

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

Southeast Missouri Redhawks

Coach Brad Korn

Chris Harris

Phillip Russell

Media Conference

Texas A&M-CC 75, SE Missouri State 71.

BRAD KORN: I thought our effort today was a prime example of how these guys and how our team has been all season long. It's not looking good, we're down 10 in the second half. That's all these guys have done all season long is continued to fight and claw and made timely shots and made big plays and made defensive stops. Put yourself right back in position to maybe take the game.

Free throws and rebounding cost us that opportunity, but again, when I look at Chris Harris, Phillip Russell, and the rest of the guys on the team, what they were able to do for this program, this university, play on this stage, a pretty remarkable end to the season. And really couldn't be more proud of the way that they went about their business and really never stopped, never gave up, and continued to fight.

And I think that's a lot that we can be proud of for our institution and our region and the future of our program.

Q. Phil and Chris, the rhythm that you guys found in the OVC tournament, it seemed like for the first 30 minutes of this game, it wasn't really there. What were they doing that prevented you from really finding that?

CHRIS HARRIS: First off, I just want to thank my teammates. They played a great season, great conference tournament, and they played as hard as they could tonight, just the ball didn't bounce the way we wanted it to. And I want to give credit to our opponents because they made it hard on us on offense. I would say they denied I would say both of us really for the majority of the game. So we had to figure out ways around that.



But honestly, I think it really comes down to us and what we can do, and I don't think we went out there and executed how we can execute for a full 40 minutes. So I really think that's where we fell short tonight.

PHILLIP RUSSELL: Well, honestly, I don't really think they did anything to -- basically it was all on us, I would say. They denied us hard, but we've seen it all year. We know how to step off, and we just did -- I really feel like we just beat ourselves today. We didn't do things that we usually do. As you can see, we fell short.

Yeah, they played hard. I tip my hat to them, but it wasn't really nothing that we've never seen. I would just say it was on us.

Q. To look up and see the fan section that traveled from Cape Girardeau and really all the SEMO fans everywhere, that's something you guys brought. I know it's not the result you wanted, but to know you helped bring this program to a level it hasn't seen in so long, how special is a moment like that for you guys?

PHILLIP RUSSELL: To me, it's very special. I know to the guys it was very special. Believe it or not, they gave us a boost. The crowd was in it today. It was a great atmosphere. We needed them here.

I feel like if they wasn't here, it was going to be hard for us to create energy. So I want to give a special shout-out to them. I appreciate you all for that.

CHRIS HARRIS: I would say the fans were great. The fan base we have is awesome. Four years ago when I first got on campus, the Show Me Center was pretty much empty every game. So to be able to go from that to this year, it's louder than I've ever heard it before. And then we have obviously Selection Sunday, it's packed out, and then we come to the game today and we see the support, like you said, that traveled.

It's awesome because that's what we said we wanted to do. When Coach Korn first took the job, and he called me because we didn't know what was going on, and he's like, first things first, my mission and my goal is to change the



image and perception of the program. And I feel like we've done that up until this point. That was the way I wanted to finish out my career.

Like Phil said, huge shout-out to our fan base, and we appreciate you guys coming.

Q. Coach, I'll ask you the same question I asked them. When you look up, I know close game down the stretch, it's not the result you wanted, but especially the way everybody was roaring down that stretch when you were making the comeback, how special is that to know of everything you wanted to have this program become the last couple years, I feel like tonight was a good example of what it is now.

BRAD KORN: It's hard to put that into words. That's not easy. You're playing on a Tuesday night, and people's time and people's money is very, very important. Those are things that people work very, very hard for. So to sacrifice that to come watch us play in the NCAA Tournament, it shows the heartbeat of what our program and fan base can be and what they want to see and what it ultimately can be moving forward.

For them to do that, to take your hard-earned time, your hard-earned money, to show support for us, I think again, it verifies the hard work that you put in. As a staff, as staff families, as players, that what you're doing is right and that people see that, they respect that, they honor that by giving their time and making the sacrifices financially to come and support us.

You can tell by the answers that Chris and Phil gave, they see it, they feel it. We felt it all season slowly building. Big contingency came for the Evansville championship game, so hopefully this is, as you mentioned, the beginning of what we can become.

Q. What was the message to the team in the locker room?

BRAD KORN: Just I wanted them to understand, and they probably don't, but just the impact that they have been able to have on our region and our university by what they've done and what they accomplished. I think it's something that's going to take root in them 5, 10, 15, 20 years down the line.

But the text messages that I get, the emails that I get from people that truly, truly care about the program and what it means to them in their personal lives, that's what we needed. That's what our program needed. I think that's what Southeast basketball can be.

I wanted them to understand that, because in that moment, that's a crushing moment. Your career is over for Chris, Nate and Israel, and so I just wanted to reaffirm to them all the good that had happened up to that point. Because it was an up-and-down season, to say the least. But I think a lot of the people that coach, coach for everything in the middle, not the highs and the lows.

It's everything in the middle that make it all worthwhile, and there was a lot of middle for us this season, and I wanted them to understand that, honor that and respect that, especially in that moment when it's a crushing, crushing moment.

Q. How important will it be that this is a step in the right direction you want to go and not the end all, despite how good this year was?

BRAD KORN: Yeah, I think that gives us the energy that we need as we move forward. When we get to design a ring, we got to hang a banner, and now everything we do moving forward is going to be geared and centered around that. And so as I said before, some validation, just because now it's just not words. There was actions behind those words and now we have tangible proof if we do it this way and we do this and we do this and we do this, we can do it again.

I think it's an opportunity for our guys to really grab hold of something that happened, that they did, that they accomplished, and it's not longer just words. So now moving forward, there's a standard now and a level that we have to get to each and every single day in everything that we do in order to have this feeling and in order to be able to come back again.

Q. With Chris and Nate and Israel ending their careers, more so Chris and Nate, with how much turnover the team has had recently, how much have those two guys meant to the program and to see them get to this stage in their last game just overall for you?

BRAD KORN: Yeah, just Nate and Chris, I told them after in the locker room, I couldn't have scripted a better thing for Chris Harris. You get your 1,000th point, you've got two degrees. You're going to win an OVC championship, you're going to play in the NCAA Tournament. That's a full book. You can't write it any better.

Happy for Nate Johnson to be the one guy on our roster that played in and started every game. He's the only guy and he had a year taken away due to injury. So to stick with it when all those turnovers going on, Chris stuck with it, Nate stuck with it. And then for Israel to join us, taking a chance on us with 10 months left in his basketball career,



and then putting all that together, going through the ups and downs.

To see it through on the other side, that's what it's supposed to be about. I know we get caught up in all the other stuff in the world and the microwave society. But to see Chris be an outlier in that respect and for Nate to stick it out and for Israel to jump on board and not be a distraction and be a man of character and represent us the way he does, to me there's still hope out there for the good guys, and those are all three good guys.

Q. It's been a while back when you played at Mizzou, but I asked you then if scheduling and playing those games was going to be what needed it to be to get to where you wanted to go. How important was the schedule now that that's all said and done?

BRAD KORN: I still feel the same way, that it was too hard. But at the same time, I think that it did prepare us. It gave us some adversity. I really believe that it was a reason why we were able to win four games in four days at the end of the season. But it really adversely reveals character. We didn't splinter from one another. That doesn't mean we didn't have some spirited practices and conversations along the way, but we didn't splinter and we stuck together.

And even tonight you're down 10 and all those experiences along the way and the tough schedule I think prepared us for it. And it made -- the Mizzou game, you referenced, but no stage or no opponent was too big. When you get on these stages or if we were to win and go play a No. 1 overall seed like Alabama and you've now played a Missouri and an Iowa, you have to prepare your guys in the regular season for the postseason.

So I think it did that, but as a coach we didn't win as many as we wanted to, and I'd say it was too hard.

Q. Obviously you get in a position like this to be playing in an NCAA Tournament and you have the guys like Chris Harris as seniors, but you also have some younger guys. What's the most important takeaways some of these younger guys can take away from today to build into next year?

BRAD KORN: Yeah, I think that it's now a guy like Evan Eurscher and even though Adam redshirted a year ago, two freshmen, they've now started their careers by going to the NCAA Tournament. So now what do you want for the rest of your career? Do you want to continue to go to the NCAA Tournament? Do you want to walk out of SEMO and say I went to four straight NCAA Tournaments. I want to be a multi-champion. I think that's the thing for them,

and that's the motivator.

You're always looking for motivation. You always have to look for things to get you out of the hard days because it's the guys that show up on the days they don't want to are the ones that have success. So now a championship-level team or a championship-level run that we had, that gets you out of bed on the days that you don't necessarily want to.

And so as a freshman that now instills what we're going to do and try to move forward with the program. And even though he's not a freshman, but a guy like Dylan Branson, and so now we bring other people into the program. It's like, no, we do it this way because this is how we won a championship. It just goes back to that validation of what you're doing is going to be held up now by the players.

And it's not just coach driven or just words on a chalkboard. It's tangible, real-life effort, blood, sweat, tears that went into that to make it happen, and everybody knows that now, and it's got to be a consistent message of what the standard now is.

Q. To kind of piggy-back on your impact on the program, what's your message to your guys after 23 years of not going to March Madness and finally coming this year and winning the OVC championship, what is the message to your guys about how proud you are of them and your overall message to the program?

BRAD KORN: Yeah, I'm always going to be a deflect guy. I'm not going to take any credit. Of course, head coach and all that stuff, and that comes with the territory. But there's so many people that go into that. You never -- I think the message to the guys, there's not just one player, there's not just one coach. I said in my introductory press conference, it's a combination of a whole lot of people pulling in the same direction.

But to say that you're not proud of that, I'm not going to be that coy or that bashful about it. It's a big deal. It's a big deal.

But again, it's one of those things that if your dreams aren't big enough to get you out of bed, you've got the wrong dreams or you're in the wrong place. So now we've got to go do it again. That's the beautiful thing about coaching or leading a group of young people, college basketball doesn't care what you did yesterday. Tomorrow we've got to get right back at it if we want to be sitting here again.

I think that's the message to the guys, and to understand that it does take a team. That's why basketball is the



greatest sport in the world. It's not just one guy, it's not just one coach, it's a whole lot of people pulling in the right direction, and if we want to get back here someday, if we want to be multi-champions, now we know how to do that.

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