

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Tyler Bilodeau

Sky Clark

Media Conference



was working the first, I don't know, 17, 18 minutes and then we talked about what they did from there, but how did you get away from what was working so well in the first 17, 18 minutes?

TYLER BILODEAU: I mean, I think it's a lot of what Skyy said there, the fouls, then rebounding, too. We got outrebounded and I think we didn't stop Chaz Lanier as good as we should have. He got hot there, hit some big threes for them. But, yeah, I would say those are some of the other things.

Q. How would you characterize, I know it may be hard to answer now but characterize the season overall?

SKYY CLARK: The season was a lot of fun. I think I grew up mentally as a person, as a player. Made a lot of great connections. We're definitely going to miss Kobe and Laz, they're a vital part of the team. But the season was fun. There were a lot of up and downs but we stuck together through it all. I'm super proud of everybody, coaching staff, players, managers, nutritionists, everybody.

TYLER BILODEAU: Skyy said it perfectly. I love this team. First year in the Big Ten, getting fourth with how we fought. Getting through the ups and downs. Going to miss those seniors, Kobe and Laz, they're great on and off the court. I love those guys.

Just all around good things about everyone, coaching staff, team, everyone else who puts hours into this. Couldn't be more proud of this team.

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

Q. Mick, as a team you pride yourselves so much on your defense, and I'm wondering when they're getting the shots they did, especially to start the second half, was that them just setting good screens, good plays to get open shots?

MICK CRONIN: Look, they're a hell of a team. There was a time they were number 1 in the country, I think. They're a hell of a team. Milicic's a fourth or fifth-year guy, Lanier is a fourth or fifth-year guy, Zakai is a four-year starter, Mashack is a senior, Gainey is a senior, Dubar is a senior,

Tennessee 67, UCLA 58

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA Head Coach Mick Cronin and student-athletes Tyler Bilodeau and Skyy Clark. Coach?

MICK CRONIN: I don't really have one. It's 12:30.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes?

Q. It was obvious the end of the first half, start of the second was kind of the ball game. What from your perspective what went wrong in those two stretches? How big of a deflating affect did that have on the rest of the second half?

SKYY CLARK: I think it was the press that got it started. I think that killed us. With some turnovers and just some fouls, gave them easy points at the free-throw line, especially fouling the wrong person. I think that's what got it started.

Q. Skyy, in the first half foul trouble happened, fouls get called. As a guard you're sitting there and some of those things are happening with the press, how much are you kind of itching to be out there and help get that corrected?

SKYY CLARK: I was definitely smacking myself on the head on the bench. I can't put myself in that position. I know I gotta be out there to help the team. So just be smarter next time.

Q. Opening game went really well for you guys. What



Okpara is a hell of a junior. They've got a hell of a team.

Guys, they only scored 67. It's not like we gave up 97, they scored 67. Not going to win many games, guys, you get 58.

Skyy not being able to play and Eric threw us off, it messed the game up. We had a chance to -- if that wouldn't have happened, we might have had a lead at half, it could have been a whole different game. I agree with Ben, the end of the first half -- I used my timeout for an offense/defense substitution and we had a couple of really, really sloppy turnovers, soft plays that, you know -- it is what it is.

But, again, they got an hell of a team. You're want going to win you score 58 points.

Q. Mick, I know that everyone knew about the physicality both ways going into this game to match-up. When y'all were looking at film how did you feel about the rebounding match-up?

MICK CRONIN: I'm not sure what you're alluding to.

Q. How did you feel about the rebounding match-up going into the game?

MICK CRONIN: It's always important.

Q. How did you feel about your match-up with your guys and them?

MICK CRONIN: We got off to a terrible start. We were stopping them and I don't have the first half stats but I think they had nine or ten offensive rebound at halftime. Our defense couldn't have been much better early, but we didn't do a good job on the glass in the first half for sure. Second half was even but the first half -- we also -- it was 9-0 second-chance points at halftime.

I told our guys this game was going to be won by other things: Who gets the ball when it comes off the rim, who is strong with the ball.

They screened better than we screened.

Q. You kind of just alluded to it but when we talked the other day you said you have to perfect the little things when playing Tennessee. What are the things that you think went wrong maybe today?

MICK CRONIN: Look, a lot of is them. I can come in here and -- you really want the truth. They're really good. They play tremendous defense. When you do set a good screen, usually they switch it and I would tell you -- first of

all, I don't think they're little things. You guys call them little things, I think they're big things. I think they're things that are not shooting the basketball, which is all that -- when little Johnny comes home everybody wants to know how many points he scored. Nobody asked him if he blocked out every time or did he take care of the ball. So they're big things.

What I would tell you is we didn't do a good enough job screening and then when we did, they switched, they emergency switched. Numerous times they switched Zakai, Jordan Gainey or Chaz Lanier and Jahmai Mashack onto our big guy, and we did not throw him the ball. We kept dribbling the ball.

There was even one time we shot a pull-up jumper in the first half, we were winning and Aday Mara has a guard on him and we decide to iso against Okpara. So our offense got us beat tonight. Our offense got us beat. Lack of execution and the end of the first half stuff.

When you are going to play at this level you're not going to shut teams out. You're not shutting Tennessee out. We held them to 67. Did you want me to hold them to 57? That's not happening, I mean, nobody held them to 57 this year, would be my guess. Offensively we were not good enough.

Q. I know it's probably way too early to start thinking about --

MICK CRONIN: Then don't ask.

Q. At what point do you start looking forward rather than backward?

MICK CRONIN: Right now, guys, it's 12:40 a.m. and our season just ended. That's it. You're going to ask me about next year. Right now my biggest concern is how bad the seats are on the Allegiant flight, on that terrible plane that we're going on to fly home tomorrow.

Q. The school bus?

MICK CRONIN: The plane version of the cheese.

Q. Hang in there.

MICK CRONIN: And is there any chance that Doug got me some hot food, because I don't eat on game day -- that I got something edible. Not next year, not right now, guys.

Q. Without asking about next year, where did this team fall short?



MICK CRONIN: Look, we restored us back to where we need to be in the NCAA Tournament. We had the 4 seed in the Big Ten Tournament out of 18 teams. After having almost no NIL and having to go to Europe to try to find cheap players, in a debacle, and fighting through it last year and finishing fifth. If we didn't have to do that -- it put us a year behind, okay?

So I thought -- this group of guys did as good as they could do, Ben. I thought Eric's injury and Will had to have a little surgery in the middle of the season threw us off, but this group of guys, you know, Aday improved. You have a team where literally your four most important players are transfers. They came together and had a heck of a year. This team is -- and Tennessee is great, man, they got an hell of a team.

Q. Your greatest success as a coach in recent years has come with continuity, Tyger, Jaime --

MICK CRONIN: You can say that about anybody, buddy, I'm not in the mood to talk about a different era. It's a new era, my man.

Q. Is continuity important going forward?

MICK CRONIN: What I would tell you, tough loss today for my older brother, Coach Pitino and I, but he's smart. If you've giving me a choice, I'll always take talent. Does that answer your question? Doesn't mean it's important. You want to give the other guy three or four-year guys, but I got better players? I will always take talent. So continuity is irrelevant if you don't have talent. You got both, you got Zakai Zeigler, right? And you got Zakai Zeigler. You're running around with basically another coach on the court. He's an hell of a player, too. I will always take talent, though, Ben, but both are important. There's a lot of stuff that's important.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate your time.

MICK CRONIN: Thank you.

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