

CBS Sports Classic

Saturday, December 19, 2015

Thad Matta

Marc Loving

Keita Bates-Diop

Ohio State Buckeyes

Ohio State - 74, Kentucky - 67

Q. So to either one of you guys, your coach said he knew you were going to win today. Did you have the same belief, and if so, why?

MARC LOVING: I mean, being an underdog, we had nothing to lose. We had a chip on our shoulder from the beginning. We felt very, very prepared for the game. We executed our system.

KEITA BATES-DIOP: Same thing. We needed this win. People underestimated us, and we came out and showed them.

Q. Marc, you mentioned the chip on your shoulder. What put it there? What was that about?

MARC LOVING: Just playing a team the caliber of Kentucky, everybody thinks you're going to lose the game except for the guys in the locker room. Just having that bond together and that tight knit group made us be able to pull this victory out.

Q. Marc, do you have any explanation for what happened to Trevor Thompson today?

MARC LOVING: Trevor played a phenomenal game. He was blocking shots and protecting the basket. That's really what we need from him. I mean, I can see Trevor playing like this from here on out.

Q. For both of you guys, you had a 16-point lead, and they cut it down to three. You were able to withstand. There were times in the season you haven't been able to answer when teams put a run on you, but you did today. What was the difference today?

KEITA BATES-DIOP: I think we were tired of giving up leads. They were a young team, (indiscernible)

MARC LOVING: Just poise under pressure. JaQuan and A.J. really ran the show. We have to follow those guys. They handle the pressure the majority of the time other than us. I mean, hats off to A.J. and JaQuan. They really withstood the pressure throughout the whole game.



Q. Marc, how hot was Jamal Murray, 23 for Kentucky. How hard was it to try to contain him?
MARC LOVING: He's 7 for 9 from three. He got hot very fast. Just had to know where he's at the whole time. Try to corral him and make him take as difficult a shot as possible.

Q. For both of you guys, eight players scored, four were in double figures. Is this what you envision the offense being? Not necessarily carrying the load, but different guys setting up different times, and in the end everyone chips in a little bit.

KEITA BATES-DIOP: For sure. We're all talented. We're all good players. It doesn't have to be one guy trying to take all the shots to take over a game. We all trust each other to make plays.

Q. Coach Matta, this is my question -- I have actually two questions for you. How big of a win is this for you guys against a team like Kentucky? Do you feel like your defense was effective today?

COACH MATTA: I think that, obviously, it's a big, big win for us. I think the defense was -- you know, we had two days to prepare for this. It was a little bit of a different game plan. These guys did a tremendous job of understanding in a short period of time of what we were going to attempt to do.

The fact that Murray got rolling today, that was one of the best performances I've seen in a short period of time. Keita a couple of times was right there. He just shot over him.

The defense was definitely the key for us. We did not let our offense affect our defense. We had some tough stretches, and that was big.

Q. For both of you guys, a week ago, it was a really tough result at Connecticut, and a week later you come up with a win like this. I just wonder if you could describe what the feeling is coming off the court, hearing the fans cheering, getting in the locker room to celebrate. How different is it from a week ago?

MARC LOVING: I feel like it's an awesome feeling to know we played as hard as we possibly could, and we came out with the result we wanted.

KEITA BATES-DIOP: Same here. Complete opposite feeling than last week. We're going to celebrate it for a little bit and then move on to the next one.

Q. Thad, you talked all year about playing hard enough to make your own breaks. Was that it?

COACH MATTA: There's no question some things happen, but we got on the floor for loose balls. We deflected passes, and guys laid out and got them. We had some guys get rebounds out of their area. We had some things go -- JaQuan's shot at the end of the half was a huge shot.

Hopefully, we made our own breaks. I'm excited they were able to stay with what we were trying to do in the timeouts, and guys did a great job executing.

Q. Thad, Kentucky kind of went to that full court pressure there in the second half, and I think late in the game you made the switch to A.J. At that point, how do you think he responded to that, and what went into that decision?

COACH MATTA: A.J. -- JaQuan was exhausted. He was under duress for however long he was in the game today. A.J. was a fresh body. He's got some quickness. He's got some speed. I thought his composure, his understanding of what we were trying to do. So we just sort of stuck with him because we knew he could get the ball in the press.

I thought JaQuan Lyle was really, really good today, but there was a time when he looked at me like I really can't breathe right now. So A.J. did a terrific job for us.

Q. Thad, Murray's second half, how much of that was sort of something that you could prepare for in the planning and exit zone. How much of it was like an improv performance?

COACH MATTA: We knew this, that he is a tremendous basketball player. He's the one guy that we feared going in, in terms of him having the capability of getting hot now, we had no idea he was going to get that hot.

But that's what great players do. He kind of put them on his back and got him back in the game. Like I said, Keita was there on a lot of those.

We made a couple of mistakes, but he made us pay for them. But that was a tremendous -- it reminded me of a few years ago the kid from Illinois had 40 on the exact same type of shots. It was unbelievable.

Q. Thad, sorry, just to follow on that, I guess what's going through your head when he's on fire like that, and what was the difference in his mentality between the rest of the Kentucky guys who seem --

you inspired them a little bit.

COACH MATTA: I'll tell you. I think Cal did a tremendous job of creating different ways for him to score because it wasn't the same way every time. He knew he had a hot hand, and he got them open.

I turned to the bench at one point, and I said, is there anybody that can guard him right now? He did just a great job. Fortunately, we challenged, I think, one, and he missed it. That was a great performance by him.

Q. Thad, Trevor's been playing pretty good the last few games and really came on tonight, 10 points, 5 rebounds, 5 blocks. What did it mean for you in this game, and what does it mean for your team going forward to have that strong of a presence on the inside?

COACH MATTA: I think that something's very important for us. Trevor has been playing well. To watch Trevor's growth in the year and a half that he's been with us, I'm very excited for him to play the way he's playing now. We've got to make sure that he has the maturity to keep working, to keep doing the things that he needs to do. That was a good performance.

He and Daniel were, I thought, dynamic together in terms of what both guys brought to the table.

Q. Thad, the play with Giddens getting the loose ball the intentional foul on Ulis, when that happened prior to, did you feel like the boat might be swinging a little bit? Were you just waiting on some sort of play to swing back your way? How critical was that play? A deciding play to the game perhaps, in your mind?

COACH MATTA: I think that was definitely -- I can't remember the score. 63-60? Yeah. But that was huge. I love to see our guys play with that that they did today, just in terms of that energy. Daniel was laid out like Superman flying through the air to get that ball.

We always tell our guys, good things happen when you play extremely hard, and that was definitely one of those things.