

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Gonzaga vs Kansas

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

Kansas Jayhawks

Coach Bill Self

Dajuan Harris Jr.

Hunter Dickinson

Media Conference

Gonzaga - 89, Kansas - 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kansas head coach Bill Self along with senior center Hunter Dickinson and senior guard Juan Harris, Jr. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach Self.

BILL SELF: Obviously, we're disappointed. I thought the first half was pretty much a horse contest. Both teams made shots. Pretty, probably from a visual standpoint, pretty fun game to watch. In the second half, we didn't make anything, and they played lights-out great. Certainly put it on us bad the second half.

I'm proud of our guys. We fought through a lot of stuff and everybody's got their own story, I know. But we certainly had plenty of episodes in ours, and guys hung in there, and gave it all they had. We just didn't have any juice in the second half.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Dajuan, I'm wondering what it was like trying to stem the tide of that run midway through the second half.

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: We was just trying to get stops. The ball wasn't falling in for us in the second half so we was just trying to get stops. They was running some good offense. So that's all it was. We just needed to get stops, and we fell short.



Q. Dajuan, what was the mood at halftime? It was quite a shootout the first half?

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: We went into halftime excited. We was positive. We just needed to get some stops because like coach said, it was a shootout. So if we capitalized on the defensive end, I think it would have took care of itself.

Like I said, we missed a lot of shots in the second half, and that's what happened.

Q. You guys had a pretty quick turnaround. How was the fatigue today in the second half?

HUNTER DICKINSON: You can't really make that excuse because Gonzaga had to deal with the same turnaround. So if they were good enough to be able to go out there and play two halves, we should have been able to do the same.

DAJUAN HARRIS JR.: What Hunt said. You can't make excuses. You want to play in March Madness. This is the best tournament you'll ever play in, and you can't make excuses when you want to win basketball games late in March.

Q. Hunter, committing to Kansas on May 4 of last year, and the year wraps up here, what has the program meant to you and your time here?

HUNTER DICKINSON: It's been -- I had high expectations coming in of what it was going to be like. It was better than expected. To be able to play for Coach Self, to play with these guys, to play in Allen Fieldhouse, it's something you can dream of growing up playing basketball.

To be able to play on this stage for this program, it didn't go the way we wanted it to, but I had a lot of fun this year and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes.

Thank you, gentlemen. Congratulations on your season.

Questions for coach Self.

Q. As it was getting late in the game, did you find any of your thoughts turning to, for lack of a better term, the episodes and how it sort of got to this? Have you thought about that?

BILL SELF: Oh, yeah, I thought about it. But that wasn't part of the thought process at all. I'll probably think about some of the things that didn't go well or didn't go right this year and some of the things that did.

Bottom line is this. Our program, over time, has taken great pride in being able to defend and rebound and doing things that are important to any team winning but has probably been stuff that we've probably excelled in overtime as much as just about anybody has.

As disappointing today that there was absolutely no sign of being able to slow them down. They were great. Whenever we made mistakes, which we made many, they made us pay.

And then when we didn't make mistakes, they found a way to still grab an offensive rebound or whatever and score a put-back or whatever it was. But Mark's team is so good offensively. And when -- if you try to dissect it and say what do you want to try to take away, we didn't do a good job of taking away strengths.

But still yet, at halftime, I thought that we were in decent shape except for -- you know, my guys were gassed. Everybody knew that at the end of the first half. I mean, my guys were gassed.

I hadn't had very many times where you take a guy out and he's setting through a three-minute time-out and I say go back in, and he says, I need a little bit more time.

So I knew that we were tired, and I was just hoping we had enough energy to get to the finish line. I'm not going to blame it on energy, but I think we played very fatigued the second half.

Q. Sort of attached to that, competitor that you are, I'm sure this will stick with you. Is it something you already feel like I got to start thinking about next season or do you absorb this for a little while?

BILL SELF: I think for the last month, I've been thinking about next season, to be honest. Not in the moments during the game, but obviously, we played -- we had eight guys on scholarship, and we play -- I mean, that were healthy there late. Injuries are part of the game. That's not an excuse.

But we could have done a much better job as a staff of

putting more guys out there that we could play. And so that's something that I've thought about for a long time. The thing about it is, in basketball, early on you can play through some things. But the course of a season, there's a grind that goes with it and bodies get run down, injuries occur. It's all part of it.

When you don't have as much firepower or that maybe you've had in past years, it certainly showed this year.

Q. Your team had to overcome a lot of adversity to get to this spot. Two players in particular come to mind, and that's two freshmen, Elmarko Jackson and Johnny Furphy. They're expected to return next year. How have you seen them step up this past year?

BILL SELF: They've both had good years. Johnny's year has been exceptional, considering what expectations were. Elmarko's year probably hasn't been as good, considering what expectations were. So much of it is when you go into a situation, expectations are so high that sometimes you really can't do as much as you need to, to live up to the expectations.

They've both had solid years. I think Johnny probably had a better year than we even imagined. But they're both good prospects and they both have a chance to be really good players.

Q. In the first half, timeouts, you guys had success of stopping runs and going on runs of your own. That didn't carry over to the second half. What do you think about the timeouts?

BILL SELF: I don't think the timeouts had anything to do with anything first or second half. What I think had a lot to do with it, we missed a lot of shots second half. A lot of shots that you say, well, that's the same shots we made in the first half. But we missed a lot of shots. The bottom line is we never got stops.

I think they scored -- I could be wrong. I think it's like 17 their first 21 possessions in the second half. That's a recipe for disaster regardless.

So I don't really believe that the timeouts didn't stem the tide that you would hope they would. But the bottom line, when you leave a huddle, you still got to go out and execute, and you've got to make shots and you've got to get stops and we just didn't do that at all. At all. Basically from the 19-minute mark to the 8-minute mark. I don't know exactly what it was where it went from up 4 to down 22 or 23. It seemed like it happened so fast.

We needed seven or eight timeouts, as opposed to just

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

four. But, unfortunately, they wouldn't Grant them.

Q. Hunter dislocated his shoulder about two weeks ago. What did he give you in terms of toughness the last couple weeks and in today's performance?

BILL SELF: Well, I thought -- you know, this is so minor, but him getting a second foul with 1.2 seconds left stunk for us because we didn't defensive rebound the ball. If we got the rebound, obviously that doesn't happen.

I thought Hunt's great. His attitude, his work ethic. His body was -- he was able to rehab it in a way that he could return, whereas Kevin tried and he couldn't. But I thought Hunt gave us everything he had. But that was one tired dude out there today.

He was exhausted after the first game. There's no excuses, just like they said. But there wasn't much recovery time for our guys.

Q. Looking back, do you think the quick turnaround was disappointing, or what is your take on having to play so early after a late game?

BILL SELF: I'm not an expert on that. Of course, would we have preferred more rest? Absolutely. But I'm sure anybody would that gets back to the hotel at 1 a.m. and you have your dinner and then you've got to flip it quick.

I would have loved to been able to practice yesterday. But that wouldn't have made any difference. When I say practice yesterday, you know, guys were gassed. It's not the time's fault that we had to play 40 minutes on Thursday in a fast-paced game. That's just the way -- that's just the team that we drew. We had to fight hard to get the win.

So there were some things that went into it that's different than people saying, well, the time. Gonzaga also had the time, but they played so well they didn't get to -- they didn't have to stress. So I don't think people making the times when teams play take that into consideration.

Well, this team's stressed and this team didn't. So whatever time it was, you know, it was. And I'm sure everybody that played here today wished it was moved back a couple hours or whatever it could be. But it probably couldn't be that way because that's what they decided to do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate you.

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