

March 4, 2010



Drake – 63
Southern Illinois – 61

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: Mark Phelps will give a statement. Then we'll have questions for just the three student-athletes, and then when we're done with them, we'll dismiss them and stay with Coach Phelps. So first, a statement on the game, Coach, thank you.

COACH PHELPS: Well, our guys, we talked about it before the game and we've had some tough luck this year in terms of close games. But we all felt as a team that we were playing some good basketball. And, you know, we faced adversity again late in the second half being down by ten. I thought they missed a shot very close to the rim that would have put them up 12. That would have been tough. But even down by 10, we chipped away at it.

You know, we did what we needed to down the stretch. Which is, if you're going to come back from that and win a game like that you have to get stops, timely stops, and you have to convert on your offensive end.

I can't say enough about our team in terms of their effort, their belief that we could indeed finish the game out. I can't say enough about Josh Young. I think at one point during the game he was 1 for 7, maybe 1 for 8. Continued to believe in himself. He's worked extremely hard. Hit a couple

of big threes against the zone as did Ryan Wedel. And then there was absolutely no question at all about who was going to take the last shot.

I thought he had tremendous poise and composure. Looked like Adam wanted to get him to go just a little bit early, and he waited another two seconds, and I thought the timing was perfect as he scored with only one and a half seconds to go.

I am really proud of our team. You'll remember big plays. Craig Stanley getting on the floor for a big loose ball. Ryan Wedel got his head knocked in there on a loose ball where he got a steal early in the second half. Really proud of our guys in terms of their effort, their energy, their togetherness. They earned their success tonight.

Q. Josh, you guys are down ten points, 8 minutes to go, and you've had one of your worst shooting performances of your career. At that point are you confident you can come back or are you getting desperate that maybe it's not going to workout?

JOSH YOUNG: You know, I have to attribute a lot of that confidence that I gained back to my teammates. We have those type of guys that continue to tell me to keep shooting the ball that it's going to fall. So I continued to believe in myself and they found me on a couple good plays and got me going there in the second half.

Q. Josh, take us through that last play. Kind of curl around. Freeman's guarding you, you pull it up. In some ways it's a shot you've made 100 times, but this one extends your career.

JOSH YOUNG: I've been in that situation a few times where we've hit a shot and left too

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much time on the clock, and a miracle shot was hit on that and we were on the losing side of that. So, I just wanted to make sure I let the clock go down as much as possible. I tried to get it around to the 6, 5-second area and tried to make a play. My teammates and coaches had had all the confidence in the world.

Q. You just kind of hinted at it there, but on Saturday you hit the shot with 8 seconds left, and then Evansville happened. Is that the difference? Waiting longer and taking the shot with a couple seconds left?

JOSH YOUNG: I think so. One thing I've learned in my career is you have to remain calm and poised in situations like that. That's what I wanted to do. I think my teammates did a great job of doing the same thing and we pulled out a big win.

Q. Have you ever hit a fadeaway like that before in your career?

JOSH YOUNG: I can't say that I've hit that exact shot. You know, I've thought about it. I've dreamed about hitting a shot like that. It was a good contest by Freeman, but I was glad I was able to knock it down.

Q. Take us through that play where you wound up on the floor with a basketball in your hand?

CRAIG STANLEY: It was a loose ball Craig and Dillard was next to me. One thing we talk about is loose balls in NFL fumbles. I jumped on it. Tossed it to a teammate and we wound up with a ball.

Q. You guys went on a 13-0 run, the huge comeback, the emotional last shot. Is there anything left in the tank for a noon tipoff tomorrow?

RYAN WEDEL: It's a lot of fun. Kind of goes back to our AU ballgames we played. Five games, six games, you turn around and play the next morning, and I think we'll be ready to go.

Q. I think they combined for 24 points and getting a lot of second chance baskets and stuff. How did you contend them or how did you weather that a little bit getting inside?

CRAIG STANLEY: Those are two great players, you know, and Teague gave us a good game and Jake as well. We just wanted to try to work hard and keep them dancing and trying to give Teague no angles. If he did get an angle, we wanted to foul some free throws. They're great players and they played great.

RYAN WEDEL: They did a great job. Keeping the ball in their hands not letting them catch it makes them work down on the shot clock. So I give a lot of that credit to Seth and Adam.

Q. What does it mean tomorrow after you've already played against them? And you talk about what it means to get that No. 1 seed and to get them tomorrow?

JOSH YOUNG: You know, I think we're excited for the opportunity. Obviously we've dropped some close games to UNI this year. They're a great team. Playing some of the best basketball they have been all year. We're definitely excited to get the chance to play them again tomorrow. And we'll try to get rested up and be ready to go.

COACH PHELPS: It's a good time. It's a quick turn around and an in-state rival. We'll go back to the hotel tonight, prepare for them and be ready to go tomorrow.

Q. SIU was up with 10 at 8:00 to go. That game could have gone kind of their way, they could have pulled away at that point, and you guys came back. How did you do that today?

JOSH YOUNG: We kept our poise. We forced shots up, and didn't get an offensive possession when they came down to score. We kept our poise and moved the ball around. Craig was driving well and finding open men. I think we hit a lot of threes there and executed our offense.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We'll stay here a while longer with Coach Phelps.

Q. You said there wasn't any question about who was going to get that last shot. But the time before that down the floor, you set up

a play for Adam. Was there a discussion about whether or not we're going to give it to Josh? You had to assume that Southern Illinois was going to try to take him away from it?

COACH PHELPS: Same play one both possessions. One time, Josh drew it back to Adam for a wide open shot. The second time Adam was trying to set a flat ball screen for them the first time. He got a piece of it, and threw it back. He missed the three, and it was right there. Second time, he tried to do it again, and they didn't cross at all. Freeman wasn't clipped at all. So Josh got in there and shot his hook. The point there was let's let Josh make a great decision, have him create for himself and his teammates.

I thought he made the perfect play both times if you think about the shot that Adam had, that was a shot that we'd welcome, and it was a game winner.

Q. That missed dunk by Freeman, how big of a momentum swing was that when it seemed the whole game just shifted toward you guys once that missed dunk happened?

COACH PHELPS: We were fortunate on a couple of missed opportunities by SIU at the rim. I thought they had at least one chance to go up 12, and a 12-point lead at that point in the game even

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psychologically was a little different than a ten-point lead. So we had a couple of breaks go our way. But when you play the game long enough, you typically create more breaks for yourself than just happen.

So that was big. We didn't need them to score that, that's for sure.

Q. You talked about all the close losses. There have been buzzer-beaters

against you the last two times. How does it feel to have it go your way finally?

COACH PHELPS: Good (laughing). You know, these guys have -- I just give them a lot of credit for doing the right things even when things don't go their way. That is really the only choice you have. And again, you know momentum swings and sometimes you get the breaks and sometimes you don't.

Coming into the tournament I told them we've been through everything, so let's go out and play and let's have confidence, and they do. So it feels a lot better winning the close one, that's for sure.

Q. After giving up so many offensive rebounds and points in the paint tonight, how are you going to prepare for UNI tomorrow?

COACH PHELPS: It's been an issue for us all year. We don't have big seniors, and we have our size, height-wise of our young guys, you know, they're freshmen. So it's going to be an issue. We have to rebound by committee. We have to do our best and have guys making rebound hits, blockout hits every possession. Being out-rebounded offensively 14-1 and still win the game. If you're going to do that, you have to be efficient at the offensive end. I thought we were good at the second half shooting 61% and 47 from 3. You can't make your living being out-rebounded like that. So we have to have great effort certainly. We'll see. We'll see tomorrow.

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THE MODERATOR: Coach Lowery will start with a statement on the game, and we'll go to questions for the two student-athletes, John Freeman and Carlton Fay, and come back to the Coach.

COACH LOWERY: You have to give them credit because Josh Young hit a tough shot to win it and Freeman missed the dunk, and the lay-up, and that's the game. We make either one of those, and we get the 12 points.

We seem to find ways to shoot ourselves in the foot. We can't have missed free throws from on our guard spot. Those are the ones we value. We know he (Teague) has to make up for him, and we didn't make enough free throws and we didn't guard them in the clutch. Obviously, Wedel got going, and Josh Young hit the two last big ones.

Q. Carlton, can you talk about the 10-point lead at 8 minutes to go? Did you feel that was a chance to break the game open at that point?

CARLTON FAY: Yeah, when we got up, we felt pretty good about ourselves. I think we just felt like if we continued to do what we were doing we'd put the game away, but we missed some shots that probably could have won the game for

us. But we put the pressure on them, and we just weren't able to do it.

Q. Can you talk about some pretty tough putbacks today, and tough rebounds. How did you kind of step it up today?

JOHN FREEMAN: There was one thing coach told me when we he played Drake was it's a zone. So, it's a lot of open spaces to create rebounds and I kind of see where the shot's coming off at and be there and get an extra possession. So that was the only thing coach preached to me about.

Q. You were leading by 10, and you missed the dunk. Can you talk about what happened on that play?

JOHN FREEMAN: I don't know. I went up and it was kind of like my legs left me a little bit. Should have went up with two hands, but I didn't have the legs to finish it off. That was a big play for us. That would have put the pressure on them a lot.

You know, he came back and I think we missed another lay-up. We just have to finish plays off and deliver the knockout punch to finish teams off.

Q. I know a lot of these close losses have been devastating for you guys. What do you sort of attribute that to as far as the entire season goes?

CARLTON FAY: I mean there's no one thing I think that you can say that we do. Just being able to make plays and finish the game off and have that killer instinct, you know, where we're up 5 or 10 points with 4 or 5:00 minutes left. And just being able to say, you know, being able to look at each other and say we can win this game because we have players to make plays. We have

the players, we just weren't able to make the plays this year.

Q. What will you take from this season as far as what kind of expectations you have from the beginning?

CARLTON FAY: It's no secret. We thought this year we had all the right pieces to have a successful year. And somewhere throughout the year whether we lost confidence in each other, we just weren't able to get the wins when we needed to.

Coming here, Coach always said "third season", we felt like we could put all the pieces together and win throughout the year. And it didn't happen. Now looking towards next year we know it's going to come down to finishing off games for us to be successful.

JOHN FREEMAN: Carlton's right. Now we have to come back and be hungry and deal with the same thing happening next year.

Q. You've gone against Josh Young several times and you've seen it before. Is there anything you can prepare for that? Or was it a moment where your team takes over.

COACH LOWERY: It was not a wide open look -- he was going left, and he shot it across his body right, and that was what you want your seniors to do. Their senior delivered, and that's what it's about. You know, he's a good player, there is a reason why he scored that many points for Drake. He's a good player.

Q. There were like over a two-minute span you missed four shots at the rim. As a coach, is there a sense of foreboding like "here we go again"? What was going through your mind at that point?

COACH LOWERY: Nothing, I was trying to keep them locked in and not worry about what just happened. We missed some point-blank shots. And there's nothing -- it didn't go our way. But you've got to give them credit for fighting us. You go up ten, and you have two great passes where you should go and finish and we don't.

Like I told them 15 times, that I've taken the blame for not getting us ready, and it's my fault for not getting these guys ready to finish. Not getting them ready to finish games off. I'm big enough to accept that fact.

15-15 is not what we want. We did not want to play on Thursday. We did not want to be going home on Thursday. That is not what we're

about; that is not what I'm about. Now we have an opportunity for some guys to grow up and step up and become men.

Q. You guys were up 11, then later in the second half you were up by 10. The lead kept falling apart. What do you contribute that to? What happened?

COACH LOWERY: You miss lay-ups. You miss lay-ups every time. You miss point-blank dunks, those are plays that as a player you see a guy go up as a player and you rest. And you miss him in transition defense. You're thinking they have time to take it out. Back-to-back plays and missed lay-ups and you think you're going to finish them. You miss point blank like in the second half.

The first half we shot bad threes. We shot back-to-back really bad rushed threes, and that's how they got back. It's just about poise and composure. We only show it. Hate to say it, but we've been a front-running team. When things go good for us, we're good. When things go bad, we run and hide.

Q. Coach, over the course of the season, it seems your rebounding has improved. Do you think you're going to take positives from this when and the fact that you were leading in the first half by almost double the rebound?

COACH LOWERY: A big part of it was Gene. Gene's gotten better that's why we've become a better rebounding team. That's why he is upset. He missed five free throws and he knows it, he feels it's his fault. We put a lot of pressure on him to do a lot of stuff. But the other guys have to make free throws for us to be successful. Especially when he's getting fouled like he was.

Q. When he was able to tie the game up late, and obviously closing out games and the team struggled this year, did you have a feeling finally this was going to go our way?

COACH LOWERY: I thought we were going to stop him. That wasn't a great shot he shot. That was a very, very tough shot. We went small and switched. And John Freeman was going. He had to switch over five guys, too. It was a tough, tough shot. He puts it in and I thought we were going to have a chance.

We run a home run play and didn't get in the spot for our screen on the ball. It got tipped in the end. But Gene was behind the play. He might

have caught it and finished it.

So, you know, again, it's the little things that have clipped us all year. It's the attention to detail stuff that's clipped us all year. When it's time to fight, not fight. Like I said, that's on me. We have to get those guys ready for next year.

Q. Next year, how confident are you that everybody will be back and you can build on this year?

COACH LOWERY: We're expecting to move forward. The biggest thing for us is not about who is leaving. That's not important because the guys who want to be here will be here. The guys that are in that locker room are committed to winning. They're committed to doing things right. We've just got to make sure as a staff that we push them in the right direction.

That's been part of why we've been good. We've been able to coach kids above their level. We couldn't get these guys above their level and that's why we're even. It's a challenge for me and a challenge for our staff to get these guys above their level and get these guys to play harder than what they did this year.

Q. Your best teams have had some great seniors and the potential to have pretty good seniors next year?

COACH LOWERY: Right, Carlton will be a senior, John will be a senior, and Jack will be a senior. John has really gotten better as the season progressed. He's your typical JUCO, he's they usually struggle early, and finish off late and have a comfort level going into their senior year.

He's had some good games in February to let us know he could play at a high level.

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