

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Monday, November 23, 2015

Steve Alford

Byrce Alford

Thomas Welsh

UCLA Bruins

UCLA - 77 UNLV - 75

THE MODERATOR: Back for the final press conference of the night. We welcome Coach Alford and Thomas Welsh to the media room. As always, we'll start with an opening statement from coach and we'll take questions for players. Coach, an opening comment?

COACH ALFORD: I'm really proud of my basketball team. I just felt they fought. This was a really good, big, athletic team that we were playing in UNLV, and I thought both teams came in playing pretty good basketball. I'm proud of my guys, because we took a pretty good punch to start the game. Never did get Tony Parker in any kind of rhythm. Isaac was out of rhythm. Jonah was out of rhythm. Those are pretty key players for us that never really got into rhythm.

For us to beat a team like this to where I thought Bryce and Tom were just terrific all night. It was a game I couldn't give Bryce any kind of blow because of the pressure, so we've got some concerns moving forward with that. But I thought both of them showed a lot of toughness.

Then our freshmen, Prince and Alex. Alex gave us some great minutes, and Aaron was terrific in the second half.

But to go 23 for 24 at the line, that will win you a lot of basketball games. Obviously, we turned the ball over too many times. That's something we've got to continue to work on, but for early season game, to win a game like this, this is really good for us.

THE MODERATOR: Let's start with questions for Thomas Welsh.

Q. Thomas, 9 for 12 from the floor, eight rebounds. Can you just tell me, were you in a rhythm tonight?

THOMAS WELSH: I think so. I think the guards did a phenomenal job of finding me when I was open too. The coaches tell me to be ready whenever the guards go to the basket. This is a great shot blocking team. Whenever they drove, they drew the help and kicked it



to me. I just wanted to be ready and try to knock down my shot.

Q. Thomas, it seemed like the transition game was an up and down basketball game. Is that how you guys are comfortable?

THOMAS WELSH: That's a good question. I think our transition defense is one of the things that we've struggled with for these first couple of games. This was a great test for us too in that matter, because they fly up and down the court. So I think we made a lot of progress tonight and we've got to keep moving forward with that.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll welcome Bryce Alford in the room as well.

Q. Bryce, coach was talking about he couldn't get you out of there to get you a blow. But it seemed like you really kind of hung in there with the fast pace that we were just talking about with Thomas. Is that the way you guys like to play basketball?

BRYCE ALFORD: Yeah, it was good to have somebody like Aaron. Last year we didn't have a guy like Aaron, so I was bringing it up pretty much every time with Isaac. So it's good to have a guy like Aaron who can take a lot of pressure off of me. It got me to get some breaks on offense and not have to go against that kind of pressure for 40 minutes, and I had to play that tonight.

Q. I think you guys shot a pretty awesome free throw percentage, 23 of the 24, and I think you guys have been in your share of close games already. So how much did that help you guys tonight?

BRYCE ALFORD: Yeah, that's huge, it's something we talk about a lot as a team. Our goal is to shoot 80% as a team every game. We haven't been doing that exactly. So for us to come into tonight in a close game like that and shoot 23 for 24, you can make the argument that that's what won us the game. So it's a huge job for the guards and for everybody to get to the line and make free throws.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach?

Q. Steve, did you feel like your use of the zone defense in the first half there kind of turned the

game around and really frustrated them offensively?

COACH ALFORD: Yeah, I thought Jonah, the one positive, I thought Jonah really helped us with was on the front of that 3-2 zone. He did a really nice job with it. He's long. That's a 7'3" wing span up there. So it's hard to see over, hard to pass over.

We extended a little bit to where we're making them maybe take some 24, 25, 26-foot shots. I think that slowed them down, because they gave us a really good punch to start the game.

They're an athletic bunch. The way they play, it's a scary bunch. So I'm really proud of our team, because we took a really good shot from a really good team. It's the first time we've had to play against that pressure, and we're doing it with three freshmen. I thought those three freshmen were really good. Then what Bryce and Tom were able to do in the first half got us back in it.

Q. Coach, I know it's early to talk about, but what do you think of tomorrow's match-up? After a tough game, is it tough to come back?

COACH ALFORD: Well, yeah. I just got here for the last six or seven minutes of that game, so, obviously, they're a premier team in the country, a top 5 team. Coach Self and his staff do an incredible job, and they're very deep and talented.

But you want to get in that championship bracket, I think that's the biggest key when you're coming to a tournament like this.

I told our team, we made strides. Last year, the tournament we were in in the Bahamas, we lost the first game. So we went right in against a very good Oklahoma team, very similar to this game. We're ahead, then they'd catch us. And we weren't able to beat them.

So then we take a step forward now with this group. We get into the right side of the bracket. When you do that, you face teams like Kansas in a tournament like this. But this is why you're blessed to have an opportunity to play in a tournament like this. You know that you're going to play incredible competition. We learned a lot from this game.

When we get back home, we'll be able to watch this tape, just like we'll watch Kansas and whoever we play on Wednesday. But we're going to get three really quality teams being on this right side now that we're going to get a really good test of who we are and what we need to work on. That's why you want to be here. So we're looking forward to the opportunity, but we know it's a very tall task.

Q. Coach, kind of looked like your guys felt the free-throw shooting. Is that something you think you'll be able to count on?

COACH ALFORD: I put 24 for 30. We always like getting there 30 times. We didn't quite get there 30 times, but we almost made 24. If they're not going to get there 30, and they only get there 24, I like the fact they made 23. They did a really nice job of making foul shots all night.

So I've got to hammer my son, because an Alford can't be the only one to miss a free throw. That doesn't sit well in the household. But we did. We did, Aaron got off to a slow start, but then was really good in the second half, made all his free throws down the stretch. You've got a 7'1" center that goes to the line and knocks down two free throws.

I couldn't be more happy or proud for them. That was an intense basketball game. To go 23 or 24, I thought that was the difference in the game.

Q. Coach, is this a little bit of a statement game in the West?

COACH ALFORD: Well, we're just trying to get better. Whether it's a statement game, I think they're really good. I think they stay healthy, I think they're going to have a really good year. I think we stay healthy, we're going to have a really good year.

This is a game where Tony comes in 16-16. He plays 11 minutes. Jonah's not going to play 20 minutes very often and get one rebound. Isaac's not going to have many games where he gets three turnovers. So those are three high-quality players we had that had off nights and we were able to beat a team like this.

It's not so much a statement in the West to me, as it is a statement to me as a coach that these freshmen are pretty good; they're hard-nosed, tough kids and getting better. So all of a sudden we have some vets that have off nights and we can hang in there and get a win.

Last year we couldn't do that. Last year we played six guys. This year we can go nine deep and we've got GG that will hopefully be back in about three weeks. I like our depth. This is a big test for us when they passed it. More than a statement, it's a good feeling as a coach, because I think this team has a chance to be pretty good if we keep working.