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DEPARTMENT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

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AKRON ZIPS (27-8 • 14-4 American)
at HOUSTON COUGARS (21-11 • 12-6 American)
Wednesday, March 15, 2017 • H&PE Arena • Houston (Texas Southern)

HOUSTON HEAD COACH KELVIN SAMPSON

Opening Statement

“It was a nip and tuck game. I was looking at the scoring sheet in the second half, we got a steal and runout, and Bertrand Nkali got a dunk, we went up six. We went down and got another stop. To show you how close this stuff is and how easy it slips away: percentage wise our best shooter Wes (VanBeck) is wide open on the right wing, a shot in that moment you would want him or Damyeon Dotson taking, but we didn’t make it. They go down and make two free throws then we make another layup. We missed three layups, a wide-open jumper, and three free throws. In close games, those become huge.

We didn’t lose because of effort or because our kids didn’t want to win, that goes around in NIT a lot where teams aren’t excited to play. We were excited to play. Are we deficient in a couple of areas? Sure, we are. We know that. That’s why as you’re building your program, you continue to recruit to address your needs. But this team, all season long had a small margin of error. They fought and gave us everything they could possibly give us. That was a good team tonight. Could we have won it? Absolutely, we could have won that game. But we didn’t.

I appreciate this team’s effort and I really appreciate the seniors: Dotson, Kyle (Meyer), Danrad Knowles, Xavier Dupree and Bert. They chose to come to Houston when maybe it wasn’t cool. People would probably ask ‘why are you going there?’ Two years later, they’ve won 43 games and gone to two postseason tournaments. That’s a heck of an accomplishment for those guys. There’ll be some dissenting views of that, but that’s okay. I appreciate everything that they’ve done. As we continue to build this program, get to NCAA tournaments and advance in the tournament, we’ll always look back at this group of seniors and say they started it.”

On what was needed

“We probably needed another body, another length guy. Devin (Davis) did a great job, it is different with Dotson going there at 6’5 vs Devin, who is a little bit longer. But that is who we had tonight. We knew he was good, we watched a bunch of film on him. He is the player of the year in that league. His greatest strength is his IQ – good players always know when they need to pass, when they should pass, and shoot when they should shoot. That’s what he did tonight.

On Danrad Knowles not playing

“That was just an internal deal, more than anything else.”

On last 24 seconds

“We had enough time to play the foul game. I was not stressed about getting a three right there. If you

miss a three there, now you are down three and now you are down four or five. By playing the foul game we were only down one and now you have one more shot. We still had a chance at the end to tie it. Dot does not have to be open to make a shot. We knew if we could get his hands on it he can make a three over a star. At the end of the game you will never get a wide-open shot. You just get the ball to the guy who has the best chance to get a makeable three. Even though that was a hard shot, which is a makeable three for him. If I had to do it over again, I would still play the foul game.”

On the message to the team to close out the season

“It was tough. There was a lot of tears back there for different reasons. Some because we lost, some because there’s no tomorrow. That’s a group of guys who have been together since June. Summer school started on June 2 or 3, and they’ve been together since then. Football is a one semester sport, it comes and it goes. Baseball and volleyball are one semester sports. But basketball, we go from June until today. Our season ended today. In the old days, basketball practice started in the middle of October, but now we’re starting in June, it’s an extended season. For that reason, that’s why you have to be careful about recruiting character kids, good guys. You can’t have knuckleheads, selfish kids or ‘me, me’ ‘I, I’ people. This group was team first, and they did their best every game. Some games were better than others, but they always did their best.

It started with this young man (Damyean Dotson) sitting beside me. I’m a lucky coach to be able to have had him as a leader. He’s coachable. When I spent a little time in San Antonio watching Coach (Gregg) Popovich with Tim (Duncan), Manu (Ginobili) and Tony (Parker), you hear your best players have to be coachable. They have to allow you to coach them. A lot of the times you can coach other people through them. I think that was Dot’s greatest gift to this program. He was arguable our best player and leader, but he allowed me to coach him.”

On recruiting Damyeon Dotson

“Looking back, through all of the phone calls I made, they were right. Everyone one of them. They described him to the t. I kept waiting for someone to be not as positive. Are we talking about Ghandi here? He came here at the right time too. For young guys like Armoni (Brooks), Galen (Robinson Jr.) and Rob (Gray). I think the greatest gift you can leave someone is how to better themselves. The material stuff is forgotten; this game tonight will be forgotten. There are 32 teams, and 16 of them are going to lose last night or tonight. Then the next time there will eight and it will go on. What Dotson did here in his two years has unbelievable staying power. He will not be forgotten. He’s heard me use Hollis Price and guys from other schools that I’ve coached, but now I have another name to use now, Damyeon Dotson.”

SENIOR GUARD DAMYEAN DOTSON

On final play

“Coach drew it up and we just needed a three. We faked the back screen, Galen (Robinson Jr.) took it to the baseline and the five just snapped back and got me. The big just stayed right there so I backed up a little bit and just kept it short.”

On the last shot as a senior

“It’s a tough miss. That one shot does not define the whole game. It was a lot of plays. We missed layups and free throws. That was not the end of the game. That was just trying to tie the game up. All the stuff before that sums up the game not that shot.”

On what he said to his teammates after the game as their senior leader

“I talked to the coaches and my team, told them thank you all for the two years that I have been here, I really appreciate everybody. I’m going to miss everybody. If anything you do just look back and always remember to work hard, listen to coach, do what he asks and never stop working. It doesn’t matter if it’s the off season, in game, practice, never stop working. Everybody remember me as an example, I try to do

my best. Make it to the tournament next year. That was my finishing statement. Make it to the tournament next year for me.”

AKRON HEAD COACH KEITH DAMBROT

Opening Statement

“First off, they are very talented, tough and have one of the best coaches America, so it’s a big win for our program. People have no idea how hard it is to win against a priority team on the road. The thing that impressed me was our complete nature. I did not know what to expect. We have had our hearts broken two years in a row, but our guys just fought and fought. I am so thankful that our Houston kids were able to come home and see their families. It was great to see them and they played well on top of that, so it is just really good.”

On new program record 27 wins

“It is interesting. I have always felt like if we could get to the tournament. It would be harder for teams who haven’t seen us than it would be for us. I felt like we were capable of winning in the tournament. This is our tournament so we need to win it.”

On key to winning the game

“We were efficient offensively. We got to the line 30 times, which for us was astronomical. We had an advantage on the inside and we took advantage of it and passed well out of the double team. Although we didn’t totally contain those guys, they did not go 30 points on us and go crazy on us and that was the key.”

On his players’ efforts

“Antino (Jackson) was terrific. He played within himself and showed what kind of winner he really is. Daniel Utomi and Emmanu Olojakpoke did what they always do. We got a really good performance from Kwan Cheatham, Jr. We looked like a high major team out there, you couldn’t tell the difference between us and them physically. Obviously, their guards are very good and we did a pretty good job.”

On Damyeon Dotson’s last shot

“He (Damyeon Dotson) took it, but it was a little long. He is capable of making that, but it’s a lower percentage shot than if he was on the three line.”

On Tavian Dunn-Martin

“Well I’m a big Tavian Dunn-Martin fan, mostly because he is my size. He weighs a little less than me. All in all, he’s a good player, I thought he played very hard. He shows no jitters, he’s not a jittery guy He has been in a lot of state championships, he’s going to be the next really good player we have here.”

On travel home

“It’s going to take us all day tomorrow to get home, we won’t get back till late so we are trying to figure out if we are going to stay or come home. That’s tough too because we have missed a lot of school. It’s a tough deal, we have to figure it out.”

On the second half

“Almost the entire second half they doubled, which opened us up. We made nine threes. I thought we drove the ball out of those double teams pretty well as well.”

On new NIT rule

“I didn’t mind the rule, I really didn’t. I thought it flowed very well. It depends on what they decide with all of the data. It will be one of the hot topics we discuss in my meeting.”