

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Clemson vs Baylor

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Memphis, Tennessee, USA

FedExForum

Baylor Bears

Coach Scott Drew

Ja'Kobe Walter

RayJ Dennis

Media Conference

Clemson - 72, Baylor - 64

SCOTT DREW: Well, the last game's never easy, but this group, especially it's hard because it's such a great group. Our staff loved being with them each and every day. And they've done such a great job representing Baylor basketball, our university, community. I'm so proud of them.

I hurt for them. I hurt that we won't be together with them. Great leadership. Great upperclassmen. And I just thank God for giving us an opportunity to work with them. And I thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ for what he did this week for us. I'm proud of these guys.

Q. RayJ, when the shots weren't falling and Clemson kind of built their lead, you could see the frustration on y'all's faces. How were you able to get back to a place mentally where you could make it a game?

RAYJ DENNIS: We had been in that position a couple times before this year. And starting with the coaches trickling down all the way through to the last guy on the roster, everybody kept their composure, and we were confident that we could come back and make it a game.

Q. Ja'Kobe, tough ending, but could you talk about what you all did to come back? But how tough was that missing the free throws with 36 seconds left, I guess?

JA'KOBÉ WALTER: Extremely tough. We work on free throws all the time. So just missing them really hurts for sure. But as a team, we all just stayed together. We know



what we've been through this whole season, so we didn't doubt in our minds at all that we were going to be able to come back and make it a game.

Q. You've talked about it before, but the freshmen and what Ja'Kobe and Yves and Miro were able to do this season, what can you say about that guy sitting next to you?

RAYJ DENNIS: I should have said this earlier, but first I want to thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ and how blessed we are to be in this position.

But I mean, they've been great all year. They're the reason we were in the position like we were today, that we were able to make it to the second round and we had a 3 seed.

They were huge all year. They didn't play like freshmen. And they'll have great careers for 10, 15 years, 20 years.

Q. RayJ, coming to Baylor, I know it's hard to find perspective now, but how glad are you that you came to this program and what are you going to take away from it?

SCOTT DREW: We're really glad he did.

RAYJ DENNIS: I'm super glad I came here. I mean everybody always has the expectations and the way they want something to end, but I couldn't have asked for my fifth year to go any better and play for a better coach and have better teammates.

I mean, I've got brothers for the rest of my life. So I'm super excited that I came to Baylor. And I wouldn't change it for anything.

Q. Ja'Kobe, since last summer you guys have talked about how tight this team is. What can you just say about kind of the brotherhood that you guys have on this team?

JA'KOBÉ WALTER: It's definitely for life. Behind the scenes, I think we're the closest group in college. I don't doubt that at all. Our seniors, they've been leaders to all of



us all year.

Everybody on the team is just like family for real. It's just really tough just to know that it's all over, but I know that our relationships are always going to last.

Q. Ja'Kobe, there are one-and-dones who could use college as a pit stop, but seems like you poured a lot into this place. What does that mean to you? You've always talked about it's always about the team, that kind of thing?

JAKOBE WALTER: It's home. The group of guys, the staff, it's just really hard. Every game, I just went and put my body on the line because I loved my teammates so much, love the coaches so much.

I never looked ahead. I always just wanted to be in the moment because this is really hard. We had big plans, and I know we could have did them.

Q. RayJ, down 10 at halftime. What was the message and what got you going in the second half? I think you scored 21 of your 27 in the second half.

RAYJ DENNIS: Reiterate what I said earlier, we came into halftime, we had been in positions like that all year. Coaches did a great job making sure we were battle tested and put in positions like that so we don't panic when we're down 10. Everybody stuck to the plan, we stayed together and we leaned on each other. And that's how we were able to make it a game.

Q. In the first half, you could never get any traction going. Was it something you weren't able to do, or was it something they were doing to keep you from getting on track? In the first half, you weren't able to get any traction in the first half. Was it something you weren't doing, or was it something they were doing to get you off track?

SCOTT DREW: I think you have to credit their length. Defensively, they're very good. They always -- schematically, Brad does a great job. But their length, not many people have a 6'10" 3-man and then a frontline that big. I don't know if that affected some of our shots, but I'd give them definitely credit for it.

I thought the second half, when we started to make a comeback, we started to get the pace, we started to get a couple of stops, I thought we started moving better, and unfortunately in basketball seems, when you make shots everything seems to go better. First half we didn't make enough shots, and again credit them for a lot of that.

Q. What did you say to the team when they were down 61-48? You were pretty animated in that huddle. You scored, called a timeout, and you kind of got into them.

SCOTT DREW: Actually, I said let's have the best comeback of the NCAA Tournament. I think they were excited about that. We couldn't change anything that happened before, but the last six months we could change.

Q. When Ja'Kobe got the steal, got fouled, goes to the line, I see your face, you're smiling. You've called him a great player all year. I know you have the utmost confidence he's going to knock them down. How do you keep him from taking it all on himself, because your offense, front ends, one-on-ones all game long.

SCOTT DREW: If you take the front ends, I think we're 16-for-29, and that's where you've got to give Clemson credit, 20-for-24. And the irony is we spent more time shooting free throws with this group than any other group. And we've really made a lot of strides and a lot of improvement, but today we got snake bit. And Ja'Kobe is one of our best free throw shooters, has been all year. If it was late in the game, we'd try to get him the ball.

What I love about him and what makes him so special is, the question was asked about the one-and-dones, they don't unpack their bags. And I mean, it was really hard for him after the game. And you love it, you love that he cares.

Q. I know this is obviously a very emotional moment for you and your student-athletes. You talked about faith, and you spoke about, you know, no matter what this moment is, that you appreciate God above everything. You've heard your student-athletes say it right next to you. Just what you can say about that faith and how that faith carries you even through a moment like this.

SCOTT DREW: Well, we know -- we call it preparing champions for life. It's a spiritual academic character formation in basketball. And our first goal is each and every year that we spend eternity together. I always tell them there's no losses, no missed shots, no bad officials, so everybody's all in.

Q. In the locker room, the theme of what these guys were saying, was this was one of the most favorite teams they've played on. Could you talk about what it was like for you to coach a group of guys like this?

SCOTT DREW: It's hard because when you coach 30-plus years, there's certain teams that are just more special than others because of the bond you have. They were all raised

right. They were all such a fun-loving group, respected one another. It all starts with the upperclassmen leadership, which was phenomenal all year. But normally you have one or two guys that aren't energy-givers and they can be an energy-vampire. You might have a win but they didn't get their points and they're a little upset, and you feel that.

This team, you just didn't. We didn't have any of that. And it's such a blessing. That's why every day was such a joy, and they always let us coach them. Anything we said -- in fact, we got scared because whatever we told them, they did. Like, we've got to be on point.

So you don't always get that from young people. Just really appreciative of the team this year and how they conducted, carried themselves and how they've given all they've had for each other.

Q. RayJ talked about it. He said that Yves, Ja'Kobe should have 15, 20 years ahead of them of playing basketball. Do you fully expect that those two guys probably played their last college basketball game?

SCOTT DREW: In the next couple of days we'll visit with them and see where things are at. But the great thing that I have is they've got great parents, and they'll make the right decision for them. I don't have to stress or worry because they'll be extremely educated and they won't put their son in a bad position.

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