

March 15, 2014



UCLA – 75
Arizona – 71

An interview with:

**COACH MILLER
NICK JOHNSON
T.J. McCONNELL**

THE MODERATOR: Coach Miller, could we have an assessment of what you think happened?

COACH MILLER: Well, I thought it was a great game. Players sometimes talk about that's a man's game. That was. There were some great players out there. I thought two outstanding teams. I can't say enough about UCLA. We knew because we watch them closely, how talented they are and how well they play together.

Steve's doing a great job with his program and with his team. I've got news for whoever draws them in the NCAA Tournament, Kyle Anderson and Jordan Adams, good luck. Those two guys are fantastic players. Kyle Anderson had 15 defensive rebounds and he played point guard. Jordan Adams did the same thing in years gone by against us. He does it on both ends, and both guys are really, really good players.

We lost to an excellent team. It was a war from start to finish. Thought the game could have gone either way. The one point I made to our guys, especially these two, this deal is about next week for us. If we won this championship, it's about next week. If we lost this championship, it's about next week. The couple lessons that I feel like we really learned that will help us in the NCAA Tournament is they shot 58% in the first half and at times early looked like we couldn't guard them and look at the stats in the second half.

We were much better defensively in the second half. But we can't warm up for the first eight or ten minutes, spot them some baskets that

we normally don't get and then expect to win in March.

Number two, we went 6 for 16 from the line. We talk about this all the time. Free throws win championships. To UCLA's credit, they went 21 for 25. For us to overcome 6 for 16 when the other team's 21 for 25, it's tough. It wasn't one player. It was a collective group. If we make more free throws today, we're probably out there doing what they're doing.

It's never easy to lose. This is the third time for us that we've lost in this championship, but we've been in the championship. I look forward to coming back next year and winning it.

But for us, it's about the NCAA Tournament. I couldn't be prouder of these two guys. I thought their effort level, our effort level, was amazing. That loose ball that Aaron Gordon and whoever UCLA player ran down, if you ever want to love college basketball, just watch that play. I mean, that was phenomenal.

We lost a game we could have won. Jordan Adams hit a great shot, and I believe that some of the things we learned in today's game will better serve us for the biggest prize while we all do this, and that is to hopefully be able to advance next week in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. T.J. and Nick, does it feel like it's about next week?

NICK JOHNSON: I mean, it's obviously tough to lose this one because this was a big game for us. But ultimately it is about the NCAA Tournament. I mean, that was our overall goal. So just got to learn lessons from what we did today and take it into the tournament.

Q. Nick, can you just talk about the strides the conference has made in the time that you've been here at Arizona? I mean, two years ago it didn't look like a very strong conference. It's grown to be a pretty good conference. Talk about the strides it's made

and what kind of impact the conference can make in the NCAA Tournament?

NICK JOHNSON: Yeah, my freshman year I think we got one team in. It was Colorado who won it. So since then, I mean, last year I think the first round the Pac-12 did really well. I mean, I'm definitely looking forward to seeing what we do this year. We obviously have a bunch of great teams. I don't know how many will make it, but hopefully we will get a good amount. I mean, we've been tested every game all year throughout the Pac, so it's definitely going to help us and help them.

Q. Coach, can you just kind of take us through the last couple offensive possessions?

COACH MILLER: Yep. We didn't execute. The last two offensive possessions we called a timeout. And one of the biggest emphasis of the timeout being down three is I think about 20 seconds, 19 seconds, don't settle. We don't need a three. Let's look for a two. Obviously we'll take a three, but we're not in dire straits. So let's try to drive the ball to get fouled or score a two. Aaron made a strong drive, elected to pass. It didn't give us anything.

Then sometimes, and this isn't Aaron's fault. This is my fault. I'm the coach. We lost our poise a little bit and took an unnecessary three. We didn't need a three at that point. We needed the best shot we could get, a two. When you take that three, an ill-advised one, it starts to dig even a deeper hole. We had a second chance at it, which isn't as good of a situation, but once again, we could have looked for a quick two, and I think we ended up settling for a three. We talked about that in the locker room. More poise.

Again, my direction has to be clear and those guys have to be able to go out and execute it, but everybody always focuses on the last play or last plays. There were 150 in the game that could have tilted it in either person's favor. Was Jordan Adams' shot a huge shot? Yep. But so was the first shot of the game and we didn't get back in transition.

It's a 40-minute game, and there were a lot of mistakes that I'm sure UCLA looks at and says that they made. We weren't perfect. But about next week, that situation we just found ourselves in, we'll be better when it presents itself, and it's going to in the future. That's what's great about a game like today. It only makes you better moving forward into the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Nick, UCLA has a good team, but they've been virtually unranked most of the year. Is there anything about the way they played or the way they jumped out to the big lead early in today's game?

NICK JOHNSON: They have a lot of people that can score. I mean, it's as simple as that. We've been rolling pretty much on defense these last few games, and they came out and punched us in the mouth. Just the variety of which they score, threes, twos, getting fouls, getting to the line and lay-up stuff like that. It's really going to -- like Coach said, it's going to catch some people in the tournament by surprise.

Q. That first half I think they got more open looks than the previous two games combined. What was going wrong on defense in the first half, and what was it that you told your team at halftime that made you guys change things up in the second half?

COACH MILLER: No question. We talk a lot about be who we are and do what we do well. No team is perfect. But our great strengths have carried us throughout the year. The first ten minutes of the game they generated a lot of points by the pace of the game through transition. It shocked us and knocked us back. I believe I called two different timeouts.

But if you evaluate our team from about the ten-minute mark of the first half to the end of the game, we pretty much were that defensive team. I'm here to tell you they're really good on offense. But for us to defend them for 30 minutes we did the best we could. We were a dominant defensive team. But when you dig yourself a hole against a good team this late in the year, like we did through that first ten-minute surge, it puts a lot of pressure on you.

Again, I don't want to keep coming back to it, because we aren't a good free-throw shooting team. But as we climb the ladder and the teams we play are better and have a lot at stake themselves, it's tough to win when you go 6 for 16 from the line. If we would have shot better from the free-throw line, we'd have been in the winner's circle, there is not a doubt in my mind about that. That is something that we have to learn from and hopefully we can do better.

Q. Coach, you went back to Hollis-Jefferson in the starting lineup. Is that

mostly so you could match Aaron up with Kyle?

COACH MILLER: Yeah, when you play them, you're really in dire straits in a couple scenarios. We actually have a pretty good match-up with Rondae as a starter. Because guys like Nick, you want to keep them on someone like Jordan Adams.

But it's tough to play T.J. McConnell on a 6'9" point guard. I think UCLA has gotten better over time with that match-up. So the reason we did that is to have a bigger group out there for sure. Gabe York will start next game. I think that's probably our best bet. But for defensive purposes, we tried as best we could to have a bigger guy on him.

I don't know if I've ever seen a player have 15 defensive rebounds, five assists, one turnover and be a point guard. This guy is a heck of a player, Kyle Anderson.

Part of it is as I look at our team, we played hard. We did a lot of great things. It was just a fantastic game and some big-time guys stepped up on our side, but certainly on their side.

Q. Sean, every season Arizona seemingly has an elite team, but you haven't won this tournament since 2002. Why do you think such a long drought?

COACH MILLER: I don't know. I've been responsible for a number of them, obviously. But I'll also tell you this, I'll flip it on you and tell you, it's hard to be in a championship game. It's hard. There are a lot of good teams that don't make it to their conference tournament's championship game, and we've done it three times in four years. We want to win the championship, but we're proud of the fight.

The other thing is if you just look at the three games that we've been in, I honestly think they've all been the same. Washington, Isaiah Thomas hit a huge three-point shot late in the game to do us in. We went on to the Elite Eight. Nick talked about Colorado when we were both fighting for a bid. I think they hit a big shot at the end, game came down to the final play. Really tonight was the same.

In one sense, it's heartbreaking, but I feel like we're on the right track. One of these days we're going to come here and break through.