

**American Athletic Conference
Men's Basketball Championship**
Saturday March 10, 2018



Kelvin Sampson
Rob Gray
Galen Robinson
Houston Cougars

Houston - 77, Wichita State - 74

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, hard-fought game. Two good teams. They run a lot of good stuff, we run a lot of good stuff. To tell you how hard it was, it was hard to execute and get something easy. It came down to having players that could make plays on their own. Rob Gray for us and Shamet. Shamet made some tough, tough threes where their offense broke down and he could play outside the offense. At 6'6" he could raise up over us and make some of those shots. But no, when we were able to dictate him in the pick-and-roll and keep him on his left hand we were a lot more successful.

But everybody on our team has a role. They know their role. We challenge them to be all-conference in their role. And they do a good job of that. Galen Robinson had six assists, no turnovers today. And in a game like that, second game in two days, that's pretty good.

Rob Gray, I didn't like the way he started the game so I took him out but Rob's one of those kids that always responds because he's a winner. Winners sometimes they just need reminding, but I know what have there. You build a culture and you get good kids that will fight and play hard, don't give in, that's most important in a situation like this. And just proud of our guys' effort. It's kind of a mundane thing to say, but I was, I was really, really proud of how they fought today.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions, please.

Q. All season you've talked about the toughness and the kind of the grittiness of this team. To see them reach down deep in those closing minutes, what can you say just about them pulling it out?

KELVIN SAMPSON: It wasn't just this game, any game for me. We're down 57-50 against SMU at home, I saw it then. We were down against Connecticut the other day. We had a lot of blowouts this year, but if you play

30-plus games, you're going to have about three or four on either side. Three or four where you're probably not nearly as good as you play and you're probably going to have three or four where you're probably not as bad as you play. That's just the way it is, unless you got a team full of All-Americans and NBA guys, but we don't have that.

What we do have is a culture. Sometimes that's an overused, misunderstood word. Our kids understand it. And that's what's important. Touching every line in a suicide drill, line drill, being on time, going to class, treating people with respect. Culture has a lot to do with everything in their lives, not just basketball. I think karma comes into play there, too.

So there was a calmness, a lot of poise, a lot of composure in our huddles tonight. We knew exactly what we wanted to do. Rob and Galen made the biggest play, or Rob made it and Galen finished it. They tried to get the ball inbounds on the baseline and we took it way, so they wind up having to throw it deep. And when you throw it that high, Rob Gray became Ronnie Lott. Do you guys know who he is? Or Deion Sanders? Kind of a corner back/safety, just go get it.

Q. On a national stage like this and against an opponent like Wichita, what does a win like this mean to your program?

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, it's the second time we beat them, you know?

Q. I know.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Okay, just wanted to make sure. You make a great point, that this stage is different. I just think it's perception more than anything else. People perceive you differently maybe. Because in our conference you hear a lot about Cincinnati and Wichita State, Wichita State and Cincinnati. Well, we tied with Wichita State this year; we both went 14-4.

But we have a lot of respect for Gregg and his program and Mick and his program. They're both outstanding coaches who have really, really good teams, but we have got a good team too.

Q. For the players, what does it mean to you guys to make it to the championship game here?

ROB GRAY: We just wanted to come here, take it one

game at a time but it means a lot because that's what we expected of ourselves and we had high expectations. Once we lost at Memphis, we knew we fell out of contention to win the regular season title or a share of it, so the only way to get that back would have been to come down here and go on a three-game winning streak and cut down the nets in the conference tournament.

GALEN ROBINSON: To follow up what he said, what was the question?

ROB GRAY: Can you repeat the question for my man. It's his first time.

Q. To make it to the championship game?

GALEN ROBINSON: Oh yeah, Coach preaches the culture and we let our culture take over. Very excited to be playing tomorrow, very fortunate and just looking forward to the game.

Q. Galen, your dad played at Houston and you're a part of the renaissance of the program. Talk about the pride you must feel being from Houston and playing for the school that your father went to.

GALEN ROBINSON: Definitely very prideful. I don't know if anybody loves Houston more than I do, but I remember when Coach Sampson was recruiting me, he sold me on the vision, and I bought into it and it's all coming to light, so I'm just following the plan right now.

ROB GRAY: To add on, I think for the city slogan that Galen created, that ties in a lot. He really does love Houston and he created for the city, we play for the city and we do it all for the city. So we're in the championship game for the city. Shoutout to Galen for making that slogan.

Q. Galen, can you take us through that last play on the inbound that they did exactly what you saw, what happened, and after that your part of the pass that was intercepted at midcourt, and then I think you also helped alter that last shot that they took at the buzzer.

GALEN ROBINSON: Yeah, I blocked it (laughter). But as far as the pass to get in, Coach told us to switch it one through four and he also tells us always that our instincts take over. So that's what I did, I read his eyes, I read his vision and in that kind of scenario he's not going to make a no-look pass. So I saw where he was throwing it and I intercepted it.

And as far as the one that Rob intercepted, I just knew I had to finish the layup. And then for the shot I blocked, I knew that he had to, he had to shoot it, he couldn't pump fake because there wasn't enough time. So I just jumped as high as I could and tried not to foul

him.

Q. Rob, it seemed like in the second half all of a sudden things just clicked for you. And it almost looked like it kind of became a more of a streetball type of performance. You guys were taking over the game. What kind of maybe ignited that for you when you started playing that way?

ROB GRAY: Well, yesterday I went 0-for-5 from the three and then the first half I went 0-for-3 from the three. So when the first one fell, it relieved me of a lot of pressure, and I think that, I don't know the first three I hit I think it put us up maybe one or two. So I kind of got my swag back from beyond the arc. And like you said just kind of streetball, just instincts taking over and just trying to play my game and be as effective and efficient as possible to help us win.

Q. For the players, coming in you guys were safe in terms of NCAA Tournament, but how much would it mean not only if you win and complete this tomorrow, you get a championship, but it almost takes everything off the table, you don't have to rely on, are you an at-large or stuff like that, you are an automatic bid.

ROB GRAY: Like Coach said, in this conference you hear a lot about Cincinnati and about Wichita State and we like to think that we have a good program as well. And we know I think right now they're ranked 8th and 11th and we're sitting at 21. But as far as seeding goes, it's a big deal to come down here and make it to the championship and even win, because it just shows again it changes the perception that maybe the Committee may have about our program and the country.

So it's a big deal and we're really looking forward to competing with Cincinnati tomorrow.

GALEN ROBINSON: He hit everything on the head.

Q. Some quick thoughts on the matchup tomorrow against Cincinnati.

KELVIN SAMPSON: Yeah, Gary Clark and Washington pose problems for us, like Morris did today. We really had a hard time guarding them the second half. We were leaking oil there. They were beating us on some things that were just a little bit slow in our rotations, our bigs were maybe not in the right spot a couple times. But Cincinnati's going to do the same thing. Clark and Washington and then the other two bigs, Scott and Brooks off the bench, they pose a problem. Evans is really playing well. And then the Broome kid, who really wasn't a factor the first two games has really stepped up his game. He's a good player.

But it comes down to being able to rebound. For us to

be a good rebounding team, Davis has got to play better. Devin can play better. He was so good last night, it was almost like he shot a 62 last night and followed it up with a 75 today, hopefully he can get back down in the mid-60s tomorrow. But it's going to be a fight. It's another team we have played twice, either team can win this thing. Both teams are going to be -- it's not going to be the toughest team wins because both teams are tough. It's going to be the teams that your best players have to step up and play well in a game like this tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Houston, thank you.