

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2017

Bruce Weber Wesley Iwundu Kamau Stokes

Kansas State Wildcats

West Virginia - 51, Kansas State - 50

THE MODERATOR: We will get started. Our student-athletes from Kansas State will be here in just a second. We'll introduce Coach Bruce Weber, let him make an opening statement, and then we will go to the student-athletes as soon as they step on stage. Coach?

BRUCE WEBER: It's a heartbreaker for us, for our kids. You guarded as good as you could against a team that is tough and physical and gets the ball inside. You hold 'em to 16 points the first half, 26 in the second, but to their credit they made some big plays and made some big shots to get back in the game and make that run and then they go zone. We just didn't have enough time to prepare for it. We went through it the last little five minutes you get 45 minutes today, and we just didn't make the right plays when we needed them. That allowed them to get back into it, and we didn't get the stops. Second half, second-chance points really hurt us and then you get a rebound foul, the difference-maker in the game.

I couldn't be more proud of the kids. We played in the best league in the country. We've played the best teams in the country. We've beaten them. Played other ones close. It's just disappointing for our guys that we couldn't find a way to win and get in the championship game.

THE MODERATOR: Our student-athletes are Kamau Stokes and Wesley Iwundu. Let's go to questions for them.

Q. Kamau, can you take us through that last possession and kinda what happened there and you couldn't get a pass off and had to take that shot?

KAMAU STOKES: I would say West Virginia played good defense end of the game. We didn't make the play and credit to them for just playing defense.



Q. Wesley, I'm curious if you could take us through your thoughts right now coming off this tough loss and what the future holds?

WESLEY IWUNDU: I feel good about the future for Kansas State going forward this season. Got a lot to hold our heads high about. Just got to wait until after Sunday to see where we fall, but I feel pretty good about our chances with the tournament.

Q. Wesley, talk about the difference between the first half and the second half. The defense was really good the first half and what got their offense going and what stagnated your offense?

WESLEY IWUNDU: I don't know, man. Defense, I felt like we was even keel all game. Second half they made some plays, did some things, and with us I felt like we kinda got a little stagnant, whatever. That's pretty much it. Overall they did some things in the end that we as a team got to step up and do some more things to win the game.

Q. Guys, you had four field goals in the last thirteen minutes of the game. What was it about that 1-3-1 zone that was giving you so many issues?

WESLEY IWUNDU: They play a good zone, you know. We had some open shots. We wasn't making 'em. Did a lot of things against the zone, but they stepped up and we just got to step up and make more plays versus that zone.

Q. Kamau, I was curious if you could talk about Wesley, what he did tonight and what he's meant to your team this season?

KAMAU STOKES: He's been big for us the whole season. There have been plenty of times he put us on his back. He's our senior leader and we need him to play well every game, and I feel like Wes has stepped up. He's done that this whole season.

Q. Kamau, three wins coming into this game, then this game. Do you feel like you've proven yourselves to be a quality NCAA Tournament team?

KAMAU STOKES: I would think so, but it don't come down to what I think. Our team, we have all played well enough to show everybody that we can compete with the best. So I would think so.

Q. Wesley, you've been through so many games at Kansas State. How tough was the ending to this game?

WESLEY IWUNDU: Losing a game by 1 point, that's always tough. Losing, period, is tough. But I think it's all about how you respond. However we played in this game I do feel good about our chances in the tournament. We've shown a lot. I would be very surprised if we wasn't in. In a league like this, man, it would be very surprising if we wasn't in. We did a lot of things in this league, competed with a lot of guys, showed that we could play with the best. We feel good about our chances, but at the end of the day it comes down to the Committee, but we do have a lot to argue about why we should be in.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, Kamau and Wesley, we will let you return to the locker room. Questions for Coach Weber?

Q. Coach, the stats are striking. Only 11 turnovers. You held 'em to 26.7%. You led for 33 minutes. How do you explain it?

BRUCE WEBER: The loss or how we played? We played well. They're a good team, one of the best teams in the country. I thought, you know, we talked about being tough, being determined. I thought we played that way. We guarded well. We broke down defensively a little bit down the stretch, maybe a few minutes -- too many minutes for some guys.

We were struggling against -- we had subbed well and the bench did a great job in the first half. Second half when they went zone probably you go with the guys you feel more comfortable with. We got a little stagnant. We needed a couple of -- make a couple plays. And the second-chance points down the stretch, they out-toughed us for some rebounds and that probably was the difference in the game.

Q. Isaiah was able to give you guys some good minutes this week. Is there anything that he had shown lately in practice or leading up to this that showed that he was capable of contributing the way he did in those stretches?

BRUCE WEBER: He's played well as of late. The last stretch of the season, got some confidence and got his mindset in a positive frame of mind. He's practiced well, battled, means a lot. He was in there crying after. He played 20 minutes probably his career high tonight in a big game and battled against some of the biggest, strongest, physical guys in the country. So you feel good about, you know, his progress as a player.

Q. Bruce, talk about that last possession, and did you want the timeout? What did you diagram on that? What failed on that?

BRUCE WEBER: We tried to go a double ball screen whether it was man or zone, and we talked about D.J. diving and then, you know, Dean popping and having Wes on that weak side, and they did a good job of jamming it up. Kam is a little smaller. Wes was open on the skip, and maybe D.J., diving into the basket. That's what the coaches said, but they did a good job of jamming it up. I wish he would have went off a little stronger, a little quicker, and make 'em make a call down the stretch.

But he didn't do it, and then we got it on the glass. So we said, get it to the basket. Get it on the glass and give us a chance but. Dean got a put-back, but it was after the clock.

Q. Last night, Coach, you said of course that the only way that you're guaranteed a spot in the big tournament is if you win it. Why do you feel like the team's performance in this tournament will merit you an at-large bid even though you didn't win it?

BRUCE WEBER: It goes back -- we got nine wins -- you play 20 games in this league and we got nine wins against the best or second-best, depending on what you look at. We've beaten Baylor, beaten them twice. They've beaten Oregon, Louisville, Michigan State and Xavier, and we beat them twice. We beat West Virginia. West Virginia went to Virginia and won. They've been one of the better teams in the country, and I know close doesn't count in basketball.

But we played Kansas who people had 1 or 2, and we had a shot to beat 'em at their place. It was a tie score minute left at our place. We had some other close games, you know. But I guess close doesn't matter. I think we're a good team. I think you watch us, you see it, if eye test means anything, but I hope for our kids they deserve it. I hope we get a good opportunity on Sunday.

Q. Coach, did you sense any added urgency in the last 48 hours by Wes, your senior leader? Did he say anything in the huddle tonight that let you know that he was taking ownership of this team down the stretch?

BRUCE WEBER: I think it's the last ten games. You've watched him closely, the numbers, double digit rebounds and double digit points, just doing a lot of good things for us. Great focus, looking you in the eye, talking, you know, like we're going through a scouting report and he's making suggestions and how shall we guard this or can we do this? Just a great, great finish to his career.

I know we're going to play in some tournament, but, you know, I hope it's the big one and he gets an

opportunity to keep playing along with D.J., Carlbe. I believe they deserve it. They've had a great attitude. They've battled and fought through adversity, injuries, a lot of stuff this last year. I couldn't be more proud of 'em. A great group, and I hope good things happen for them.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much and wish you the best next week. Good luck.