

March 20, 2014



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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: It's a wonderful feeling for us, obviously, to win this game. Our first tournament game for this season. And having done it last year, we know how the amazing feelings you get from having an upset type of victory in this great tournament.

I thought our kids, and these kids in particular, the three kids with us right now, played a tough game of basketball. We had to be very tough against a ball club that we have a great deal of respect for, that their athletic, that they put the press on us and really made us work for everything. And then, we certainly have to kind of make some plays down the stretch. Some free throws, Siyani and Wesley and certainly, Siyani's big shot there at the foul line, a pull up jump shot, I thought were key moments offensively for us. But a team effort, a team win, and I'm really, really proud of our kids for a magnificent performance here this afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Siyani, you had a tough shooting night all night, what was going through your

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head as the shot clock was winding down and you pulled up for the jumper at the elbow?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: Going to the middle, coach says that's my shot at the free throw line. I got to the spot, he backed up a little bit and I rose up and shot it. We practice that all the time. Coach says if you get there and it's open, go ahead and take it. So, he believed in me, I'm pretty sure my teammates believed in me and I believed in myself and I was able to take it and I was blessed to make it.

Q. Siyani, we talk a lot about your emotions and being a leader, but there was point in the first half the ball sort of outlet, you thought it was tipped, you kind of slammed the ball down, and you talked to the ref. I don't know if you saw him, the ref, he came from the other side almost, teed you up. But, how did you compose yourself or just get your self right for the rest of the game, mentally?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: My teammates. They were just like keep your head in it, keep going, we need you out there. You got to keep your emotions. Also, coach talks about it all the time. So, my teammates and coach reminded me over and over and over again and that helped me get my composure back.

Q. Siyani, comment on the defensive game plan against Kilpatrick.

SIYANI CHAMBERS: Our game plan was to put our best defender on him, Wesley Saunders. He's done it for us all year. And he was able to do it again tonight, I thought. And also, when he gave it up, we really tried to knock the ball back and try to limit his touches and I think Wesley did a great job of that.

WESLEY SAUNDERS: My coaches put a lot of confidence in me to guard the best player every night and like Siyani said we were trying to deny him the ball back and just limit his touches, because he's a great scorer. And he was able to get some shots off, because that's just how

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talented he is, but I think it was a group effort to kind of try to stop him on the defensive end.

Q. Laurent, there were a lot of these kind of plays, but you took a charge, Kyle took a charge that was big, Siyani came up with a rebound down the stretch. In a game like this where it's ugly and they're shooting terrible and you got to kind of do those kind of things to win it, how important was it for everybody to kind of do the dirty work, I guess?

LAURENT RIVARD: It was very important. It's a team effort. The big guys did a great job of boxing out, but the guards have to go and help them out. And Siyani did that at the end, like you said, and then just making the right plays on defense, that's what we have been doing all year and we tried to do the same thing today.

Q. Siyani, the other shot you made, the one that went in the first half, that was kind of an end of the shot clock there. Was that unusually high for you?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: Yes.

(Laughter.)

Jackson is a very great athlete and he recovered quickly. So when I rose up, he was already up there, so I had to shoot over him.

Q. For all three players, their coach characterized this as not an upset. In your minds, did you feel this was not an upset?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Leading up to this game, coach emphasized, and we all talked about just living up to our values and our standards and doing the things that have gotten us to this point. And so, we felt as though if we were able to do that, that we would have a great chance of coming out with a victory. Luckily, we were able to do that tonight and I guess the scoreboard reflected that.

LAURENT RIVARD: Same thing as Wesley said.

SIYANI CHAMBERS: I agree. Coach always talks about if we do what we're supposed to do, stick to the game plan, we expect ourselves to win. And I think it started early with Kyle Casey coming in, just being an animal on the backboard, disrupting shots, grabbing rebounds. And also, when Brandon came in, coach talks about those two guys making a factor on the defensive end and I really think they did a great job tonight.

Q. Laurent, this was the third year in a row you put up double figures in a March

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Madness game. Do you feel the pressure helps you at all?

LAURENT RIVARD: Yeah, I definitely like big games. But, we treated that as a regular game, we prepared the same way and we played the same way as we do all season. Some teammates did a great job of finding me in transition in the half court and I was fortunate to make shots.

Q. You guys talked about this before the game. Aside from like whether or not it was an upset, but you seem to embrace the idea of not sneaking up on anybody this time and I was curious about how much you guys sort of took on that role. Like, we ain't sneaking up on you, but we're still going to play our game. And that's for Wesley or whoever.

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Yeah, we just think that if we come out and play our game and don't try to do anything different that we'll have a good chance of beating anybody that we matchup against. And so, that's what we try to come out and do and we have kind of embraced being the underdog and we were able to come out and get a victory.

Q. For any player, you guys are a better shooting free throw team than that, did that start to get into your head a little bit?

LAURENT RIVARD: Not really. We have had some really good free throw shooting games during the season and we have also had some bad ones, not too long ago against Yale, I think, it was even worse than tonight.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yes.

(Laughter.)

LAURENT RIVARD: We always find ways to get around that. We had to make other plays because we're not making our free throws, but we played a tough game and we were able to make other plays to compensate for that.

Q. Siyani, talk about the emotion of moving on again and being 40 minutes away from a Sweet 16?

SIYANI CHAMBERS: Oh, wow. Always getting a victory in this kind of environment and this kind of setting is very exciting. You can never describe it, no matter how many times you do it. So, right now we're really excited and we'll try to enjoy it tonight and for the rest of the day, it's kind

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of early.

And then tomorrow, I think, coach is going to get a game plan together with the other coaches, and I think we're going to be ready by tomorrow's shoot around or practice.

Q. The crowd, it seemed that the University traveled pretty well. There was a big cheering section, does that help you guys or is it not a big deal?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: It definitely helps us having the crowd come out and support us, that's great. It gives us a sixth man on the court. So, it definitely helps us and gives us a lot of energy to go out there and play, which was definitely needed against a team like Cincinnati that pressures you and brings a lot of energy themselves.

Q. Anyone of you guys can answer this, how big was rebounding in the game plan for each of you, I know Laurent, you had a very impressive rebounding performance. I know in the past against Colorado some rebounding woes factored in the second half, how big was that to go up against bigger bodies in Cincinnati?

LAURENT RIVARD: It was one of the main points in our game plan. We know that they're relentless on the board, especially Justin Jackson, he follows his shots and he's really tough to guard.

So, it was a big point of our plan, but it was a team effort. Really, the bigs did a great job and the guards had to come help them and actually grab the ball if the bigs were blocking their guys out.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

Q. We have beaten this to death, but is this no longer upsets when you guys do this?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I've heard it before and I think that college, in college basketball, you look around, and I've heard this before where there really aren't upsets any more. There may be some surprises, but I just think when you're looking at seeds and if you're playing this time of year, you're probably a pretty good basketball team, and I think you have to be lucky and fortunate to advance in this great tournament. And we were good and, but we also were somewhat fortunate and lucky, as well.

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So, I'm not sure about the upset label. Again, I think in the world that we live in college basketball you look around the country and conference play, tournament play, you see many many different types of teams that come out victorious and it may be a surprise. But I'm not sure the way our game is played throughout the course of the year and certainly with conference tournaments and then post season tournaments, there are not really that many upsets.

Q. Before the tournament began did you look at all at Michigan State or Delaware and did if so, any thoughts about that matchup?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I was zoomed in for us, for our team, on Cincinnati. Our staff, we divvy up scouting assignments and so, we will dive into whoever we're going to play, obviously, after this game here this afternoon. But, no, I was focused on the first one, which was obviously the Cincinnati Bearcats.

Q. The first question, how much did the fact that this was -- this being an ugly game, sort of help you guys? Defensively you guys, so many stops in the first half they can't press, so that changes the entire dynamic.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, I wish that we didn't contribute at making it such an ugly game. We turned it over way too many times. They knocked it off of us, we didn't make free throws. I think if you do some of the things, take care of the ball a little bit better, make a few foul shots, I think it wouldn't have been as ugly for us.

But, certainly, they struggled at times to finish around the rim and that again, we were fortunate, we were fortunate that Jackson didn't make as many close shots that he had in there.

I think that contributed to their frustration a little bit. We got frustrated at times when we couldn't really pull away from them enough, when we had chances to do that. They made a run to get back in it, we withstood that and still kind of kept our composure. But, this time of year if it's ugly, if it's pretty, if it's whatever, if you can advance this time of year, you're very, very happy and thrilled, which we are.

Q. Could you just talk about your point guard a little bit. He was on the floor for 37 minutes, did a lot of different things. Just the

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confidence that you have in him, I guess?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yeah, he's our most important player. We have talked about Wesley being our best player, but Siyani's our most important. And that's been the case for us throughout this whole season. He makes it all go for us. We needed the ball in his hands to make the decisions and plays. Sometimes, I heap a lot on his shoulders and I got to remember he's just a Sophomore. And I just -- I'm thrilled for his growth and his development and he has a great deal of confidence in himself, and his teammates believe in him so much. I certainly have that feeling about him, and I think that's what really drives him and makes him go to the different gear and level. He mentioned that shot, it's ironic that that was a very similar shot that he made against New Mexico a year ago. A very similar pull up jump shot right there, late that we needed it, and he buried it. Then he made free throws, obviously. So, he's on the floor because we need him on the floor against a team like Cincinnati that's going to come after you and make it difficult for you to run your offense, make it difficult to get it up the floor, difficult to get it in bounds. He's our best ball handler and our best passer. We only played him 37 minutes, we needed him for 40, but we did have to give him a quick break.

Q. Could you comment on Wesley Saunders playing defense against Kilpatrick. I know it was a lot of help defense when he needed it out there, especially from Cummins, but how impressed were you by the performance?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I was very impressed. Wesley draws that assignment for us. He's been, in my opinion, the best all around player in our conference and one of the better ones in the country and he doesn't get enough credit for what he does on other end, defensive end of the floor. But he got into quick, a couple quick fouls. Brandyn came in and then he had to guard Kilpatrick, Agunwa had to guard him, so we had different guys that had to rotate on Kilpatrick and he got going after he made a few free throws, we put him to the foul line, which was a big mistake on our part, and that kind of got his rhythm. But he's such a tremendous offensive player, he puts so much pressure on the defense because obviously he can put the ball on the floor and make a play off the bounce, but he's such a good deep ball shooter as well, so -- and if you foul him he goes to the foul line and makes free throws.

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So, but Wesley has got to guard those guys for us. That's lot to ask of him, but he's capable and I think he's shown that he's up to the task for doing that. He's done it for us all season.

Q. You guys had eight turnovers in the first half, four in the second half, talk about the adjustments that you guys were able to make to beat the press in the second half.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yeah, we talked about our ability to have to go into the game, not just at the halftime, but certainly we emphasized it even more, our ability to inbound the ball -- sounds so elementary, Basketball 101, but we knew that was going to be a key for us, whether it was baseline or under our basket whether it was a sideline out, whether it was going to be full court, they do a great job and work really well at denying you the ball and making it very difficult for you to get it in and difficult for you to run anything of structure.

So we knew it was going to come down to us making a savvy play here and there. Meaning how to get open, V cutting, meeting a pass, being strong with it when you get trapped and not thinking that you're going to get bailed out for a call for a foul if they happen to bump you a little bit.

So that was a key part of our game plan, knowing that that was going to take place this afternoon, this morning and afternoon, but I thought when we needed it the most, we were able to do it. But certainly that led to their ability to make the game very interesting and certainly we got rattled a few times when we couldn't inbound it cleanly and then we couldn't get it across the half line against their press.

Q. Coach Cronin mentioned in a couple of their earlier losses this season that teams defended Kilpatrick by kind of like over helping and over playing him at the expense of the other options on the court. With as that something that you noticed in your preparation?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, what we tried to do, to be very honest, we were aware of how difficult he was going to be for us to guard. And we really didn't want the other guys to kind of compliment him. I'm not sure you can stop a Kilpatrick, I haven't seen anyone do it in all the films and what he's been able to accomplish. He's tremendous player. So we -- can we contain him a

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little bit, can we not allow him to go berserk against him, that Wesley is good enough to probably give us a good enough effort to do that. With help, obviously.

But we were really concerned about the other guys not becoming those complimentary or secondary or third option scorers. And I thought that was as big of a key to our game plan as it was to seeing how much we could stop Kilpatrick.

Q. Talk about the defense that Steve played on Jackson. Seemed like he did a great job of defending without fouling?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, our -- I thought Evan Cummins came in and gave us some solid minutes. I thought he played really well for us. Steve and Kyle as you mentioned, Laurent, we went small and not necessarily against Jackson, but having to guard front line guys. So I thought we did that by committee. And Steve is our best post defender. He moves his feet very well and he's very strong and can get up on the backboard to rebound it, but also challenge and block shots, as Kyle can do.

So those guys in particular I thought did a tremendous job on Jackson. And then we were a little lucky. Jackson missed a lot of things around the rim that I think ordinarily the kind of player he's been and how good he's been, that I think ordinarily he makes.

Q. We were talking about Jackson, obviously, but are you sitting at any point -- because I looked at it and they had like eight offensive rebounds.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Six in the first four minutes.

Q. And then two points off it. Two second chance points.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: No, we were fortunate.

Q. Are you looking saying, the ball is bouncing and volleyballing, like, man, one of those might go in. Are you nervous about these tip-ins?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, we were fortunate. Because they had so many offensive rebounds there early and until you kind of go against this kind of team -- we talked about it, we showed film on it, obviously, on these guys and prepared for them, but until you go against them, you can't simulate the length and athleticism that

they bring to the table and bring to the court. And the thing about Jackson, that you mentioned about him, how quickly he can get the second and third jump. By the time we're trying to turn and find it and whatever, he's bouncing back again.

We can't simulate that in practice. We can't. And we talk about it, we made our kids aware of it, but until maybe you get adjusted to it and find your way around the court a little bit like that, that's why we were fortunate that those earlier opportunities that they had didn't cost us as much.

Q. The last one is, Cronin just, he called this a high major game. You hear it a lot and we talk about sort of not being a surprise any more, but when you keep doing these kind of things and having the success you have just, like, I don't want to say, what does it mean for the program, because that's a terrible thing to say, but just the regard that people have for your team now, you know what I mean? That this, this is a quality team. It's just not an upset.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, I appreciate that. I think that we have become a program that's become relevant in the world of college basketball, what we have been able to accomplish. Not just this season, I think you've seen what we have been trying to put together for awhile. To see Oliver McNally here, he was a catalyst for the growth of our program. We know about Jeremy Lin. We have had some kids that have been a part of this in the past that have helped us grow and develop. And certainly some times, if you can have some success on the big stage, that we have had last year and now this year in the NCAA tournament, we get much more notoriety and exposure for it.

But I just think our kids have worked hard, have represented our school in an incredible fashion, and we're proud to be able to say that we've become a program representing our conference that we can go on a national stage in a national tournament and be competitive and be a contender and certainly to win a game or two.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, coach.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Thank you.
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