

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - UCLA vs Tennessee

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

UCLA Bruins

Rick Barnes

Chaz Lanier

Zakai Zeigler

Jahmai Mashack

Media Conference

Tennessee 67, UCLA 58

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Tennessee Head Coach Rick Barnes, student-athletes Chaz Lanier, Zakai Zeigler and Jahmai Mashack.

Coach?

RICK BARNES: Yeah, just the utmost respect for Mick Cronin and his UCLA team. We knew coming in how hard they play and they take on his personality. We kept talking about that all day yesterday and today. Exactly the way the game started out, that's what we expected, both teams playing their hearts out, going after it.

Really proud of our guys, I thought we stayed in there, did a better job rebounding tonight than we have in the last couple of weeks.

It's something that we needed and proud of our guys for getting that done.

Q. Chaz, you broke the Tennessee single-season record for threes made in a season, what does that mean to you and were you able to talk with Chris Lofton at all about it?

CHAZ LANIER: It's a blessing to be in my position. I want to give all the glory to God because without Him I wouldn't be here.

I haven't got to talk to C.Lo, but yet but hopefully I get to



see him today.

It's just a blessing. I want to shout out my teammates as well. They're always setting good screens and passing the ball on the money for me. So without them I wouldn't be making the shots.

Q. Zakai, that last three, four minutes of the first half, how important was that? And how much momentum did you guys go into the locker room with after that?

ZAKAI ZEIGLER: We went into the locker room with a lot of energy. Because we knew it was going to be a dogfight going into the game, you knew it was going to be a lot of ups and downs, but the last couple of minutes in the first half we had a lot of energy. Getting turnovers and those loud plays, it really picked us up. Going into the locker room we had a lot of energy.

Q. Jahmai and Zakai, seemed like late in the first half some of that trap stuff y'all were doing, did you know going into the game this was part of the plan and we're going to use this?

JAHMAI MASHACK: I mean, I think going in we have a lot of things built in but honestly we're a team of adjustments. So we know how to adjust. We don't want to give every team our first look. We see how the game is flowing and how they're handling the ball, and see if their passes are a little long or short or whatever the case may be. But we're pretty good at adjusting to the situation, so it wasn't a planned thing. You just go out and do it and try to execute perfectly.

Q. Any of you guys, the second half it seemed like they were getting frustrated. Could you sense that after about the first five minutes when you went up 13-15?

CHAZ LANIER: Going into halftime we knew they wouldn't let off the gas, so we wanted to make a point at getting at them and being aggressive on the defensive end coming out at halftime. So I feel like we did a great job pressing up and forcing turnovers.

Q. Jahmai, you are about to play your third straight Sweet 16, at what point do you think you could



accomplish that at Tennessee?

JAHMAI MASHACK: Honestly, as soon as I signed with Tennessee I knew that was something I wanted to do. I've been winning all my career. It's not something that is new to me. I'm not saying that to be cocky, I'm saying that because I put in the work. I had to scrap for everything I'd get.

Just knowing the Sweet 16 was a possibility that I wanted to get to, I wanted to do it and I knew this team was going to be able to do it.

Q. Jahmai and Zakai, when Chaz is shooting the way he did tonight, how much of a boost does that give you guys playing on the defensive end?

JAHMAI MASHACK: It definitely gives a big boost. We see him put in the work all the time. We always tell him that's nothing to be nervous about, you go out there and hoop. It's something he has been doing for a long time, being able to shoot the basketball. It definitely frees us up for getting a lot of energy on the defensive end, trying to create turnovers. But when he's hot, you try give him the basketball and that's kinda how you play. I think we did a good job of doing that.

ZAKAI ZEIGLER: We see that every single day in practice. He puts the work in and you expect him to take those shots and I tell him every time he shoots the ball, I think it's going in. So if he miss, I want him to shoot the next one.

Us getting out our energy on defense, our offense doesn't really dictate the defense. Our defense is going to be there regardless, but when he's shooting the ball like that, it's going to pick us up even more.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys. We appreciate your time. Questions for Coach.

Q. Rick, when you look at what Chaz has been able to do this weekend and over the course of the season, what's been the most impressive thing about his game and how he's performed for y'all this season?

RICK BARNES: Probably the fact that he hasn't changed any approach into the tournament. We tried not to do that. We understand what we're in the tournament, we understand what this time of year is about. He hasn't strayed away from his routine, what he needs to do.

Last three weeks he's been very aggressive shooting the ball. But I think his focus is -- he's gotten so much better at paying attention to detail, but in terms of his personal psyche coming in, I thought it's something he really

embraced. Something he dreamed about being a part of.

When he came in, he's a pretty cool, calm guy. I think he meant what he said about he gives all the glory to God. He's grounded in a way that it's not about him. He knows he's part of a good team and he's willing to do whatever he needs to do to help this team, but he's just not selfish and in his own way he sets a great example.

Q. Rick, what did y'all see out there that made you go to that trap in the first half. It looked like it changed things.

RICK BARNES: Well, we have it and sometimes we use it, sometimes we don't, depending on the game. What Zakai said was true, we wanted to throw it out there and see how teams handle it. If they don't, we stay with it.

With them, they're such a well-coached team and they really execute their sets. Our thought process was to get time off the clock so we didn't have to go down and grind it for 30 seconds. Just try to let 'em get down and get started with 18, 19 seconds on the clock and we were able to turn 'em over a couple of times, which is something you expect but not really. Just like at the end of the game, we didn't do a very good job of taking care of the ball at the end. Obviously they were playing behind and they could take a lot of chances.

But we got 'em on the court, hot zone where we felt like we could get some traps and came up with I think a couple of takeaways there.

Q. Coach, you guys gave up some size but battled inside, dominated on the glass. How big of a point of emphasis was that?

RICK BARNES: What I'm looking at here, if I'm reading it right, really proud of Igor, 7 rebounds. Felix had 7, Cade had 5. I can't tell if that's a 5 or 6. That's what we ask those guys to do. That's all we've talked about for two days is our post guys being effective at rebounding the ball for us, need to get extra possessions on the offensive end, gotta do it on the defensive end. That's something we talked about and we haven't done a great job the last couple weeks with it.

But we were better with that tonight. Other than turning the ball over late we played really well against, again, an outstanding defensive team. They're very handsy, but that was the big thought coming in, we had to get production out of our front-line guys and with their rebounding, they got it done for us.

Q. Rick, apologies if you covered this, but to make a



third straight Sweet 16, obviously this team has talked about having big goals but you have to take steps along the way. What does it mean to do this for the first time in program history?

RICK BARNES: Well, again, I thank God for Him bringing us all together, for one, because we have half a new team sorta, kinda this year, but it goes back to Zakai and Jahmai and Jordan has become a part of that core group, and they do come in. I'm glad a year ago that Cade got some time to play.

It goes back to leadership with our players. They deserve all the credit. They want to be coached, they know what we as a coaching staff expect from them every day and they know we're going to try to be as consistent as we can doing our jobs and we want them to do that. It's just a great testament to these guys that they really do like each other. They care, and they love our fan base.

Obviously it's great being here and having a lot of -- we've got the best fan base in the country and we believe that, everybody says it, we truly believe it.

These guys want to represent our university in the right way. But it goes back. Obviously I've got the best coaching staff in the country but it goes to the players. They're the ones that grind it every day.

Some of them obviously want to play more but the fact that our motto is "it's not about me," I think these guys really do exemplify that extremely well.

Q. Rick, as you've looked at the film stuff with the rebounding things you haven't liked, is that guys not in the right place, getting pushed at times? What's caused those things you didn't like?

RICK BARNES: Well, our opponents have a lot to do with it. Because we play against teams that emphasize it just as much as we do. But it really is a focus and sometimes -- I mean, we're obviously going to teach blocking out but honestly sometimes you just gotta go get it. I thought we did that tonight. We pursued the ball better. Obviously we need our guards to be in there getting after it, too, but our opponents have a lot to do with it.

We want to limit teams to one shot, but they won't -- they're not going to let us do that. I just thought the focus was really there tonight, and you tell me going back, what did I learn? I thought we weren't as focused as we needed to be in key positions there. But it's not, I don't think, because of a "want to"; it's hard. It's really hard to do when you're playing at the level of competition that we're playing against.

Q. Coach, the 1-2-2 three-quarter before the half seemed like that worked out well for you guys. Was that always part of the plan?

RICK BARNES: We've been using it more lately. We've had it. Jahmai said it, we've got a lot of things -- we probably would have had some more things in, but I don't think we are where we need to be with our ball screen defense, and everybody does it. I think you've got to be elite there, especially this time of year.

They made some nice adjustments tonight and was hurting us in the middle there. So we probably didn't spend as much time working on that as you probably would like to, because we were trying to get some other things right, to an elite level, whether it's being in gaps, whatever it may be.

It's simple enough that, you know, you can use it. We've gotten some confidence in it, too, obviously, lately over the last couple of weeks.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time. Thank you.

RICK BARNES: Thank you all.

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