

Pac-12 Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Sean Miller

Dusan Ristic

Deandre Ayton

Arizona

Arizona - 75, USC - 61

SEAN MILLER: Well, we're honored to represent the Pac-12. We really believe in this conference. I think we have a number of quality teams and a few teams, one in which we just played, USC, that you would not want to play in the NCAA Tournament. They're very, very talented.

Jordan McLaughlin is as smart of a point guard as I think we've faced, I've seen. Yesterday was Aaron Holiday and Welsh and that team. But to win three games in three days is quite an accomplishment on the heels of winning the regular season. We're certainly very proud of those two accomplishments.

To my far left, Dusan, there's been some amazing great players that have played at the University of Arizona. Not all of them have been fortunate to have won three regular season championships and three Pac-12 Tournament championships. Parker and Dusan have done that. Obviously Deandre, the dominance that he just put forth, if there is another player better, I'd like to meet him. But he put his team on his back and he played the right way, and he absolutely was a one-man wrecking crew here these last two days.

So we're confident that we use this tournament to prepare for next week, and hopefully we can continue to play our very best.

Q. Dusan, what does this mean? What are your emotions right now?

DUSAN RISTIC: It's an unbelievable feeling right now. Tonight's game was one of the best games of the season for us. Especially in the second half, we played really tough, especially on defense. I think that's the reason why we won. We held them to only 61 points. Yesterday we played UCLA in the overtime, and they scored 67.

That's the example of how we should go from now on. If we want to do something in March, we have to play



defense like we played these last three days.

Like I said, it's just an unbelievable feeling. I felt like I played at McKale tonight. The fans were amazing. It was much easier to play when you have that kind of support in the stands.

So we're all just proud and grateful for all the support that we received today.

Q. You guys have won this event before, but given what you had to go through to get here, does winning this tonight mean a little bit more?

SEAN MILLER: It does, because when you're the head coach, you represent the players, you represent the families of the players. You want to protect them. You want them to have success. You want them to really enjoy their experience. All of that was really on the table.

I give our leadership of our team a lot of credit, Dusan being one of our team's leaders. We stuck together, and you hear it all the time, that adversity can bring out the best in a group, bring a group closer together.

And in some ways that really is the identity of our team. We fought all year, and hopefully we can continue to fight here for a couple more weeks.

Q. Deandre, is there something about these last two days that you could point to specifically and kind of say why you've been able to raise your game to another level, especially considering the quality of the competition?

DEANDRE AYTON: I just want to win. That's about it. I'll do whatever it takes to win. I play hard on both ends of the floor. I give my all. Having five guys -- having the teammates that I have that have my back and knowing that they know that I have their back is a great feeling. It makes me go all out for them.

Q. Deandre, what would you say is the biggest difference between the second round struggles in Colorado versus your back-to-back 30 point performances against UCLA and USC? Was it pressure in the first game, or was it your Pac-12 Tournament debut?

DEANDRE AYTON: Like I said, I think it was yesterday, I was a little star struck. I wasn't ready, to be honest. I

was rushing all my shots against Colorado. Wasn't taking my time. I just needed to really watch film. Coach told me take my time, face-up, see what the defense is giving me, and that's what I did.

Q. Along those lines, after that Colorado game, was there any particular bits of advice or wisdom that you gave Deandre to help him settle in a little better?

SEAN MILLER: No, Deandre, his heart is always in the right place, so that's the starting point for everything. Not a lot of guys would admit that they're a little bit nervous, but sometimes you forget that he's young. 19 years old. This is the first Pac-12 Tournament.

In Dusan's case, I think tonight would have been the 11th game. So that was a long time ago that he might have had that same feeling.

That's why it's so important that you're part of a good team, a program, because Deandre relies on his teammates, like he said, to have his back. I think that struggle, if you would even call it a struggle, to me prepared him for the last two days. I think this tournament will really prepare him for next week, and our team.

Q. Deandre and Dusan, what did you guys think of Rawle's dunk about midway through the second half?

DEANDRE AYTON: Well, me and Rawle, he'll always -- practice and working on his own offense, he's always telling me look for the cut. Once I heard him say "Dre," I just dished it off to him, and it was curtains after that.

DUSAN RISTIC: Yeah, it took me a few seconds to realize what happened. It was one of the best dunks I'd ever seen in my life. It's like probably top 5 dunks in college basketball this year. It was amazing.

Q. For both of you, basketball has become so guard oriented in recent years, and the fact that you wind up with two seven-footers, how do you feel like you two feed off each other in the changing landscape of the game right now?

DEANDRE AYTON: To be honest, we both complement each other's games. You know, if one is shooting the ball, one is rebounding it. We just know where each other is on the floor. In practice we talk about high-low passes, and we know how each other play and we know each other's personnel.

DUSAN RISTIC: Yeah, I just want to confirm what he said. We feel much more comfortable playing together right now than that was the case like two or three months ago. Like we just have more experience playing together in practice and in games.

So now when I catch the ball high post, I exactly know where to throw the ball, and Deandre will either catch it and finish it almost hundred percent. So it's just experience and getting more comfortable playing with each other. I think from this point on we're going to keep improving our relationship on the court.

Q. For all three of you, when you come to Vegas, it's Tucson north. How does that make you feel? Is it just like home comfort?

SEAN MILLER: I always try to stress to these guys don't ever take it for granted because it's not like that everywhere. In most cases, the only experience they'll get in college is the place they choose, so they don't know the other side. Our fans, the thing that's amazing about our fans is they're passionate.

They love the U of A, but because of what Coach Olson did, and because of so many great, great teams and players that have been here for decades, they are very smart. They're not just fans that cheer when the ball goes in the basket and boo when things aren't going well, they have a loyalty and an understanding of a bigger picture. And you sense that as a player. And McKale, a lot of times our worst basketball that we play is met with the loudest cheer. In some arenas it's not like that.

So these guys, as they move through life, I think that's why so many of our former players love the University of Arizona so much because that's what they remember. They remember being here or they remember being at McKale, but our fans are awesome.

DEANDRE AYTON: I mean, everybody was warning me about our Tucson fans traveling everywhere, and I didn't know it was going to be like this. I felt like I was at McKale. It made me more comfortable playing. Yeah, that's it.

Q. This has obviously been a trying, perhaps emotional, season for you personally and for this team. I'm curious, winning the regular season, winning this tournament and perhaps making a run even to the Final Four, is that something that provides part of a vindication that you've talked about, or is that something that comes from somewhere completely different?

SEAN MILLER: No, you know, look, I'm living my life one day at a time. The two people, the two factions of people that I cherish and love every day are our players and the families of our players because we're around each other and we're trying to accomplish something special. I don't want any of these guys to walk out the door feeling like we left something on the table.

Then your own family, because you have three sons, a wife, mom, and dad, they care a lot about how things are feeling. So for me, it's about having that type of focus and belief and really controlling the things that you can control.