

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2017

Bob Huggins

Esa Ahmad

Tarik Phillip

West Virginia

West Virginia - 51, Kansas State - 50

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the Mountaineers from West Virginia. Coach Bob Huggins, and we will start with his two student-athletes, Tarik Phillip and Esa Ahmad. So we will start with questions for our student-athletes.

Q. You guys switched to a zone defense in the second half. What was the affect of that?

TARIK PHILLIP: They were getting a lot of run-outs and penetrating to the rim. That was giving them opportunities to hit threes, so we wanted to stop that.

Q. What do you attribute the slow offensive start to?

ESA AHMAD: To be honest, we just missed shots. We weren't attacking the basket and felt like we were settling for threes. We talked about that at halftime. We wanted to get to the rim. That's what we did.

Q. Tarik, is this a team that always feels like it's in a game, it's never out of a game?

TARIK PHILLIP: We're always in the game. It's just because of the style that we play we create turnovers and stuff like that, but we always in games.

Q. Tarik, what went right in the second half after no points in the first?

TARIK PHILLIP: We guarded a lot better. We rebounded. We made shots.

Q. For you personally, though?

TARIK PHILLIP: I don't know to be honest. Like I said, we just made shots and we guarded the ball a lot better.

Q. Esa, ever since the back injury a couple weeks ago, slow getting you back into things, but you got back in the starting lineup tonight and poured it on in the second half. Any difference in the way you played tonight from those past couple of games?



ESA AHMAD: I started myself tonight. My teammates kept me positive throughout the whole slump. My coaches kept my positive, and they told me I was due for a good game. I came out here and tried to give it my all, and that's what I did.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, we will let you go back to the locker room. Congratulations on your victory and good luck tomorrow. We'll take questions now for Coach Huggins.

Q. Coach, how do you explain a victory shooting 26.7%?

BOB HUGGINS: Coaching. (Laughter.)

I don't know. I told 'em at halftime we've just got to find ways to score. We've got to get more shots. We just -- our whole thing is by either turning people over or rebounding the ball. We've got to get more shots than what our opposition does.

Q. Bob, how about defensively on Kansas State's last possession, what did you instruct your guys to do?

BOB HUGGINS: We put J.C. on the wing and put Nate underneath because they were trying to lob it to D.J. I wanted size back there, but other than that we didn't do anything, just switched personnel.

Q. The affect of the zone in the second half, can you speak to that?

BOB HUGGINS: It stops penetration. When you got three guys across the foul line you should be able to stop penetration. They were getting a lot of penetration on us and I wanted to make 'em shoot it from the perimeter.

Q. Coach, what does it mean for you and your returning players to get a second shot at the championship after last year?

BOB HUGGINS: Well, I think everybody who comes here comes here to win. We've got another opportunity to win, and that's what they were talking about in there. Let's don't let another opportunity slip away from us.

Q. Bob, you said you didn't play well last night and tonight's game low scoring, poor shooting, a lot of good defense. What does it say about this team

that it can win these kind of games?

BOB HUGGINS: Well, Kansas State is pretty good. Let's don't take anything away from them. Bruce has done a great job of coaching them. They played great last night. They played really well today.

We defend. We didn't do a very good job on our man and about, I don't know, three weeks ago we decided to try a little bit of the 1-3-1. I'm not very smart, but I'm smart enough when it works keep doing it. It's been pretty good for us.

Q. Coach, just curious your impressions of going against Wesley, for what might be his final time against you?

BOB HUGGINS: I really like him. He can defend the perimeter. He can defend the post. He can play in the post. He can play on a perimeter. He's a 6-7 guy who really rebounds with guard skills. We've always thought he was a really hard match-up for us. Esa was much better with him today than really what we've been. Esa has the same kind of size.

Q. Bob, you guys had success against Iowa State this year. To what do you attribute that to? The last couple years, really.

BOB HUGGINS: I don't know. They started out at our place and made every shot. I mean, it was like -- we just kept -- we just -- like we do, we just kept trying to bother them and try to make things hard for them, but they've put so many guys on the floor. Steve has done an unbelievable job with those guys when you think they're playing really one big guy, because Burton is really a perimeter guy. He's a big perimeter guy, but he's a perimeter guy. They make so many shots and score so many points. We're going to have to score more than 51 tomorrow probably.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Congratulations.