

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Oregon vs Arizona

Monday, March 24, 2025

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Oregon Ducks

Dana Altman

Nate Bittle

Jackson Shelstad

Media Conference

Arizona - 87, Oregon - 83

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

DANA ALTMAN: Well, first of all, Arizona did the things necessary to win the game. They out-rebounded us, hit their free throws, and just made the adjustments that they had to to win the game. Proud of our guys. They fought their tails off. We got down 11 in the second half and fought back. We put ourself in a position to maybe make a comeback.

I was talking to the guys here, and we have played 30-some games and it's the first one this year that we lost at the line. We've been a good free throw shooting team. We've hit clutch free throws all year, and we went 12-22 with missing a front end. So you know, that hasn't been typical for us, but I've always told the guys it's a game of very few possessions in most cases and tonight that was true. We had our opportunities, came out great, but didn't play the way that we needed to play to win the game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Jackson, you guys have come back so often and so late this year. How did that keep you calm down the stretch and when you're at the line in this game?

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Yeah, we've played in a lot of situations where we've had to come back towards the end of the game, but we usually are good at knocking down our



free throws and kind of doing a good job at the line, and tonight we just missed a few, and I think that's kind of how the game ended like that.

Q. Nate, you guys get the hot start, obviously. What kind of shifted do you think for Arizona to start clawing back into the contest for you guys? And then in the second half, what did you guys find to close the gap again and make it a game down the closing minutes?

NATE BITTLE: When we got on that run in the first half, they started crashing the boards, we were up and then it flipped pretty quickly there on the rebounds. They got a couple offensive rebound put-backs and stuff and started attacking us. We weren't building our wall, getting back in transition defense. They got some transition buckets.

Then in the second half, we came out and made a run and it was just going back and forth. We just had to get stops in that moment and we weren't able to.

Q. Jackson, can you explain just how you guys got back into the game down 11? How did you guys keep your cool to give yourself a chance late?

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Yeah, I think we just started really playing more physical going to the boards, trying to get more stops on defense. And then offensively, we were getting good looks and just kind of playing together, just getting good looks offensively, defensively. Did a better job definitely stopping them from getting better shots that they were early -- or late in the second half.

Q. I know both of you had some business decisions to make in the days and weeks ahead. Can you say if you're registered for spring classes in eight days?

NATE BITTLE: Yeah, I'm about to graduate.

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Yeah, I am.

Q. Last year you came up short in the same round in such a detail way, where it was just like on the very fine margins and it was kind of the same this year, whether it's free throws, rebounding -- I guess those are core to the game and not on the margins. But when it's little things like that and it's so close, how



hard is it to get over it -- how hard was it to get over it last year and what's -- how is this one going to sit going forward, do you think?

NATE BITTLE: For me, I wasn't able to play last year, but definitely being able to experience it and be there to watch. It's a very physical sport, especially in this round, trying to get to the Sweet 16, but we just -- we didn't do what we had to do and just came up short today.

JACKSON SHELSTAD: Like he said, losses like this hurt a lot. It's going to hurt for a while. We were right there last year and this year and just a couple different plays or free throws, anything, rebounds, could have went a different way. So it's going to sting for a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take some questions for Coach.

Q. Assuming the rebounding was going to be an issue in the first half, how did you fix that and kind of get past that to come back in the second half?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, Nate and K.J. really got after the boards and really solidified our effort the second half. You asked about the comeback, we just got some stops and some rebounds. We kind of put fool's gold that first half. We hit those shots and then we just gave up easy baskets in transition and the game got too easy, both teams shoot 45, 47 percent, you know, you take out the free throws, they shot a little better from three, we shot a little better from two. But it just, we gave up too many easy baskets with that lead, just wanting to outscore 'em. And that's not us, that's not the way -- we got out rebounded in the first half, we gave up easy baskets, and that's just not the way we need to play. So again, I can't fault their effort, they got down 11, fought their tails off to come back, we just didn't do the things necessary to win the game.

Q. When this had been the best free throw shooting season for you guys in 11 years, how much is this going to stick with you? This isn't a strategic decision, this isn't something the players chose to do, how long will this stick with you that this is the worse night in two seasons when it was the best season in 11 years?

DANA ALTMAN: You know, we've won so many close games and we've hit a lot of critical free throws. I was shocked that we were missing some of those. Nate's shot it really well all year. Jackson missed the front end of a one-and-one and he's been shooting it good. T.J. got to the line and missed some. So, K.J. been shooting 'em good. So it's one of those things. Every area of the game matters and again, I didn't think we should have been in that position if we would have rebounded and made some

better defensive decisions. I just thought we gave up way too many easy baskets. But again, Arizona's a good team, Tommy does a good job. We've had a lot of close games with 'em over the years, and they go 17-24 and we go 12-22 and that's five difference and that hurts.

Q. You've benefited so much this year from the veteran guys you brought in in the transfer portal. How much more difficult does it make this moment when those are guys you only have for a year, you only get a group that, for a season, like it's not you can say, next year this group, I mean you have certainly some guys, key guys, but how much harder does it make it to process these moments when it is such a short time you have the group as it's constructed?

DANA ALTMAN: You know, I love working with the guys. If it's one year, if it's two years, maybe -- like a guy like Dante, who went through all the surgeries and he came over and he was ours, you know, he wasn't going home, he was ours. So you spend a lot of time with guys like that, but T.J. Bamba and Brandon and supreme, Ra'Heim, the guys that came in this year they were fun to work with. They were great guys. I enjoyed working with the group. We went through that five-game stretch, four on the road we played five games in 13 days, and we sucked, we didn't play very good. And they battled back. I got after 'em pretty hard and said, We're not giving in to this, and challenged 'em and they responded. So I loved working with the guys, I'm sure they didn't always like working with me, but I did enjoy the group. We did some good things, we had some downs, but we had a lot more ups than we did downs and this one's going to hurt for a long time. That last one, it always hurts. The Creighton game last year, going back to North Carolina in 2017, Virginia in 2019, it doesn't get any easier. USC in 2021, I loved that group. I mean, I've been so fortunate at Oregon, at Creighton, I had teams that I loved working with. So I got a great staff that gets really good players for me and, you know, I love doing my job.

Q. In today's era you have to deal with the transfer portal opening tomorrow, how do you handle that conversation, is that a distraction from the pain of this loss to look at the roster and work on it?

DANA ALTMAN: I want our guys to be happy. I hope they can be happy at the University of Oregon. You can't be your best in any relationship unless you're happy, you know, you want to be in that relationship. I hope and pray that the guys want to stay, because I, like I said, I want 'em to stay. Everybody that can come back, I want 'em to come back. But they got to be wanting -- you know, like I said, every relationship is two-fold, I've been married for 41 year, I'm all in, I hope Reva is all in, but that's any

relationship. And with my players, I want 'em to be happy. And if they don't think I'm the guy or Oregon's the place, I understand that. Because I want 'em to want to be there so that they can be their best, academically, athletically, have fun playing ball, have fun in college. I don't want the business aspect to take away from the fun of going to college, the fun of playing ball. I know it's a -- you know, guys, it's different, there's a business aspect to it, and I understand that. But, man, if you're not having fun playing ball, if you're not having fun with your teammates, if you don't enjoy the four years you get to play, I'm not sure you can put a price on that. So to answer your question, I hope the guys want to stay, we'll have conversations with 'em. I told 'em to focus on winning ball games and we would worry about that after the season. The agents and everybody probably aren't waiting too much, but we'll talk to the guys, and like I said, everybody that's eligible to come back, I hope they want to come back, and I hope they want to work their tails off so that we get better. We'll have those conversations and hopefully they go our way, and if not, then we'll find a group that wants to be at Oregon and wants to compete in the Big Ten and wants to try to go a little further in the NCAA Tournament.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....