

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Miami (FL) vs Houston

Friday, March 24, 2023
Kansas City, Missouri, USA
T-Mobile Center

Houston Cougars
Kelvin Sampson
Marcus Sasser
Jamal Shead

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Miami - 89, Houston - 75

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by the University of Houston Cougars Coach Kelvin Sampson. Coach has brought two student-athletes in the interview room, Marcus Sasser and Jamal Shead.

Coach, we'll come to you first for an opening statement.

KELVIN SAMPSON: First of all, congratulations to Coach Larranaga and his staff and his team. Obviously they were the better team tonight.

I'm proud of my team for a lot of things. Unfortunately, one off-night and you go home in this tournament. We just never could get a foothold. We kept climbing, and we'd get ahead of them, and then we just couldn't put stops together.

We've hung our hats all year on unscripted points. Tonight was just -- we just couldn't get anything going. We scored 10 points on second-chance points and 4 points off turnovers. That's 4 for 14 points. It probably needed to be 14 in each category.

But they're good. I don't think there's a lot of difference in the two teams, but tonight there certainly was.

The Pack kid, some of the shots he made were shots you hope he takes. The problem was he made them. Those were -- some of those were Howitzers.



But we needed to make a play. We had a transition three right in front of our bench. Those are the shots we've made all year, but not tonight. Our kids kept fighting.

Miami's got older guards, and they're really, really good. Wong, ACC Player of the Year. Miller is really good. And then Pack tonight was outstanding.

But proud of my team. I'm disappointed we lost, sure. A lot of tears in that locker room because they care. But I'll go to war with this bunch any day. 33-4, losing four older, four senior starters from last year's team. And to have the kind of year we had this year is just unbelievable.

I'm fortunate to have coached this team, and I'm grateful for being their coach. But tonight just wasn't our night. Again, congratulations to Jim and his group.

Q. Kelvin, did they do anything in the game that you didn't see in film that maybe surprised you all?

KELVIN SAMPSON: I wouldn't say surprised. Pack's range was a little better than I anticipated. We guarded him to 23, 24 feet. He hit some tough ones. When you hit tough shots like that, it kind of raises the level of play of everybody.

I thought we did a good job on Wong. He scored a lot of points once the game was decided.

J'Wan Roberts had two rebounds. He's our best rebounder. Jamal's live ball turnovers early in that stretch in the first half is unlike him. You know what, we didn't play very good, and they did.

So did they make us play poorly? I'd have to go back and look at the film, but they're good. There's a reason why they're the ACC champions. I don't think the final score indicates the difference in the two teams. I don't think there's much difference in the two teams. They're good. We're good. But they were certainly better than us tonight.

Q. Marcus, I know obviously not how you wanted it to end, but just coming back for your teammates this past season, just kind of what's this past 12 months

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just meant to you personally to do this with your teammates one last time?

MARCUS SASSER: It was an amazing run. Came up short, but the time that we got to spend throughout these months, I couldn't have for nothing better. Then just coming back to this program, coaching staff, it was just amazing.

I'd pick that choice 10 out of 10 every time. So it was a great run for sure.

Q. Marcus, there was sort of the ongoing theme of playing in Houston potentially in the Final Four. Did that pressure impact the team at all as you all were playing in this tournament?

MARCUS SASSER: Not really. We were just taking it game by game. Everybody else was thinking about that. We knew how hard it was to get to the Final Four.

Just because it's in Houston, that don't mean we get extra points or something like that when we step on the floor. We were just taking it game by game, but we fell a little short.

Q. Coach, just what are your thoughts on Norchad Omier tonight, what he did against you guys?

KELVIN SAMPSON: That's a tough hombre. His strength -- there's so many people that have a romanticism with how tall someone is. It's like, if you're 6'10", you're better than you are at 6'7". That kid has been the biggest, strongest guy on the floor every game he's played.

I think what helps him is how smart he is. His basketball IQ is off the charts. He's tough. He's got great hands. His width -- we played a lot of 7-footers this year. None of them bothered us. 6'10", 6'11", 7-foot, we played against a lot of those. They were never a factor with us.

But this kid was because of how good he is. He doesn't need the ball. His attitude is tremendous. He impacts winning in many different ways.

There were so many loose balls that were batted around. He always got them. We always got those balls almost all year. We didn't get any of them tonight. Reggie might have got a couple.

But I was impressed with him. He's a load.

Q. Marcus, can you put into words what this program has meant to you in terms of your development on the court, off the court, the entire coaching staff, Coach

Kelvin, Coach Q, everyone.

MARCUS SASSER: It meant everything. From the day I stepped on campus, really, you could see the development, not just in me, but in a lot of players that came through here.

Everybody is just a family here, so everybody cares about each other. The way they just take their time out of their day to come be in the gym with us all day when they've got families at home and other things to do, I couldn't thank them enough for that.

Just becoming a better man. Coach and his coaching staff, they don't just teach us lessons on the court, they teach us a lot of lessons off the court too. So I really just couldn't thank them enough.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Congratulations on a terrific season.

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