense in other ways, so puts it down, he's very under control, has really worked on his footwork, his finishing, specifically with his offhand, and to your point, he's showing more power finishing through contact and above defenders.

So I think it's just another iteration of his development, and hopefully it continues that way.

Q. What was the key to making sure the 19 turnovers weren't a problem? How did you work around those?

WES UNSELD JR.: Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good. But none of those turnovers -- a lot of those turnovers were not typical for us. I think some of the turnovers were turnovers of aggression, which are okay, and I think guys are looking to make plays for each other. We've seen it at times where it's a spacing issue and other dynamics, but I think when you anchor yourself in the defense, and I thought all game we did a pretty good job of allowing our defense to transition and getting us out and running, so we were able to get the benefit of getting stops. I think that allows you to absorb some of those miscues on offense.

Q. Picking up this win now before this West Coast swing, how big is it to have it now, and how big do you

think it could be to help you guys continue this momentum and build on this?

WES UNSELD JR.: Yeah, hopefully it does. I think we were in need of a win badly. Winning cures the soul. But it's one game, so hopefully this allows us to take some of those lessons, take some of those examples, those positive examples that we'll see tonight on film, carry them with us, of course, on this trip. We have a lot of tough teams on this trip.

We need the same energy, same focus, and hopefully we can play with the same tempo. Whether we make shots or not, I think if we have the ability to approach the game with the same mindset, we'll give ourselves a chance.

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