

Washington Wizards Media Conference

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Coach Brian Keefe

Media Conference



Wizards 115, Trail Blazers 111

Q. Coach, two-part question. Can you take me through defensively the last possession where Jamir was guarding Shaedon Sharpe? And part two, can you talk about how important defense is to the overall the game tonight?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, I'll answer that in a second. That's a good one. But I thought this game was really about -- I like that you asked a defensive question. This was a defensive win: 15 steals, ten blocks. I think that hadn't been done since 1987. 42 disruptions, which is what we count them as like steals, blocks, deflections, offensive fouls committed.

Our activity, we went small there at the end of the third, tried a different lineup, and our guys were flying; Malaki, Jamir, JC, they got us back in the game because we were struggling in that little stretch.

I think that's a good development for our team that we can try different things, go with different lineups. Went small; the activity brought up and then we finished the game, like you said, the last couple possessions, and obviously a great stop by Jamir at the end. That's why he's here. That's what he's capable of.

But we won because of our defense.

Q. I think it's fair to call it a chippier game than average. Do you like seeing that kind of fire and intensity, guys being more physical and active vocally?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think that's what we been doing here lately. That's the nature of how games are. You got to embrace the competition. They're a big, physical team. I thought we answered that very strongly.

Q. You mentioned the steals and the blocks as well, too. Tony was filling in for Drew and he mentioned

Alex's ability to do it on the move. How has that evolved for him and why is it so beneficial to the way you guys do defend?

BRIAN KEEFE: His ability to execute multiple coverages is throughout the game. We had him up high on the pick and rolls early to start the game. We had him switching on guards, and he's just roaming around there covering every drive into the paint.

Like it's a really unique skillset he has and we're continuing to get better with things that we can put him in.

But that's a unique player. He does unique things.

Q. In the game where they out-rebounded you as much as they did, I know that was a point of emphasis going into that for you, was just trying to limit what they were doing on the glass. How much did the guys have to just find that fight within to just, okay, that might be the one area they beat us on, but we can't let them beat us A, B, and C, and that's where we have to pick it up a notch?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, that possession game is a big game, big thing in the NBA. They hurt us on the boards but we turned them over, and then I think the last few minutes of the game they didn't rebound and we cleaned all those up.

So like there are lessons within the game that you can learn and I thought we really answered that in the fourth quarter. They only had 24 I believe, is that right?

Yeah.

We finished with a defensive quarter and that's what we kept talking about, we're going to win this game with our defense, and that's what happened.

Q. I know there was a lot going into this just with the rising stars and the timing of it. Your three rising stars had great performances. Does that kind of solidify them getting the nod and also too making sure that



people are understanding the growth and confidence that they're playing with right now?

BRIAN KEEFE: You know, I think the biggest thing is the reasons those guys got into those games, and we talked about this with our whole team, is they just focus on the process. So like I wasn't -- I mean, that happened last night. We acknowledged them. That was great. We always want to celebrate our guys.

They had a basketball game to play tonight and they prepared like they always do. I think those are good lessons because you're going to have lots of things happen throughout your career. You know, some really positives stuff like that, but you got to go play the game. I thought our guys stepped up and played the game tonight and that was really good.

Q. What did you like about how your team executed down the stretch offensively?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, pretty good. Really we had the one possession I didn't love, but other than that, we got some good shots. We scored on a couple. Bub hit a bit shot to cut to one and then we really got stops. You know, you think about Kyshawn -- we got a steal, Kyshawn goes in for a fast break, we got a stop, they got a foul.

So sometimes it's not always going to be pretty offensively, but the game can get really physical on both teams.

But like I said, two of those possessions we scored on because we started with our defense.

Q. What was your message to your players immediately in the locker room after the game?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it was what we started the fourth quarter, talked about we're going to win this game by getting stops, and I said that's what we did. That's where we're continuing to grow. Like you want your defense to carry -- those are the things you want to be able to do down late stretches of a game. Can you get stops? Can you execute the game plan?

I thought our guys did a really terrific job with that.

Q. How much better is Alex's motor now compared to what it was when he -- in training camp of his rookie year?

BRIAN KEEFE: I think it's more consistent. Always thought he had a good motor. You got to learn the NBA and going through the fire like I've mentioned before.

He's just learning to do it consistently now. And he's kind of experienced a lot of things. He's still got some more experiences to come, like they all do because they're young guys.

But it's just his consistency has been growing and that's the thing that's been very impressive this year.

Q. Coach, can you speak to the team's growth, instances in general throughout the season?

BRIAN KEEFE: Yeah, I think we talked about this. We've been in a lot of those close games lately and these are great lessons for us because the margins are thin and you want to be able to execute on both ends. Like even tonight we had to execute to win the game, defensive things.

There were -- they have a need to where they need to score, we get the stop; we're up four. We're talking about switching, not fouling. We execute that.

Those little things matter and we always review those things, we look at those things, but to be in them is the best way to learn and that's the most important thing.

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