

UConn Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, November 6, 2024
Storrs, Connecticut, USA

Head Coach Dan Hurley Men's Basketball Press Conference



UConn 92, Sacred Heart 56

DAN HURLEY: Don't have probably a long opening statement. Impressed with Sacred Heart. I was impressed really watching them in particular. You know, I don't know if I'm allowed to say that. It might be an NCAA violation, so I'll skip that.

Temple, just watching them at Temple was impressed with them and the way they played. Out-rebounded Temple and had a chance to win what would have been a really nice road game for them. I think they'll be pretty good in the MAC this year. I think they've got a pretty good team.

So overall I think that things obviously I was happy about the rebounding, to go plus 22 there with the rebounding, zero offensive rebounds for them. They out-rebounded Temple, and they go to the glass. So it was good to see that.

Obviously love the assists. Any time you see that number in the 20s you feel good about it. I think the turnovers were a byproduct of just some opening night bizarre shit, and then, you know -- I don't know. I hate opening night. It's like the worst day of the year. I hate it.

That will be the thing that drives me out of coaching is how you feel when you wake up on opening night and you have no idea what your team is about to go do. So there you go. Happy it's over.

Q. You mentioned 25 assists, 13 turnovers, 25 assists on what 30 baskets or so. That's pretty much the way you want to play, right? The expand on your happiness about that?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, and we missed -- I thought they played really, really hard and physical. I thought they gave up a pretty good level of resistance, but we missed open people. We probably should have shot mid to high -- mid 50s maybe. It probably should have been a 30 assist game for us.

You know, I think it's just part of who we are, part of how we play. We're going to get better. We're going to get drastically better throughout the year.

I think when you look at the team and people are imaging what the team looked like last year, like, you can't compare what we looked like last year the last time you saw us play. Then you see us tonight and say, Wait, they don't look as good as the last time I saw them in Phoenix. Well, it took us a while to get that good.

You know, I think when we get Jayden Ross out there, I'm pretty excited about Solo and Karaban and Liam and J. Ross, what that's going to look like when we play those four guys together with a center.

Q. Dan, the pregame ceremonies, banner reveal, message from the former players, the final wrap goodbye on last year's season.

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, that was awesome. I cared for, like, 90 seconds (laughing). Then I cared no longer.

It was nice, though. I mean, the actual video, just seeing the boys up there. Obviously I hate looking at myself talk because my voice is bad, and it's like cringe level. You know, I think everyone doesn't like seeing themselves on TV.

But it was great to see the boys. Then the banner actual reveal, that was pretty cool, but I just wanted to get back in the locker room. I just wanted to play the game. We've celebrated enough stuff.

Q. You talked about how Liam was too hyped up for his exhibition game. How did you feel he handled tonight?

DAN HURLEY: Better. You know, I think better. He basically had three days of practice after missing, you know, two and a half weeks, so I thought that was -- obviously you could see the strong performance.

He did what we needed him to do. We understand that we



don't have the 7'2" center that we had with Donovan, so it was good to see him take to heart the help we need on the defensive glass.

I think that's going to be the benefit of having some of these big wings that we've got that I think that that can mitigate some of the five-man rebounding, especially with Samson. That's a little bit of an Achilles heel, but this guy is going to just -- that's just the tip of the iceberg with him. This guy is going to be so good this year.

Q. 20 points on nine shots for Alex. Was today kind of exactly what you're looking for out of him, just all-around just how he is involved on everything it seemed like?

DAN HURLEY: I just think in games like this great players, high-level players, guys that are ready for the season to start, you know, Alex played like an All-American. He played like a Big East Player of the Year type. Nine shots, 20 points, 7 assists, 7 blocks, 6 rebounds. Kept us organized.

In games like this that's what you are supposed to do. I mean, that's what you see the quality of Alex's performance, Liam's performance. You know, guys that shot the ball efficiently in a game like Solo, 9 shots and 16 points; Tarris 7 shots, 15 points; Liam 11 shots, 18 points.

You should be efficient like that in games like this.

Q. Hass coming off the bench, is it just a matter of -- obviously he did so very well last year. You just like that infusion of kind of energy and defense?

DAN HURLEY: I think that's just a little bit we're trying to figure out, you know, how we want to start games. Obviously like Jayden Ross would have started this game if he was available. Jayden Ross has been just a rocket ship for the last two weeks.

I mean, this guy has looked like our best player at times or one of our -- he just changes things for us. Just a 6'7" athlete that's making threes and on the glass and just getting to the rim.

It's going to be interesting when he is healthy where we go that way because Solo looks pretty entrenched, and it's going to be hard to get Liam out of the line-up. It's going to be hard to get Alex out of there, and then we have the two centers. So where do we go when J. Ross is back, and then who is better starting the game for us, Aidan and Hassan? You know, Aidan started.

I think part of it for us because we're deep, it's just going to

be -- you know, it's going to be someone else's night here a lot of times, you know. In the exhibition it was Aidan's night. He had 17, and he was super efficient. We have a deep team and a high-level team.

Tonight just wasn't his night, but I don't know how that's going to shake out when J. Ross is healthy. It will be interesting to see how we play it.

Q. Back to Alex for a second. What do 7 blocks say about his willingness to impact the game defensively for you?

DAN HURLEY: Just where his brain -- how his brain processes, the principles of where to be defensively and how to play angles and how to get vertical, and he did it without committing a foul. It's just like really, really -- just his basketball brain, you know, and his discipline and obviously his experience. It's like having another coach on the court. It's like cheating.

Q. Now that Liam has made his debut and gotten through a summer and preseason and everything, what are some things you look for, do you think, over the long haul that you hope to be able to count on, say, in January, February?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, I think more play-making. I think you saw how much success we've had the last couple of years when we get our bigger perimeter people, taller perimeter people using zooms, using ball screens, getting down the paint, you know, throwing those lobs to our finishers, Samson and Tarris, and to be able to see the three-point line.

I see him on the ball a lot more creating offense for himself at the rim, for our rollers, and having that 6'7" size to also spray it out to the three-point line.

So I think you're going to see assist numbers and just more higher usage on ball with him.

Q. How encouraged were you with Tarris' second half after he struggled a little bit in the first half?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, Tarris is obviously a huge X factor in the year. You see the physical abilities. I mean, this is a guy that can do things for us that Adama did for us in terms of around the basket presence.

You know, you can see the mobility and the physical strength, and it's just continuing to direct him towards taking the identity.

He got caught a little bit not being as aggressive or as high

as we want him to be in ball screen, which doesn't necessarily mean a hard hedge. It might just be just a high. We don't play a drop here. We play a higher flat, but he is buying into what we're asking him to do. I would imagine that's been -- that was one of his more efficient performances of his career. We're going to look at that.

But, again, I don't think the center position is going to be a problem for us this year. I mean, we've got 24 and 14 with four blocks out of that spot combined today. I don't think the center spot is going to be an issue.

Q. Dan, can you elaborate on what Solo Ball did today? It seemed like he was doing everything offensively and even defensively early he forced the steal and a fastbreak chance. You've been raving about his shot for two years, and I was wondering, was his performance something that you guys -- you forecasted coming, or was this kind of just -- did you learn something about him tonight?

DAN HURLEY: Yeah, our buy-in with him was his personal makeup, the family he comes from, his personal traits, and then the fact that some of our biggest nonconference wins of the year last year at The Garden, he was a major reason why we beat Carolina there and played great in that Texas and Indiana swing, and he was solid at verse Gonzaga.

He flashed as a freshman where we could bet that he is going to be a 12, 13 a game scorer for us. The shooting is a weapon, a major weapon. When he starts learning how to cut and get out in transition, he is going to be hanging on the rim catching lobs. He's going to have games where he makes, you know, five, six threes and is going to light it up.

I just want to look at what his defense looked like because we need him to be, you know, strong at that end of the court too, but he's a safe bet to have a break-out year I think.

Q. Dan, you mentioned you woke up this morning kind of not knowing what your team was going to look like, worrying about that. Now you know something at least about what your team is going to look like and probably glad that it's over. What's just your overall take-away? Do you feel good about what you saw tonight? Do you feel like, yeah, it's going to be okay? What are you thinking?

DAN HURLEY: Obviously Andrea was excited to get me out of the house this morning and just to get me away from her and into somewhere else.

I see the vulnerabilities. You know, there were some

vulnerabilities out there, but I do think that this team through the first six weeks, maybe two months of the year is not going to look as good as we looked in the first six to eight months last year.

I don't think we have to be as good as the team last year to win trophies and to make a deep run in March and to compete for that championship, but I'm really excited. When we get J. Ross back out there, I just love the wings. I love the versatility of what we got with the wings.

I think the Samson and Tarris combo at center is going to be really interesting and exciting. Obviously we wish we got better performances from Aidan and Hassan today. That was not reminiscent of what those guys are capable of doing for us.

You know, you see the vulnerabilities, but I also see a team that's got great potential, and we're just going to get better and better. So we're going to be competing for the same things we've been competing for the last two years.

Thank you.

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