

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Coach Brian Keefe

Media Conference



Wizards 129, Hawks 126

BRIAN KEEFE: Bilal. Let's just talk about Bilal first, his imprint on the game. All over the place defensively, steals, blocks, deflections. Made obviously the big play late, but he did it from the very beginning, and that's what we talked about as a group. We talked about this before the game and you guys a little bit.

We were 3 for 19 in the first half from three. Didn't stop us from guarding, defending, hustling, scrapping. Sometimes you have to grind out games in the NBA. We grinded that one out because of our defense, and Bilal was the head of that for sure tonight.

Q. What specifically did you think made Bilal as effective as he was defensively there? Was it technique? Was it effort?

BRIAN KEEFE: He used his gifts that he has, but it was also his mentality. No possessions off, contested every pass, every dribble, every shot, pressured their main player. I thought it was just a terrific all-around effort from him, and it wasn't about scoring. It was just -- he was doing what his job was necessary to help us win the game, and then he obviously made a couple plays there late. Made a big three. But it was his defense that set the tone for the whole team.

Q. What did you think was key to the comeback there? You guys were trailing, I think, 16 midway through that third quarter.

BRIAN KEEFE: Team win. Look at our bench, what they did, the contributions of all the guys that came in, Tristan, Cam, JC, Bub. I don't know what the total points they had, but I think it was pretty high. They all contributed, and they sustained us going to the fourth quarter, got us back in the game. I thought those guys were terrific both halves tonight. It was a total team win. Nice job by those guys.

Q. Going back to Bilal and his defense on Giannis,

and I know when it comes to a player of that magnitude, it's not just a one-on-one matchup that you speak to, but his ability and mindset tonight seemed different than what we've seen in the past. It almost seemed like he took this a little bit more personal in the sense of, like, I'm going to make it as difficult as possible on you tonight, and then subsequently fouling him out of the game on that play. Where has his mindset shift come from, especially in these last five or six games?

BRIAN KEEFE: He's just getting his rhythm. He's getting back. He missed the whole preseason with us, all the training in September. He's just kind of getting his rhythm back. But that's what he's capable of doing. He's done that in multiple games here lately.

Tonight he was the one who put the imprint on the game to get everybody going, and you saw it from the very get-go. It was really impressive performance by him.

Q. From an offensive standpoint, the way that the others, if you will, you mentioned Bub, JC, Cam, the way they just kind of maintained composure throughout, knowing if we can get it to the fourth quarter and we're close, the OGs in a way can help us take it over the edge, what does that resiliency look like, especially from a defensive mindset; you were down 16 in the third quarter?

BRIAN KEEFE: We just played possession by possession. We just focused on the next thing that was in front of us, and I give all the guys credit. They stayed focused on what their job was to do, calling out the coverage, executing the game plan, and then we kept trusting with the pass.

We were just missing some shots that were great shots in the first half. We said, the tide will turn, just keep defending. That showed good resilience on us that not every game is perfect in the NBA. It just doesn't work that way. Our guys stayed with it, and they stayed with their mentality really defensively to keep us in that game.

But great contributions by everybody tonight.

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Q. To the point about the OGs, Khris and CJ, especially in the last three minutes, hit some very tough shots off of what looked like maybe broken plays. Can you speak to their tough shot-making ability in situations like that?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think we could have a highlight reel for about 20 minutes of those guys doing that throughout their career. That's what they've been doing for a long time. Those guys are great players. Great players make great plays. We're really lucky to have both of those guys within our organization.

Q. I asked you about it pregame and you mentioned briefly Marvin and Tristan specifically taking over front court duties. Can you take appraisal of their performance?

BRIAN KEEFE: I mean, look at their production tonight. Look at what they did on the court. Contributions on both ends of the floor, defensively, offensively, offensive boards by Marvin, obviously, the scoring. I think they had 38 between them. Pretty good.

Q. You guys were down by seven, got a bunch of offensive rebounds. What were Justin Champagnie and Marvin Bagley doing that you were able to --

BRIAN KEEFE: That's what -- Justin Champagnie is one of the best rebounders for his position in the league offensively, and Marvin has been doing this his whole career. That's what their strengths are, but I thought they even had a little extra tonight. Those guys were terrific.

Q. It seemed like Cam Whitmore had a pretty mature approach to this game, too, picking his spots. How does his performance speak to the strides he's made since joining the Wizards?

BRIAN KEEFE: Like I said before, he's grown, too. This is only his third year in the league. We act like he's been around for a long time. No, this is new for him, and he's with a new team. I think he's doing a great job of adjusting to our environment and been terrific in how he works and how he gets after his craft, and he's just getting used to playing with his teammates. Every game he's growing and learning how to play with these guys. Obviously big contributions from him tonight on both sides of the ball. I was really pleased with him tonight.

Q. Even if Kyshawn didn't have as many points as Marvin did, what can you say to Kyshawn's ability to keep the big man towards the end there?

BRIAN KEEFE: I thought it was great. Kyshawn didn't have one of his better offensive games. He'd be the first to admit that. But what he did late in that game showed unbelievable growth. He made some of those great dump-off passes, got in the paint, simple little passes to Marvin. He kept the scoreboard moving for us in the crunch. It wasn't just CJ and Khris. He was handling and making plays. From having a little bit of a tough struggle offensively, he ended up having three or four big assists down the stretch of the game that were huge. Big deal. When things aren't going well, what are you going to do? And he just hit the stride late in the game, and he stayed with it. It was terrific.

Q. Giannis obviously an imposing threat for the Bucks. What was the key to maneuvering around him in this game?

BRIAN KEEFE: You don't stop great players like this. These guys are a handful. There's a reason these guys are MVPs, champions. We just tried to make it as difficult as we can. I thought our guys battled, tried to make things contested. I think we took a couple charges on him which we talked about before the game. You just try to make it as hard as you can, and I think obviously Bilal was the one who started that.

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