

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Duke vs Houston

Friday, March 29, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

American Airlines Arena

Houston Cougars

Kelvin Sampson

J'Wan Roberts

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Duke 54, Houston 51

THE MODERATOR: We will go to questions for Coach Sampson.

Q. Can you specify what Jamal's injury was, and, two what his absence meant to your team ultimately?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Grade four sprain. He is probably going to be out four to six weeks. That was a really tough locker room at halftime.

It didn't take a lot to convince those kids that we could still win. That's just kind of what we've done all year. We've dealt with this all year. As far as answering your question what did it mean ultimately, he is a first team All American. He is a Big 12 Player of the Year. He's a Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year. He's the heart and soul of this team.

I doubt any team in America has -- maybe Edey from Purdue -- that means as much to their team as Jamal means to this team. There's just not another Jamal. He was the best player on the floor tonight. He's been the best player on the floor every game we've played this year except a few.

We got a 1 seed because of his leadership, his toughness, his ability to make everybody better. We didn't have another -- we don't have another Jamal. You say, well, who is your point guard to replace Jamal? We don't have a point guard to replace Jamal. Those guys are -- we've had guys to go in and rest him, but get him back in. Sometimes that's just God's work. It just wasn't our time.

I couldn't be more proud of our team, though. We're still in a position to win the game. We held that team to 54



points. Second-chance points, they were plus 2. Points off turnovers, we were plus 5. Fastbreak points, they had none. We had two.

We had some plays that I wish we would have made that we certainly could have made. We were in a position to win the game without Jamal. With Jamal, it's a totally different story, but that's neither here nor there, is it?

Proud of my kids. Resilient, tough, just like they've been all year. My disappointment came not just in losing, but not being able to coach them tomorrow. I love coaching this team. I really did.

This is an unbelievable group of young men.

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by J'Wan Roberts. Questions, please.

Q. When Jamal goes out, Coach yesterday was talking about your leadership and how you two were the pillars of this culture. When you see him go out, what goes through your mind, and how do you kind of proceed through the game?

J'WAN ROBERTS: Just try to be the voice of the team. He's the head of the snake. He's the leader. When he goes, we go. My job when he is on and off the court is to lead by example and just try to take everybody else under my wing and just try to be the leader that I am.

When he went down, it was hard to see, but we got confidence in each other. We know that we're going to stay together and play for him. It happened to me when I played against Texas Tech, and I went down pretty hard. They all came together and said We're going to do this for Wan.

The way I look at it, this is just deeper than basketball. It wasn't the outcome that we wanted, but I don't think nobody quit. I don't think nobody gave up. Everybody just kept fighting.

You look up, we're down one, we're down two, down three. It wasn't like it was a 15-point lead, and we just quit.



Definitely proud of the guys and not giving up knowing we didn't have our leader on the floor, but just trusting each other. It wasn't the outcome that we wanted.

Q. It was 8-3 at the first time-out, and you had all the points. I think Francis had a basket. All the points right inside. You were killing them inside. Obviously the game changed for a number of reasons, but what did they do to make the physical battle more even as the game went on because it looked like you had control early.

J'WAN ROBERTS: Yeah, just foul trouble, fouls that were pointless, end of the shot clock fouls, reaching fouls, just little disciplined areas that we did.

But I would say that was the main part, just not being disciplined, but just silly fouls.

Q. What emotions are running through your head right now?

J'WAN ROBERTS: One, we lost. Two, we don't have any practice tomorrow. You know, we don't have any more film sessions. We don't have any wake-up calls anymore. The season is over with.

We started this back in June, and we all had one goal. That's to get to the national championship. That's really all the emotions that's going through just not being able to be with these group of guys again.

I love every single one of them. They're like brothers to me. We never go a day without talking to each other. We always see each other every day. Just the bond that we have with each other, it's a real special group. Especially with all the adversity that we've been a part of, injuries, Terrance being out, and just the journey that we've been on.

A couple of days ago, Jojo, the freshman, I told him you didn't think you was going to be on a Sweet 16 team your first year, and just all the stuff that you've been through, surgery, it's just all part of the process. I try to tell the guys, be sad that we lost, but -- yeah, that's the main thing. Just not being able to practice with these guys again.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, J'Wan. Questions for Coach.

Q. Would you have done anything differently looking back on this season?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I don't know. It's probably not the time to ask that right now.

Q. Same thing I asked of J'Wan. Yesterday you talked about him being one of kind of the unsung leaders along with Jamal who kind of gets all the national applaud, but what did you see from him tonight when Jamal went down and you needed somebody to step up on both ends really?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, we had a game plan going in that when the ball got reversed and we said those step-up screens that they would switch and then Wan would just get it down and make the right read. If they came and doubled, move it, move it, and we were going to get a shot on the other side of the floor. They didn't come just play one-on-one. They didn't come, so we played one-on-one, and they were scoring at will.

Then he got a little too aggressive on a back-down. The kid, he did the right thing. Wan shouldn't have given that little extra nudge, but you're taught to block. He did what he was supposed to do and the call went against -- the problem was that was his second foul.

You said, what changed? Well, when he was on the bench, he can't score inside anymore. That's what changed. You say, well, how did they even it out? There was no evening out. He wasn't in the game. So when he's not in the game, we're already down Jojo, so it wasn't a game that I could put the other freshmen in, Ced Lath, that wasn't fair to him. It wasn't fair to our team either.

J'Wan is a wonderful young man. He really is. He's just a great, great, great human being. Jamal was the heartbeat of this team, but in a lot of ways, the soul of this team was J'Wan. He had a tremendous year. Second Team All Conference Big 12. Because of our limitations with the other injuries, we just couldn't afford him to get his second foul tonight.

But even that I thought this was a game we could win, but without Wan or Jamal, it would be difficult. We still have a chance, but with Jamal and with J'Wan, obviously...

Q. I don't know if this even matters, but does it feel kind of anti-climatic? You had a great team. Obviously a No. 1 ranked team. You want to see if you can win a championship or what it's going to take to beat this team and ultimately Shead misses 26 minutes.

KELVIN SAMPSON: What was the question?

Q. Was this anti-climatic?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, it doesn't feel like a fair fight.



You would have to take maybe two of theirs to equal one of Jamal. That's how good he was.

He's a First Team All American. You don't have another one of those. You don't have the best defensive player in the Big 12. You don't have a guy that made all the big shots at the end.

I thought our kids battled. Think about it. We had the ball a couple of times to take the lead late in the game. So it's not like we lost Jamal. Okay, the game was lost. No, we still battled, but that's our identity. That's our culture. That's who we are.

We felt like we had a good enough team to get to Arizona. It was unfortunate that that team wasn't able to stay together.

Q. Do you think if Jamal was in the game, you win?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I'm not going to answer that.

Q. So you've been through this enough. You've had a great season, Sweet 16, 30-plus wins, all that stuff. Do you feel like you had a great year?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Obviously.

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