

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Tennessee vs Houston

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

Houston Cougars

Coach Kelvin Sampson

L.J. Cryer

Milos Uzan

Emanuel Sharp

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference

Houston 69, Tennessee 50

THE MODERATOR: We will ask Coach Sampson for opening comments and take questions for anybody up here on the dais.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, first of all, congratulations to Rick and University of Tennessee. Making the Elite Eight is awesome. It's an amazing, amazing accomplishment. When you work on this side of the table of taking -- coaching a team when they get to summer school in June all the way through today, I know what it's like. I know the heartbreak and the tears that's going on in that locker room, but they had an awesome, awesome season and they're coached by a Hall-of-Famer in every sense. So congratulations to Tennessee on a great year.

Really proud of our kids. We play in a tough conference. I think going 19-1 in the Big 12, 10-0 on the road prepared us for this. The Purdue game was kind of like a road game. Tennessee game was kind of like a road game, too, with their fans, but our kids are kind of calloused to that and so kudos to them. Really proud of this bunch. I think the reason why we have been so good over the years is we've developed a great culture that our seniors adopt and make sure that our young kids and new kids buy into it. We're kind of a home-grown program. We bring kids in as freshmen. It's been a secret sauce of ours and we have had two kids the last two years in the portal, L.J. who came from Baylor and Milos who came from Oklahoma, but their character and willingness to be coached the way we do it and their maturity, I think, has really helped.



We have a really good team. I think being humble and staying hungry every day has really helped us. I'm more excited than I'm letting on right now (laughter). I'm really excited. I'm really excited for these kids, but it's their moment and just happy for them.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll take questions for the coach or student-athletes.

Q. Coach, you guys really jumped on them that first 5, 10 minutes of the game. I'm wondering what, if anything, did you see in the last 36 hours that might have indicated that your team was ready to do that?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, it wasn't the last 36 hours... since June. We didn't get good the last 36 hours. We just went through the Big 12 Tournament, played three games there. The thing I like about this team, I don't think they overreact to anything, good or bad. Kind of keep an even keel. That's the way Milos is, the way L.J. is, J' Wan, Emanuel. They just have a good way about them when it comes to that. We spent a lot of time with Purdue just like they did us. We played the Arizona and -- who did we play? Who was our first two games against in the tournament? SIU and Gonzaga. So after SIU and Gonzaga, we knew we were playing Purdue, so we spent a lot of time preparing for them. And then Tennessee, I had seen Tennessee play quite a bit. I knew Zakai Zeigler and Chaz Lanier and the Gainey kid. We've seen them a lot, but we felt like it was a good matchup for us. Our defense and our rebounding, I thought Terrance Arceneaux coming off the bench early, when J'Wan got his second bound allowed me to leave J'Wan over there so he could be ready the second half.

The strength of our team has always been our team. Emanuel and Milos and L, J'Wan, JoJo, they have all taken turns being the best player for that week or the next two weeks, but we have a good team and whoever we play the next game we get prepared for it and that's been our secret sauce.

Q. This is for Coach Sampson and Emanuel, please. First bucket of the ball game you guys scored and then Emanuel tied up a Volunteer there at the top of the ten-second line for a held ball situation. You guys go



down and score and after 10 minutes you're up 17-4. The defensive pressure that was set early, can you talk about that, please?

EMANUEL SHARP: That's what we do. We're a great defensive team and that's how we like to set the tone of the game, on the defensive end. I think when we come out with the right intensity, we're a hard team to beat and we did a great job of that today and it helped us as we carried it on for the rest of the game.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, we start with our defense. Our kids understand how meticulous we are with our game plans, what we're trying to take away, and our kids have a very high basketball IQ. We have a very smart team. We're able to do some things that may be outside the box, whether it's spending extra time on baseline, out of bounds plays, we spend a lot of time on that, offensively and defensively. We take pride on not being scored on in baseline out of bounds. Tennessee was different than Purdue and Gonzaga in that they didn't run a lot of ball-screen stuff. They did the second half, but the first half they changed the angle of their pin-downs. Not a lot of staggers. Lanier and Gainey, Zeigler, if you watch them when they beat Auburn or beat Alabama, they played a certain way. But we play the way we play and our kids are very confident in our approach and our defense.

Q. Question for Coach, hard-fought game blowing that early lead then protecting it, ultimately taking that intentional shot clock violation late in your last possession. What moment did it sink in that you're going to win the game ultimately and move on to the Final Four?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't allow myself to think that way until the game's over out of respect, number one, for the game. You always respect the game. And then number two, respect your opponent. When the game was over, I was excited, but I know how hard our kids work. I know that most of our work is done in anonymity and I prefer it that way. We start in June. What is Monday? Baseball field, right? We did 18 100 yard sprints for time, and if anybody doesn't make it, we start over. That's part of our culture. You be on time and you're held accountable for everything you do. Once you teach accountability, the next phase of that is responsibility and that's why our kids -- this is very much a player-led team. They're responsible for our success, and as a coach, that's the way I prefer it. This is the 11th team I've had at Houston. We won 30 plus games five times, and this is the first time we won 34 games. And I'm glad these guys did it. The maturity of our older guys has been great for our younger guys.

When the horn blew, my first thought was to Rick because

getting to the Elite Eight is such an amazing accomplishment. I knew he would be a little bit down so I thought about him. I was really happy for my kids, and then when I turned around and saw my son and my daughter, my two grandkids and my wife, I felt good for them, too, because they have to put up with a cranky old coach sometimes. It's good to be able to share this with your family, and that's what's most important to me.

Q. Coach, I asked the players this, but I wanted to ask you. Looking forward to next week, how exciting is it to have the Final Four in San Antonio, so close to Houston for the team as well as for the student body and the fan base, as well?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Excited about it. Two years ago we beat Auburn in Birmingham and we were the higher seed. We were the one seed coming here, and Purdue and Tennessee, that's great for them. They didn't ask to be here. They were chosen to be here. Just like we chose to be here, but we didn't really talk about that with our team. We just said two more road games, that if Kentucky had won today, that would be a road game because their fans are going to quadruple our fans. Tennessee's fans were awesome today. What's the attendance at this place? Anybody know? Total?

Q. We had 18,000 today, Coach.

KELVIN SAMPSON: That's probably 16,000 Tennessee fans. That's awesome for Tennessee. Jump on the interstate and get here. That's what we'll do next week. We'll jump on the interstate and head down San Antonio. That's why you don't complain because it can flip the other way. Proud of our guys for finding a way to win. We beat two outstanding programs, not just teams, great programs this week in Purdue and Tennessee.

THE MODERATOR: Got about four minutes or so.

Q. This question is for Milos. From the beginning you guys dominated, what message did this send to Duke in the Final Four?

MILOS UZAN: I feel like we always want to throw the first punch. Eman, the way he guards, he was able to get a jumpball early. I feel like that shook those guys up a little bit and it's super important to keep our foot on their neck. So we did a good job with that.

Q. Giving what happened to Mylik last game, he made that clutch three and had a significant contribution -- how awesome is it to see him compared to that day to this day?



KELVIN SAMPSON: I'm going to let L take that one.

L.J. CRYER: Can you ask that again?

KELVIN SAMPSON: How satisfying given what Mylik went through the last 24 hours --

L.J. CRYER: Mylik is one of the most under appreciated players on the team, one of the most underrated players in the country. We appreciate all the little things he did and I'm glad he had a moment like that to hit a big shot for us because he does all the small things people don't talk about, rebounds, loose balls, block shots. He's a big piece of our team and he stepped up big for us today.

Q. Score got to be about 11 points and then five threes fell for you guys. Let's talk about that run right there at the end of the ball game.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, I have seen that many times from our group, home and away. I think we're one of the top two or three, maybe, three-point shooting teams in the country. All three of these guys shoot 40-plus percent from the three-point line with volume attempts, so it's no surprise. I was more surprised they missed some of the ones they did. But, you know, just kind of stay the course. When they started pressing us, my message in the huddle was, be fearless. Don't be afraid to take a big shot and don't be afraid to miss it either. What's the worst that can happen? You miss it. We're also a good offensive rebounding team. That's why a missed shot is much better than a turnover. You can't rebound a turnover. If you get a window -- I talk to L.J. about this a lot. I don't have to talk to Emanuel. Emanuel usually shoots whether he has a window or not. L.J. is a little more frugal in his approach, but all three of these guys... Milos had six threes the other night, last game. L.J. has had many, many games with six threes, and so has Emanuel. That's part of our offense, that we've got outstanding offensive rebounders and normally we don't take an offensive rebound back up. Normally we kick it out and we call those daggers. We dagger offensive rebounds and that gives us another opportunity to make threes.

THE MODERATOR: We have time for a couple more. We have one on Zoom.

Q. For the student-athletes, you heard Coach talking about getting the 34 wins and being happy that this team is the team that got to do it. What has it meant to reach the Final Four together this season?

EMANUEL SHARP: Can you repeat that?

KELVIN SAMPSON: What do this season's

accomplishments mean to you guys getting the 34 wins and me saying I was glad this team did it?

EMANUEL SHARP: It's a good feeling knowing what we've been through this season. We went through some struggles this season and a lot of people doubted us. We went back into the gym, cracked down on the things we need to do better and we fixed them. We improved them ever since then and ending up where we are now is great. With the players we have on this team, we have come a long way and it's a great feeling.

MILOS UZAN: Yeah, it's definitely a good feeling. This team, it's a brotherhood here. I love lacing up next to E and L every day. So, I mean, it's definitely big-time for sure.

L.J. CRYER: I mean, it's special because you're doing it with guys that you love and it's always good being on the right side of history, so, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. All the best in San Antonio.

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