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DEPARTMENT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

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TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE (10-7 • 3-2 American)
at HOUSTON COUGARS (13-3 • 3-1 American)
Thursday, Jan. 11, 2018 • Health & PE Arena • Houston

HOUSTON HEAD COACH KELVIN SAMPSON

Opening Statement

"I mean obviously we have a good team. We didn't overreact to the game against Wichita State, much like we didn't over react to the games against Arkansas, or Wake Forest or Providence or tonight's Tulsa game. If you play 30 something games, you're going to lose your share. The key is having a plan and practicing how to improve. That's why a week off can go either way, because it's not easy having multiple practices while school is not in session. I think we went two-a-days for three days. That's not easy either, especially coming off that last game, but it was all about development and how can we be better.

The key for tonight was how much better we got throughout practice this week. We came out and our defense was really good early and then it became a foul fest. If you have to run to the free throw line every possession it becomes a discombobulated game."

On first half tweaks to three-point shooting

"Just Rob, we wanted to get the ball to Rob early in the shot clock and told him to be aggressive. I said earlier that Rob cannot be a parasite, he has to be a piranha and go after people. He's a lot better that way. Obviously we're 13-3 and in the games Rob hasn't played so well we still won. So can we win without Rob. We still win, but our team is a lot better when he is aggressive. One thing we did tell him to do was to shoot if they slid on the ball screens, we're a good offensive rebounding team so shoot it with confidence."

On Rob Gray pushing through slump

"It is what it is. How is it that a guy can go 3 for 30 in baseball and the same guy can come back and go 12 for 30? Who knows why? I do know that Rob is a lot better when he's aggressive and when he's in attack mode. We were playing USF and I got cross eyed with him. We won the game, but in the second half he came down in transition and almost shot an airball on a three-point attempt. Then he gets in the paint and throws up an airball. That's not Rob, he was just playing so passive. This game's not easy, the good ones make it look easy. Tonight he made it look easy. That's the same guy who couldn't hit water if it fell out of a boat two weeks ago. It's not easy, but there's a lesson in there; keep fighting, keep charging and be aggressive. That's important."

On Chris Harris's effort

"You know, big kids there's no middle ground with them. 6'10" kids, the only way they can be productive is to be active and play hard. There's no productivity without activity. Chris was active tonight. He was completely overwhelmed against Wichita State and I'll take some responsibility for that. The last thing I should've done was start him in that game. We had one player they weren't even guarding and Chris they didn't guard either, so it was like 8 on 3. It was just a bad matchup. So we spent a lot of time with Chris this week and I'm really glad with how he responded. He competed and got better. Chris will go on a good trajectory here, but you've got to keep throwing him out there. He's 6'10" and a half, 250 pounds and athletic. He's going to get a lot better. He has a higher ceiling than anyone on our team. Him and Fabian both. They both have high ceilings."

On the fouls in the second half

"I'm just glad we were up 40. That was more important than the foul fest."

On containing Tulsa forward Junior Etou

"Devin (Davis) did a great job. Devin's a senior and he plays like a senior. Igbanu's a good player, we didn't play smart down there tonight. We could've doubled him and taken him out like we do everyone else, but Henderson had eight three's against Connecticut and he can really shoot it. Tulsa's a good team, just because they got beat like that tonight doesn't make them a bad team. Same thing with Arkansas against us or us against Wichita State. North Carolina lost to Wofford, it happens. You've got to go back in those moments and ask how can we get better and what's the plan here? Like the old saying says 'If you don't plan, plan to fail'. Well we have a plan and our kids did a great job of following it."

HOUSTON SENIOR GUARD ROB GRAY

On getting different plays called for him in the offense

"They were giving me the ball at the top of the key and not having me stand in the corner. I feel like I can shoot, but it's not my strength to stand and have someone create for me. I feel that I'm at my best when I can create a shot. I was being aggressive and not settling."

On building off his play as the game went on

"In the first few minutes is when I should get going and be aggressive early. When the first shot went through I forgot about all the other games. I stayed aggressive and helped my team set a tone early."

On all the threes falling in the first half

"We shoot a lot as a guard group collectively. I also have to say it feels normal, because in practice we move the ball a lot and hit a lot of threes, we know that's our strength. When we do what we have to do we can't be too happy, you don't get a pat on the back when you do what you're supposed to do like Coach Sampson says. We can't hit this many three's all the time, but we would like to make it normal."

On being two three's away from breaking the school record

"I think Galen was on to something when he kept telling us to shoot threes, we set an AAC record. I think he shot the late three to try and extend the AAC record, but he was very aware of the AAC record."

On hitting 18 three's

"Going into the game plan for this game, we weren't really focused on making so many three's, we were just focusing on not letting Henderson and Etou get good looks and playing sound defense."

On the fouls in the last seven minutes of the game

“Coach Sampson says we are going to watch film of every single foul we committed tomorrow just to show how much better and improved we need to be on defense. When we foul, are giving up free throws and Igbanu wasn’t missing free throws, we were gift wrapping them two points each time. Our defensive performance overall could have been better. We have to be smarter and more mature.”

On the key to the East Carolina game coming up

“Not taking any opponent for granted, we just got beat by Wichita State and learned a lesson. We could have easily came in here and been like ‘yeah we are going to beat Tulsa’, but we came in here like ‘yeah we really are going to beat Tulsa’. I feel like we can’t have a hangover from this game, go to East Carolina and lay down and think they are going to let us win by 30. It’s the beginning of the conference season and anyone can lose.”

On Gabe Grant being a three point shooter

“Like Coach says, ‘you can’t drown in your own sweat’. Shout out to Gabe, because he has been working hard. Things may not have been going Gabe’s way before but like Coach says, ‘stay ready, because your time will come’. I don’t even think Gabe came in and thought he would have four good looks from three, and hit two of them. I wish he would’ve went four for four, but Gabe is going to be a main contributor on our team. He will be effective in the second half of the conference season.”

HOUSTON SOPHOMORE GUARD ARMONI BROOKS

On all the threes falling in the first half

“To be honest, it feels good when you see your hard work paying off. We work really hard to be good three point shooters. Seeing your teammates succeed, that’s the best feeling. Seeing everyone work hard definitely helps you succeed.”

On his three toward the end of the game breaking the AAC record

“I didn’t know it was the three that tied it. It feels good knowing everything you have done and built up is paying off and it’s a great feeling to be a part of this record setting performance.”