

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Northern Kentucky vs Houston

Thursday, March 16, 2023

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

Northern Kentucky Norse

Coach Darrin Horn

Sam Vinson

Chris Brandon

Media Conference

Houston - 63, Northern Kentucky - 52

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We'll begin Northern Kentucky's press conference with an opening statement and then we'll field questions for the players.

COACH HORN: Give credit to Houston. There's a reason they are the No. 1 team in the country. Really physical and aggressive. Played without their best player in the second half tonight. I'm unbelievably proud of our team, the fight that we showed. In a lot of ways, I don't think it's a stretch to say we outplayed Houston tonight. We just didn't make enough shots. Had 9 steals against the No. 1 team in the country. We were plus 10 in turnover margin, had 18 offensive rebounds. Just a lot of things we can point to. We played really, really well. Put ourselves in position to have a chance to win the game, just did not make enough shots. And again, give them credit. They made two huge back to back 3's. Those were really big plays. Got a loose ball put-back at a key time. Sheard hit a step-back at the end of the clock there late. They made the plays they had to. I'm unbelievably proud of our guys. I thought Chris Brandon was as good as anybody on the floor tonight with how hard that he played. Hard to lose. We thought that this was a game, especially as the game went on, that we could win, and would win. Just didn't make enough shots.

Q. Just how frustrating was it when the shots just weren't falling, and how much of it was Houston's length and defense?

SAM VINSON: Yeah, it was frustrating a little bit, but we



don't think about that during the game. Our players and coaches saying, "Keep shooting, keep shooting the ball." But we came into the mindset to swing it, let the ball loose and shoot it if you got a shot. We were doing that all night, just to see a few rim and out or be close to going in, it hurts. But we just kept on shooting the ball and we had that mind set the whole game.

Q. Just how do you process something like this, knowing you had Houston on the ropes at times in this game. There's only been one 1-16 upset in March Madness. How are you guys feeling right now?

CHRIS BRANDON: I feel like we played pretty well. As you said we had them on the ropes a few times. Like Sam said, we weren't making enough of the shots we needed in the stretch. I feel good about how we played. We just weren't knocking down the shots down the stretch.

Q. Both of you had some really big rebounds. Their size and talk about the effort you guys had in the paint tonight.

SAM VINSON: C.B. does a great job. The way he rebounds is crazy. Super vital for our team. And he was getting after it all night long. And the way he crashed opened up lanes on the perimeter to get in there and get rebounds. With how we came into the mindset of shooting the ball, we knew we were going to get long rebounds. So with C.B. crashing, open up lanes so we could get rebounds as well.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, gentlemen, you are all dismissed.

Q. Coach, how much of the shooting struggles -- was it one of those nights and how much was the length in defense bothering you guys?

COACH HORN: Obviously, give Houston credit. They are a great defensive team, and they didn't make it easy. At the same time I felt like we got a lot of good clean open looks that we usually make at a high rate that we didn't. For us to hang in the game the way we did and with Marques having the tough offensive night that he had. I kept thinking we



were going to break through at some point and enough of those were going to go down at the right time, and we just weren't able to make them.

Q. Kelvin Sampson praised your defense, especially the turnovers you forced. Talk about how you were able to bother them tonight.

COACH HORN: When the matchups come up, one of the things that you want when you are an underdog -- and I think one of the things in my mind we're not a 16-seed. If you saw our league play this year, the top half of our league was really strong. When you see the matchups come out, you hope that your advantage will carry over into the game. Maybe it's something that the higher seed doesn't do. And you get Houston who plays really similar, is really good at turning you over and really good defensively. For us to play this game the way that we did, have a plus 10 turnover margin, get 9 steals, I think it says a lot to the toughness and the character that our guys have, and just how good we are at what we do on the defensive end of the floor.

Q. It seemed like a good amount of fans made the trip. Any comment on their impact tonight?

COACH HORN: Yeah. I thought our crowd was great. It's one of the things that's good about our place is we get really good support. And we got a long tradition of winning, even going back to the Division II days. Absolutely made a difference. It kind of seems like in these situations, the people that weren't wearing black and gold got behind us a little bit as long as they weren't in red as well. Great energy in the building. This is the stage you want to be on. This is one we want to be on. I took this job to win an NCAA Tournament. I make no bones about that. Winning the Conference Tournament every year. We embrace that. That's much easier said than done. That's why we're here. I think we showed tonight, not only with our following but what our guys played, we're getting closer to being able to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.