

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Oregon vs South Carolina

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

PPG Paints Arena

Oregon Ducks

Coach Dana Altman

Jermaine Couisnard

N'Faly Dante

Media Conference

Oregon - 87, South Carolina - 73

DANA ALTMAN: I'm very proud of our team, especially these two guys. Just unbelievable performance by both of them. The rest of the guys, you know, really chipped in. We got some good contributions from K.J. tonight, and Bam gave us a little bit. Jackson was solid again. So really a team effort. And just but these two guys are our leaders, and they did a tremendous job.

South Carolina is a really physical, well-coached team, and we out rebounded them, which I thought was critical. We had nine turnovers at half, but only one the second half, and I thought that really helped us. And we out rebounded them the second half. So some really good stats there. I thought we gave up some real easy baskets though the second half. I thought we let down once we got a lead, and that's something that we gotta look at. But other than that, I thought we played pretty good.

MODERATOR: Questions for student-athletes.

Q. Jermaine, 40 points is the most points scored by an Oregon player in the tournament. Can you just talk about today's game and how you were feeling? At what point did you kind of realize you were on one tonight?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: I think when I pulled up dribble three because I know I had it coming, but if it wasn't for these guys I wouldn't have had what I had tonight. So I appreciate these guys.

Q. Jermaine, you had a bunch of your family sitting



close to the court. Obviously the uniform on the other side looked familiar. How much did any of that fuel you or not? How much did just sort of all those different narratives contribute to the way you played tonight?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: It was -- I kind of heard somebody say something on the court to me. That's what got me going. I'm a competitor and that's like a guy that I kind of mentored when I was there. So once he hit a three and he got to talking. But it was fun, man. Those guys kind of made me. I grew a lot. I learned a lot when I was there. So I appreciate those guys more than anything.

Q. Jermaine and N'Faly, you two have scored together in the double digits. I think this is your ninth straight game doing that. What kind of chemistry have you two gotten into that's gotten your team into the run it's on right now?

N'FALY DANTE: I mean, just, I don't know, I think we've been playing for each other for three years now, and it just worked out. I don't know how to explain it, to be honest. What you think?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: I don't know, bro. This guy.

Q. Jermaine, your dad earlier in the week had said that this was personal, that he saw it in you even looking on Selection Sunday and your reaction to the matchup. Even before anybody says anything on the court, you went off when mom showed up in the LSU game there. How personal was this even before anybody said anything?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: First of all, this is one of my grandmother's first game. So I was happy to see her be able to drive out here and play in front of her and be able to watch me play. It wasn't them. It was just me being competitive. I know those guys have a great team over there. Coach Lamont did a wonderful job this year. It was just me just showing my will, just trying to compete to win.

Q. I'm sorry. I missed what you said. Who said something to you on the court and what did they say?



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JERMAINE COUISNARD: Jacobi. That's my little brother, though, but it was nothing personal. I just heard him say one thing after he hit the three.

Q. What did he say?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: I can't even remember. I think he just said, it's cash. I work out with him a lot. I competed against him a lot.

Q. And all the injuries you guys have had to overcome this year, how have you been able to make it to this point and when did you really start to catch fire and catch a rhythm?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: We just kept believing. Coach just kept telling us we do two things, rebounding the basketball and not turn the ball over and we'll be in good shape and I feel like we're starting to see the form that that's what takes to win the games.

Q. Jermaine, you kind of nodded at coach there, but coach has got a good record in the opening game of tournaments overall. What's your perspective on just how he prepares you guys, why he's able to get his team so ready once the postseason comes around?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: Since day one he hasn't changed. It's been the same message for us since day one, just play together, make plays for your teammates and just go out there and swing away for us and just defend and rebound and we'll have a good chance for us to win.

Q. For both players we've talked about how this might have been personal or how much this meant to both of you because of your five year guys. Well, this next one's going to mean a whole lot to the guy sitting to your right because it's his former school.

JERMAINE COUISNARD: Right.

Q. What do you think Saturday will mean to him? If today was personal to you, Jermaine, what will Saturday mean to your head coach?

JERMAINE COUISNARD: Same thing, I feel like. Same thing.

N'FALY DANTE: Well, I think it's personal. We have a goal to come here and do what we want to do. So we think every single thing is personal. Just look forward to it.

MODERATOR: Thank you, student-athletes. Questions

for Coach Altman.

Q. Coach, I want to ask you the same question I asked them. What have you seen that's gotten into them that's led you guys as a team and gotten you guys into the run, especially from Jermaine and N'Faly?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, I think Dante, you know, has really worked himself into much better shape, even though he's grabbing air tonight. But he was out ten weeks, you know, and he comes back mid January. And when you're a man that size, it takes a while. So I think his conditioning has gotten much better. Jermaine and him have gotten a much better feel of playing with each other. Jermaine missed half of last year. So they haven't played that much together. But I just really saw in practice when Dante started getting back mid January, late January, early February, that those two in a pick and roll situation, those two looking for each other, they're our two oldest guys, our two most experienced guys, and you see how college basketball is all geared to experience. And so we geared it to them.

They're just great guys. They're easy to work with. They listen. They try to do what I ask them to do. So I'm really happy for both of them. They've carried us. I just tried to stay out of the way. Those two guys have done a great job, and they carried us through the conference. They carried us all year. But they really carried us in the conference tournament, and obviously the two of them got 63 of our 87 points. So dominated the offensive end of the court, and defensively I thought Dante did a great job again.

Q. Coach, your guys were talking about the formula, and the formula you preach with rebounding, taking care of the ball, all that but obviously it helps having a guy score 40 as well. What was your perspective on Jermaine's night and kind of the impact he had on this one and kind of what fueled that, what made that possible?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, he was really feeling it. As he mentioned, he had a couple threes that were tough, and I think that really got him going. He got in the paint and finished some tough shots. He just had it going. Those are games every player dreams of, you know, getting it going and getting it going in the NCAA Tournament is a really good feeling.

But, no, it was big-time performance. They tried hedging those picks really hard and getting him out of some ball screen action because he'd been really successful with that. But he just found another way to score.

Q. Dana, they made that three right at halftime to kind of deflate things a little bit. What were the adjustments you made in the second half because I think you came out and went on a 23-8 run to kind of build up that huge lead?

DANA ALTMAN: Nothing, really. I talked about the turnovers, the rebounds were even at half. I told them, it's just one shot, guys. It's no big deal. Eight point lead to five point lead they come out hit a three and start the second half. It's not that big of a deal. And long half times. It was 20 minutes. I didn't know what to talk about. So we just, no big deal, let's go.

You know, our guys were excited. They knew they didn't play as well as they wanted to, and we really felt like we could pick up the pace and play a little quicker. And we just -- Jackson getting that steal and getting an easy two and got an easy three in transition, you know, those things really pick you up.

Q. Dana, they're one of the better scoring defenses, mainly due to tempo. For Jermaine to drop 40 and the rarity of that, was there something you guys saw heading into this that made you think he would have a big night, maybe not 40, but that he would have a prolific night?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, he's been playing so well policy. We really thought we could get some isolations and get him some easy buckets. They weren't quite as easy as we had hoped. And then the ball screen action, we felt like -- and I thought the pace was good for us. It wasn't really fast, but it was just quick enough that we could get down and until we got a little tired there the last eight or ten minutes, we didn't push it very hard there, but until then I thought the pace was pretty good for us.

Q. Dana, you guys, you coaching, haven't lost a first round game while at Oregon. What is it about the way that your team responds to being in the tournament, to playing in the first weekend, first game? Is it like riding a bike when you get here to this point?

DANA ALTMAN: No. No. It's always exciting. Our guys were really excited, you know, and they're a good group. So when we talked to them about the things we had to do, we were really impressed with South Carolina on film, wins over Tennessee, Kentucky. I told these guys, they got impressive wins, fellas. We're going to have to play our tail off.

So our guys knew the battle that was ahead. They got excited about it. And that's where leadership comes in, and Jermaine and Dante, again, did such a good job. And

we've just been really fortunate. We've had good players. We've had competitors. And these guys, the season's been so up and down for them. I mean Dante plays the first game and then ten weeks out with knee surgery. And we lost four guys to season-ending injuries. You know, the guys handled it. They didn't make any excuses. We tried not to as coaches make any excuses, hey, this is what we got, let's go.

But the response of those two guys in particular, and telling the freshmen, freshmen don't know. We got two freshmen that are starting, they don't know. Junior college guy, he doesn't know.

And so those two guys' leadership it's been the deal. They've really done a tremendous job. As good as any of the great leaders that we've had, Payton Pritchard, Eugene Omoruyi. Nolan Brooks. They're as good as any leaders we've had.

Q. Dana, there were a couple of times down the stretch there in the second half where they tried to claw their way back into things coming within 12, 11, 10 points. How pleased were you with how you guys played down the stretch? And in your mind what was key to kind of keeping them at arm's length and staying ahead there?

DANA ALTMAN: Well, two things. That's what I talked about, I was disappointed we gave up some real easy baskets in that stretch but we hit our free throws. We shot 80 percent from the line, 24-30 and we had some really good possessions where Jermaine and Dante had the ball in their hands at the end of it and either got fouled or scored.

So our defense wasn't what it should have been, but offensively we kept pace with them and finished at the rim on a few. And, again, the free throws, K.J. hits four, Jackson hits four. Jermaine hit his. Everybody but Dante was perfect from the line. And this time of year free throws decide a lot of ballgames.

Q. What's this next one going to mean to you?

DANA ALTMAN: Oh, you know, you spend 16 years at a place. And I got great feelings about Creighton. As I said yesterday, you can leave a place but that doesn't mean you still don't love the place. And I've had 14 great years at Oregon, and I love this place. And when I'm done, I'll feel the same way about Oregon as I do about Creighton. I'm the luckiest guy. I've coached 30 years at two great schools, and I've been supported and given everything we need to try to be successful. And so I'm so happy for Greg and Creighton and all their fans and the people that I know

there. Greg's done a tremendous job. They got a tremendous program. I'm so happy for him. You know, I follow them. My family's all back in Nebraska. Oregon is 1, but I think Creighton is 1A. There's not much separation. I still love the school.

So, again, it'll mean a lot. But it means a lot to those guys. It's for my team. And like I said, it's bittersweet because only one of us is going to move on. But we'll battle our tails off. And like I said, Greg's done a tremendous job. They got a tremendous team, individual talent on that team is really special. So we're going to have to play as good as we've ever played to get 'em. We're going to have to be so sharp defensively, on the boards. We're going to have to shoot it good again.

You know, we have not been shooting it well from three point. 7 for 16 tonight, 43 percent. I thought we shot the heck out of it. It just felt so good hitting a few shots. But we're going to have to bring our A game, just like we did against Arizona or Colorado or any of the other teams that we beat in conference tournament. We're going to have to play really well, and we had two guys who played tremendous today to win this game over South Carolina, and we're going to have to have more guys step it up Saturday to give ourselves a chance.

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