

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Coach Brian Keefe Media Conference



Clippers 110, Wizards 106

Q. What did you see on the offensive rebound that was given up on the missed free throw by Harden there in the second half?

BRIAN KEEFE: Give them credit. We just didn't execute our coverage on the box-out. They beat us to a loose ball. Give them credit.

Q. What did you see on your shot selection down two, I think it was probably 10 seconds left to go, Bub passed up a transition three --

BRIAN KEEFE: Oh, great shot. To got two great shots -- executed a two-for-one. Kyshawn got a great shot. We came down, we trapped, they missed, and we got a transition three, which was perfect. We didn't want to call a time-out. We trust our guys. We had an advantage, and Kyshawn got an open three. He's going to make a bunch of those in his career. Good shot.

Q. What can you say about the value of getting your young players in those situations, whether the shots go in or not?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, great lessons the last two games. Really proud of guys. The Wiz came back off a trip, one day off, early game, and our guys put it on the line, and we got in these situations, and there's so many things to learn, so many things to do. We have to execute, and we're playing guys -- we talked pregame, this is the ninth leading scorer in NBA history we played against tonight and all the different coverages we threw at him, and I thought we executed a lot of them. Good stuff to learn about defensive execution and offensive execution down the stretch. These were really invaluable for our guys, and it's great to be in them.

Q. We saw Alex get off to a hot start against two big men that have made all-defense before. What did you like about his game tonight?

BRIAN KEEFE: It was a mixture of putting pressure on the rim and then obviously stretching the floor with his shooting ability. That's a unique presence, and that's something he's continued to grow with. It makes it hard to guard.

Q. Of late, your team has competed a lot deeper into games. It's not leading to wins, but what is leading to them competing at a higher level and being able to stay in games and have a chance to win games?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it's just the growth of our team, realizing the formula that works for us. We can see our defense is definitely improving. Even though they had that high free-throw rate tonight, I think it was like a 112 defensive rating. Those are going to keep you in games.

Then we're making good reads with our passing and our offense, so we're learning to play with each other without one of our better passing games tonight. So those two things, and then just the resiliency of our group, learning how to play through tough times. There's tough times in every game, and for a young team, I think we had to go through some of those lessons early, and those things and stacking those and reviewing them, talking about them, coming back the next day, I think those things are all paying off now.

Q. With Alex, he's obviously shown the ability to block shots, change shots. At the ends of games, how does he put his fingerprints on a game defensively when it's a guy like Harden who's great at getting fouls, great at getting to the line and is very crafty?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, those are all part of it, right. That's what he's learning. Just having his presence on the floor alone just deters shots. You can never underestimate how many shots are not -- people are out driving him because they know he's down there. His ability to switch, his ability -- you saw him trapping the ball tonight, forcing him to make passes off that. He's got a real unique skill set for a big that can really imprint the game at all times, and especially in the fourth.

Q. You mentioned free throws. Harden had 20. How do young players learn to guard a vet like that who's so good at getting to the line?

BRIAN KEEFE: Some of it you've got to go through it. He's done this for a very long time. You have to feel what that feels like. You don't know that until you're out there in the fire of the competition and the pressure of the moments. That's why this stuff is all great.

Jamir Watkins, he's only guarded him one time. That's the first time he's got out there to get him. Those are all things you've got to go through. You learn from this, you grow from this. You could see this with Bilal. Bilal is in his third year now, and he's much improved in all these things because he went through the fire, and that's something we believe in here as an organization.

Q. Kyshawn had six turnovers, I believe. Part of that I'm sure is residual from any increased ball handling, but how does he clean that up going forward?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it's also the respect teams are putting on him. They game planned for him tonight. Two on the ball, trying to crowd every time he had it. Those are good lessons part of it, too. What are they going to do, he's had a couple good games in a row. I know their staff; they were prepared for him. Every time he came off a pick-and-roll, he was seeing a crowd. I thought he had some really good moments, but that's part of it. When you're a handler you're going to have to make a lot of decisions. Usually the guys who lead the league in turnovers are the guys who have the ball the best, and some of the guys who lead the league in assists. This is all part of it for him, and we're going to keep using him like that.

Q. It feels like you're trending in the right direction in terms of turnovers the last three games. Today 19, I think 12 in the second half. What did you make of the ball security today?

BRIAN KEEFE: Give them credit; they do a good job of that, physical. I thought their second unit came in and really set the tone a little bit, kind of late third, early fourth, we had a little bit of a turnover stretch.

But like I said, these are part of the lessons. I felt like we actually had a really good passing game, but they had a little string there, but our guys responded after that, and we kept making the right play to give ourselves a chance and an opportunity to win at the end.

Q. You spent a lot of time with Harden throughout his career early on. What are some of the things you took

away from watching him grow as a player that you can also apply to your players here in Washington?

BRIAN KEEFE: You know, every player is different, but I think the things that kind of stay the test of time is the work. I was very lucky to be around a lot of great players in my career. He was one of them. It's not an accident with these guys. They've worked their tails off, and they do it all the time, every day, and are consistent with it. It kind of leads to you having consistency in this league, which I think is the hardest thing to do. It's a tough league, and I think if we can always have those things and can learn from other guys and imprint that into ours, I think that's the biggest takeaways from some of the guys I've worked with.

Q. You spoke about Bilal. Every player has something to work on. What is something you think Bilal has to work on to take his game to the next level?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think Bilal is growing. The defense is even improving. He's one of the elite on-ball defenders in the league in terms of his metrics, and we're letting him initiate offense quite a bit, which I think he's doing a good job. We missed him out there tonight, but I like his growth.

Q. You mentioned how Jamir answered the call. What are some of the ways he's improved as a defender?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think you saw the last couple games, he has an imprint when he comes in the game. This is a first-year player who does some really unique things, fighting over screens and using his physicality. He's learning all these different things on the fly, and he's pretty advanced for a guy who's only probably played about 25 games for us. We're going to keep putting him out there because I think these are great situations for him to grow from. We have a lot of potential with him, and we think he's going to be an elite defender.

Q. You mentioned he's advanced. He's also only 23, 24. You feel when he came in that he was already a step ahead as far as maturity goes compared to most young guys?

BRIAN KEEFE: Probably a little bit. Definitely physically and probably mentally he's played a lot of games, so that's an advantage for him. But he's also physically very strong, too, so I think both those things have helped him.

Q. Tonight Bub became the eighth player before 21 in NBA history with 500 plus rebounds and 500 plus assists. Being as young as he is and carrying the load that he has, not missing a game, what does it say about his ability to grow within the game but as well to grow within the system that you have been running,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

whether he is coming off the bench or starting?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think Bub speaks of consistency when you think of Bub. You can count on him. He's going to be in the lineup, and he's going to do the things that he does well. Rebounding is one of them. We know about the passing already, but he's always been a good defensive rebounder. I'm not surprised by that stat. It's nice to hear.

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