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Creighton – 60
UNI – 57

An Interview with:

COACH McDERMOTT DOUG McDERMOTT KENNY LAWSON

THE MODERATOR: The victorious Bluejays are here. They have a date in the semifinals against the No. 1 seeded Missouri State Bears. That will be the first game in tomorrow's slate. We'll ask head coach Greg McDermott to start off with a statement on this game, then questions for the student-athletes.

COACH McDERMOTT: Well, it was a heck of a basketball game. I was pretty sure that there was no way that Northern Iowa would have a second half offensively similar to their first half. I thought we did a good job, but I thought they also missed some shots that they normally probably make, and I was right.

They were good the second half. Offensively they made us pay for a couple of different ways. We chose to defend the ball screen. When they put five shooters out there, it puts a lot of pressure on your defense.

Fortunately for us, we rebounded pretty well. Coming into the game, we are willing to give up a few of those as long as we kept them off the free-throw line. I thought our big guys did a good job helping as the penetration came in the lane. Kept their hands back, and we kept them off the line. At seven free throw difference in the end turned out to be big for us.

Q. Given the up-and-down year you've had, what's it mean for you to come here and play this kind of game?

KENNY LAWSON: It means a lot. Not just for me, but for our team. We understand this

is our only chance to make it to the NCAA Tournament, so we've been working really hard in practice this last week. We had a tough task in Northern Iowa, so it was great to get this game. But we're still not done. We can't be satisfied.

Q. Doug, how do you think you played, and how much fun was it? How much fun was it here in your first Missouri Valley Conference tournament game?

DOUG McDERMOTT: I thought I played pretty good. I got off to a good start with a quick nine points and then I kind of slowed down. They were coming with double teams. Played a fairly good job rebounding it, but I also turned it over four times which is unacceptable.

But it's a blast coming here to St. Louis. I came here a lot growing you up as a fan, and now here as a player is even better, especially after a win.

Q. Talk about how with Kenny's up-and-down year and you coming into the lineup, how did you two juggle that and keep a cohesiveness with this team?

DOUG McDERMOTT: Well, Kenny's a first-team player. Every day he's preaching to us to get better. He's done a really good job being a leader for this team, and I think that showed today how he's one of the better players in the league. It was just a great win for us.

Q. There's been a lot of games this year that have come down to the final minute or final second that didn't go your way. What kind of gratification is there on your part that this one did?

KENNY LAWSON: I think it shows we're improving as a team. We're also getting tougher. A lot of times down the stretch of the season, we may not have pulled those stops together. We did that tonight. I think a couple games in the past we're starting to pick up confidence as a team. You know, knowing we can finish out a game.

Q. Kenny, in the last couple of weeks was there something they were doing that was allowing you some open looks?

KENNY LAWSON: Not that I can pinpoint. I don't really go into a game thinking I'm going to shoot or I'm not going to shoot. It's just with our offense, it's for anybody. It's for somebody has an open shot, they're going to take a shot. I just felt like there were good looks and I took them.

Q. Was there something about you guys struck in the paint early, was there something that you UNI was doing that freed you up and got you those looks?

KENNY LAWSON: Yeah, when you have a guy like Greg and Doug in the paint, it frees up a lot of guys on the perimeter. So with Doug and Greg down there being really tough from the block in the first half, I think it definitely opened some things up for me.

Q. You guys had eight turnovers first half, cut it down to three in the second half. How much did taking better care of the basketball contribute to this win?

DOUG McDERMOTT: It was a huge difference. The only thing in the second half they scored 40 points compared to their 17 in the first half. But limiting turnovers is definitely huge. We did a really good job on the boards too, 39-24, so credit that a lot to Kenny, Greg and myself. Just got to bounce back and look forward to tomorrow.

Q. When Jahenns' lay-up there kind of curled off the rim, what is going through your mind?

KENNY LAWSON: Me and Doug are on the other end on the ground for about 20 seconds. So honestly, I didn't even see it. I don't know if Doug saw it. But we were laying on the ground. I guess we were pinned down, and I didn't see what happened.

DOUG McDERMOTT: I saw the whole thing. Me and Kenny, I was kind of celebrating, like dang. We were laughing and we knew we had to get up and get a stop.

Q. Could you take us through that last shot with Ahelegbe and how it went down with you guys?

KENNY LAWSON: I think it was Jahenns on him. He did a good job, and he made a shot fake, and Jake was disciplined enough to stay on

the ground and force him into a tough shot. So that was really good on his part.

DOUG McDERMOTT: Yeah, I thought he did a good job staying in front of him. Kwadzo was good with the head fakes and he gets to the free-throw line a lot doing that. So I thought we did a good job overall tonight by staying down when he shot faked.

Q. Can you talk about tomorrow's match-up a little bit? Because you've played this team twice, and an O-fer against them. But what's tomorrow bring?

DOUG McDERMOTT: Missouri State's a great team. They've got a lot of confidence after that win with SIU. We've played good games against them, we just couldn't close it out. We were up at half at our place, and had a 15-point lead at their place and let it slip away.

We're looking forward to getting them for a third time and hopefully get another victory.

KENNY LAWSON: Same thing Doug said. They're a great team. But our confidence is up right now and it's going to be a great match. It's a matter of who is going to be the tougher team.

COACH McDERMOTT: Missouri State, there is a reason they won the league. They found a lot of ways to win games like today. Maybe things didn't go perfect for him, but they found a way to grind it out and seniors step up and make plays.

Leonard hit a couple of big shots and made a play, at the end that's why he's Player of the Year. As Doug mentioned, we had double digit leads in the second half of both games, so we know we're capable of competing against them, we've just got to figure out a way to finish the job. At the end of the day, we lost both times.

But this time of year in this tournament, it's about surviving and getting into tomorrow, and worrying about tomorrow when it comes. We'll spend a lot of time getting ready and hopefully put on our best foot forward tomorrow.

Q. From a coaching standpoint, what's it mean to you to see Kenny come through on this stage?

COACH McDERMOTT: It's the way it should be. Kenny has been unbelievably unselfish all season long. The role I've asked him to play, you could go around the country, and I'm not sure you could find a guy that not only has he accepted

the role. I'm sure he doesn't like it, but that never manifested itself on the practice floor. I never saw it in the locker room. It never came up in our conversations when we watch film after games.

Kenny is about the team. You would hope that that unselfish approach would pay off in the end and that when we're on a big stage like we were today that Kenny stepped up and performed. Not just on the offensive end, but he switched some ball screens and did some good things against Northern Iowa as well. Couple of shots they hit with hands in their face.

But very proud of him. He's a great example for our younger players, and I'll use him as an example as long as I'm coaching, because you don't have guys that are unselfish that often.

Q. Jahenns misses the lay-up. He's on the floor and ends up making a good defensive play. What do you say to him in the huddle and get him to get that moment and focus on the task at hand?

COACH McDERMOTT: We talk about rearview mirror all the time. You've got to put it behind you. It's the next play. You've got to forget about what happened, whether it's good or bad. We instructed them to stay on the floor and not go for shot fakes. It's easy to listen to that. When you get out there and Kwadzo's up to not leave your feet, that's not easy to do. He defended it extremely well. Kept Kwadzo in front of him, and plays like that happen once in a while, and he was able to come up with it and make a good stop.

Q. Can you talk about the emotions of today, being back in Arch Madness and playing against Northern Iowa?

COACH McDERMOTT: I'm thrilled to be back, number one. I think it's a great tournament. The way that St. Louis wraps its arms around this tournament is incredible. I've always felt that way. You know, it's different than when I was in the Big 12. Not that those cities didn't do a great job. But I think it's special because it's here every year and they look forward to having us here.

The Missouri Valley Conference staff does a great job putting on a first class tournament, and the guys feel that. So in that regard it was great to be back.

You know, if I could have played any of the other eight teams, that's what I would have rather done. If I was going to meet Northern Iowa, I would have preferred it be Sunday so that one of

us is going on to play in the NCAA Tournament, but it didn't work out that way.

I'm proud of our guys that were able to fight because when Northern Iowa was shooting it like they did in the second half, they're a very difficult team to beat. Fortunately we had that 8-point lead at halftime, otherwise we would have been in big trouble.

Q. Your ability to dominate on the boards and take better care of the basketball in the second half, how big was that?

COACH McDERMOTT: It was big. We had eight turnovers, but a couple of those were calls on Gregory when he's trying to make a play to the basket.

But I thought we took good care of the basketball. Made good decisions in the second half. Doug did a good job against some of their pressure when Northern Iowa took Antoine away to break the press against the guard a couple of times.

If I had known that going in, I can't say I would have slept well last night. But I he did a good job of handling that.

You know Northern Iowa's not going to make mistakes. They haven't all year. They have good guard play, they're good at what they do, and they're not going to force him into turnovers.

So we turned it over 16 times, eight in the second half as well, there is no way we win the game.

Q. Any thoughts of fouling that last possession and putting Kwadzo on the line?

COACH McDERMOTT: I never have. Not to say I won't ever do it. But I had confidence in my guys. I had a decent feeling of what Coach Jake might do. He didn't end up running that play, but we were ready for what I thought they were going to do, and we had practiced it.

So I was confident that we could at least get to a shooter. But it came up in the huddle, but it's not something I'm real comfortable with.

Q. You recently recruited Kwadzo to play at UNI. What is your thought now that his final game is over?

COACH McDERMOTT: Well, Kwadzo and Kerwin they were the last in that recruiting class. Kwadzo, besides being a heck of a basketball player, he's a great young man. I've always had

tremendous respect for him. Watching him grow during the course of his career from the outside has been very impressive, and how he's led this team the last couple years to two NCAA Tournaments and what he did last year. I'm very proud of him. I had a small part in him coming to Northern Iowa.

So I'm proud of him while he's there. He played basketball the right way. He's a great representative of what college basketball's supposed to be about.

Q. You said plays like Jahenns missed lay-ups happened. But what's going through your mind at that point?

COACH McDERMOTT: After I wanted to strangle him? You know, you'd like to put it away there, obviously, and he missed it. You know, in that situation you're going to miss 1 out of 100, probably, and that just happened to be the one.

But you have to put it behind you as quickly as you can, and fortunately our guys did.

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