

National Invitation Tournament: North Texas vs UC Irvine

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

North Texas Mean Green

Ross Hodge

Atin Wright

Jasper Floyd

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference



lost the basketball game.

But the true disappointment comes from just not being able to be with this group in another film session, another team dinner, just all the things that really matter at the end of the day.

Q. What has North Texas meant to y'all this last year, really, and what will you remember or miss most about your time here this year?

ATIN WRIGHT: Man, it's meant everything. I wish I was here longer with these guys. I wish I had more years with these guys because I love all of them. Most connected, together team I've been on.

And like were Coach said, I mean, it's really not about the wins and losses. Yeah, it's fun to play basketball with them but like off the court, just being around them, we all love each other. I think that's just the main thing that I'm personally going to miss about being at North Texas.

JASPER FLOYD: First and foremost, I give a lot of honor to My Lord and Savior Jesus Chris. He's head of my life and I'm nothing without Him. I thank Him every day for giving me the ability to glorify Him, and I thank Him every day for giving me the people that He's given me in my life.

You know, that means a lot to me, and you know, that's just what it is. I'm thankful for the people that I've been blessed with.

Q. How do you think your game has evolved over this NIT run? Another big game for you today.

JASPER FLOYD: Personally, I don't think I did enough for us to help us win. But I think I've been playing at a good level. I just wanted to help us win. That's all it is.

You know, that's credit to my teammates. They allow me to be me. The coaching staff, they allow me to be me, and you know, I just -- I just wanted to help us win. That's all there is.

UC Irvine 69, North Texas 67

ROSS HODGE: About what I expected from a game standpoint. A ton of respect for Coach Turner and everything he's done with that program the last ten years, really, ten, fifteen years, they have been a model of consistency. Senior leadership, toughness, and ultimately they were able to make a couple plays more than we were tonight.

But you've got to give a lot of credit. They won 32 games for a reason and they just kept fighting and scratching. They would answer. We made some big shots. They answered. We had our opportunities. Felt like in the first half we fouled a little bit too much. Let them get back in the game.

Felt like we had played hard enough in the first half to be up but just fouled too much and did too many, really, uncharacteristic things from this group that you can't do in games like this.

But love the heart of this team. Like I said, what they did in a short amount of time, coming together, loving each other, serving each other, this journey with this team started June 1st, really and here we are April 1st still playing, and gave ourselves an opportunity to win a championship, which these guys so desperately wanted.

But I feel like I'm a better person forgetting to know these guys and their families. Such incredible people. Great players, obviously. But just incredible people, man. They are going to be tremendous fathers and husbands and like I said, they are an inspiration to me as a group of how selfless they have been and how they have poured everything into this, and yes, extremely disappointed we

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. In this era of portaling for players and coaches, it's very admirable that you stayed the course; that you want to finish what you're doing. Curious why, and your reaction to Ross's decision, to complete this and be a part of this team all the way through.

ROSS HODGE: Appreciate the question. And also, I want to start out by saying thank you to Wren Baker, the athletic director at West Virginia, and Jared Mosley, the athletic director at North Texas for allowing me to do this, as well.

And I think they -- they know my heart, obviously, and they know me. There was never any real discussion or any real doubt that I was going to finish what I started with this group.

And we talk all year long. Like you said, it's not a secret. You know, when you have good, young players nowadays, like you know the pool that they are getting pooled on, if you have success as a coach, you're going to have opportunities.

And that was kind of a message all year long far before anything that came with me is just, hey, let's be where our feet are and let's pour everything into this group. You do life with these guys and you get to see them, everybody gets to see them out on a basketball court, and ultimately that's my job to win games, and if you don't win enough, we know all that.

But you literally do life with these guys and you help them navigate losses with their families. You know, we've had losses -- we've had people lose family members this year. We've had staff members have kids this year. And like, you're going through all those life experiences with these players, and that's a big part of our messaging. And it's more important than the basketball part. And what you see on the floor is just, in my opinion, kind of a reflection of how much these guys care about each other, and I would be the biggest hypocrite in the world if I changed.

So I was going to stay true to me. I'm always going to be who I am, and I love these guys, man. I wasn't -- obviously you get pulled a little different directions but no different than you would be if -- if you're at North Texas this time of year. You're recruiting the portal and you're prepping for games. I wanted to give these guys everything I had, and you know, when we -- when we told them -- I mean, they were -- they were so incredibly happy for me. It was like tears of joy from them.

And I told them then: If you see me change my demeanor, or not jump on you for not getting on the floor for a loose ball, you need to call me on it, because we're going to win

this thing. I'm thankful for everybody involved that they gave me the opportunity to finish this out. I wish it could have finished with a win, but just an opportunity to do that with these guys one more time.

ATIN WRIGHT: Our motto is stay together all the time, on and off the court and we lead by Coach's example, and his heart is always in the right place. We natural, like, follow after him. I personally had no doubt, like he wasn't going to change when he found out he had got the new job. Like he said, we were all happy for him. He's a great man, honestly.

JASPER FLOYD: You know, I wasn't raised like to just step out on somebody just because something happened. That's just not in me. We tell each other we love each other. It wouldn't be right for us, like Coach said, that would be a hypocrite.

You know, to just to quit on this team like that, I don't -- I don't think that's the right mindset to have. Just wanted to try to finish something out together with these guys and this team.

Q. You've been at North Texas for eight years, but it's been a big part of your life and your career. What are your thoughts on North Texas and what it's meant to you in that time?

ROSS HODGE: There's not enough words, especially if you make me start crying. But there's honestly not enough words that could accurately describe the last eight years, and you know, like.

I said, man, like I just mentioned there, we've really been through all the -- we've been through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, man, and you do life. Your kids come to North Texas, and my son's five. You know, he's 13 now. My daughter was nine. You have staff members have kid, and they get older. You lose a staff member in Nelson Haggerty which we still talk about every day and use his quotes. You go to NCAA Tournaments and you win games and you win NITs and you lose tough losses.

Met so many people that supersedes anything that you could do on a basketball floor, and it is really hard to even kind of put into words at this moment. Obviously just very thankful, very thankful for the people that have been brought into my life during my time period at North Texas.

Q. You were off to a big lead. What turned it?

JASPER FLOYD: You know, they are a really good team. They are well-coached. We're a good team, as well. But sometimes that's not how the game goes. We lost focus a

little bit. And you know, that's what happens sometimes in these games.

Q. Obviously both you guys have been integral to this team's success, especially on the offensive side of the ball. When you both being seniors, what kind of advice have you given to younger guys that will have to take that scoring burden and lead the team going forward?

ATIN WRIGHT: Only taking it one day at a time. Always get your work in. Be patient. Take advantage of any opportunity you get. And it might not always go your way, but you know you've just got to keep your head down and keep working. That's my advice.

JASPER FLOYD: Personally for me, I was in a position where I wasn't playing at first, and I waited my turn.

So you know, I just try to stress that to those guys that they just got to stay where their feet are, stay present, enjoy the moment that they are in and be ready, be prepared for the moment that comes for them.

Q. Just the way you guys were able to take away Leuchten for them in the first half, and then he was able to get to the line in the second. What changed there? Was it officiating? Was it his play?

ROSS HODGE: No. I think, you know, early on, we were able to disrupt them, and we were able to get deflections. We were able to make it hard on them. We were able to turn them over.

And then, you know, as the game wore on, they were able to move the ball a little freer. Obviously they are a really good team with experience.

You know, he creates so much pressure on the rim whether it's offensive rebounding or he's such a big target. We made the choice to double-team Tillis when he gets the ball down there. So you're kind of leaving him free at the rim at times and we just weren't quite able to make up fully with the activity.

We turned them over 17 times, which is a great number. We're typically -- typically, we give up -- we're like one of the -- we're a team that gives up some of the fewest assisted baskets in the country. We don't give up a lot of assisted baskets.

So for them to get 18 assists, you know, they were able to move the ball a little freer, and the skill level that they have across all positions, puts you in tough binds. We just weren't quite able to make up with it, with some activity,

and then you've got to give -- you've got to give Hohn credit, man. He just jumped up and made a couple bombs at the end of clocks. That's what senior guards do.

Q. Coach McCasland spoke highly of you recently and in the past when you got hired here. What has his impact for you as a coach here at North Texas and moving forward?

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, before we worked together, he was one of my best friend in life, and I've always said it about him, as well. There's a lot of people that will profess their faith and tell you how much they love Christ and how they live a God-centered life, and often, that isn't the case.

But as good of a basketball coaches, he's a better husband. He's a better father and he's a better Christian, man, and that alone is something that I strive for in all situations.

You know, he's obviously influenced me a lot from a basketball standpoint. We worked together six years but it's more that his daily walk with Christ is something that, you know, all Christians should look at and -- and want to do. It's not fake. It's real.

Q. You spoke to the turnovers. You guys ended up with 70 shots. How does that hit your eyes, and how pleased are you with that aspect of your execution?

ROSS HODGE: I think any time you go into the game and you look at a stat sheet, you look at it and you only had five turnovers and the other team had 17. It wasn't like we got crushed at the line.

Yeah, you feel -- wish we could have had a couple more defensive rebounds. They out-rebounded us by five. But if you're just looking at a stat sheet, you shoot 70 shots, you get 21 more shots, for a pretty efficient basketball team, like you're probably going to feel pretty good about it.

And I did think we had some good looks, man, that just didn't go down. Even there late, had a couple shots, you couldn't get them much closer. They just didn't go down. And to their credit, they jumped up and made them.

Q. You mentioned that the journey started June 1st and now it's April for you guys. This team is made up of so many new guys. How would you describe this journey as a whole now that the season has kind of concluded that you guys have went on?

ROSS HODGE: Again, it's kind of like -- it's really hard to put into words accurately. You have to be with them every day, this group, to really fully appreciate the people they

are.

And it's repetitive, but how they supported each other and how they loved each other, and it's one of the least, you know, just -- they just didn't have bad days. Atin Wright doesn't have bad days. Jasper doesn't have bad days. Moulaye Sissoko; they just don't have bad days. Man, they are just every day, you walk onto the floor, or you walk into a room, and you are legitimately happy to see them.

And if you're having a little bit of a bad day, the gratitude that they have in their hearts snaps you out of it, and they motivated me to be a better person and view things differently. Just their perspective on life as people is what I will remember this group for the most.

Q. You just mentioned Moulaye Sissoko. Playing up against a seven footer is always going to be a big challenge, and more so knowing that he's not an outright natural center. Talk about his overall development and performance tonight.

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, Moulaye has been incredible this whole year. He was the most improved player in the American this year as voted by the other coaches. I've always said it; not only was he one of the most improved players in our conference, he was one of the most improved players in the country.

If there's a better person out there than Moulaye, I want to meet him. Because he's genuinely one of the best people I've ever met, and I will certainly miss him. But I know he's going to do great things on and off the floor.

Q. How do you feel about the future of North Texas Basketball after the culture that you and Coach McCasland have built here over the last eight years?

ROSS HODGE: I've always said coaches win games and administrations win championships. Under Dr. Keller and Jared Mosley's leadership, I have no doubt in my mind that they will continue to do great things there. The people are incredible, man, and what maybe they may lack in numbers or sheer volume, they certainly make up with passion and commitment.

D-Rob is going to do great. Like I said the other day, I've known him for a really long time, and I have no doubt in my mind he will continue doing great things at North Texas.

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