

March 13, 2013



Utah – 69
USC – 66

An interview with:

COACH CANTU OMAR ORABY BYRON WESLEY

THE MODERATOR: Coach, some opening remarks, please.

COACH CANTU: I want to start out by saying I thought Utah played really well tonight. I thought they ran great offense. They really caught us off guard with their switching of zone-to-man, zone-to-man, their 1 to 2 three corner court really kind of slowed the game down.

Once we were able to attack it, we got back in the game and played well. We were a little shorthanded. But I thought Omar played a great game with the minutes he played, and I was happy our guys were able to fight. It's been a long year, but there are a lot of great things that have happened since the coaching change occurred, and I'm proud of our guys' efforts overall. We just came up a little short tonight.

Q. Can you explain what happened on the last possession? I'm assuming you wanted to run the shot clock down on Utah's last possession, and hopefully get a three-pointer off?

COACH CANTU: Yeah, the three-point game. I didn't want to foul and make it two possessions, and I felt that we'd get it back with probably at least 6 to 7, which should be enough. We got the rebound. We got an outlet, and then it was kind of we fumbled it; and it was kind of a scramble there at the end. I thought we were getting ready to actually have a pretty good look.

So it worked out how we wanted it defensively, we just weren't able to get a shot

attempt. But we kept fighting to stay in the game and to get it down to one possession.

Q. The defense you played on Washburn, you forced 3 to 14, and I'm sure you would have taken that pregame scenario every time. Did you account for Jarred DuBois' success against you, and was it surprising? Just what was your reaction to the game he had?

COACH CANTU: Well, I thought Omar did a great job on Washburn. We were trying to get him to shoot over top of them and use his length, obviously, at 7'2". We had a little difficult time with the ball driving to the basket. He's so crafty. He can get to the rim. He's great in the open court. He's obviously, a very, very good player, and he showed it tonight.

Our goal going in was to try to limit both of them. We did do a good job on Washburn, but we weren't able to get stops, I think, at key points in the game. We made great runs and cut it down. Then they'd hit a big shot or DuBois would get to the rim and score a lay-up. But they're playing good basketball right now. They've won three in a row, and I could see them winning a couple more.

Q. Did you know going in that you'd only go with seven guys, or did that get dictated by the game?

COACH CANTU: No, it just kind of was dictated by the game.

Q. At halftime, Jio, Eric, and J.T. were 2 of 15 from the field. Was it nerves, was it -- what accounted for that?

COACH CANTU: Utah's defense did a great job of keying in on our key players, and they had a great game plan. We didn't get as many great looks as I would have liked. A lot of our shots were contested, and you've got to give credit to the other team for defending. But those guys battled back in the second half, and we got better shots, and we shot a better percentage.

Q. Omar, did you feel extra responsibility or pressure or anything today because James and Dewayne weren't here? What has it been like the last couple of days knowing that you would be the guy in the middle?

OMAR ORABY: Yeah, of course it's always hard playing shorthanded and missing some key players off the team. But I had to step up, and I had to step in and do the best I can and play as hard as I can to fill in with them missing. But we came up short in the end.

Q. Just the emotional state of the team over the last couple of days knowing that you wouldn't have two teammates with you here, what was it like? How did you try to overcome that?

BYRON WESLEY: Well, we just looked at it as an opportunity to try to go out there and win for the players that weren't with us. Any time you lose players, it's difficult, much less two seven-footers. So that's always a challenge.

But at the same time, we looked at it as motivation, and we just wanted to go out there and give it our all for those guys missing.

Q. Byron and Omar, did you guys feel let down at all by what Dewayne and James did? Just what are your feelings towards them, for them, right now?

BYRON WESLEY: At the end of the day, we're a team. If one person messes up, we all basically mess up. So we're never going to point fingers. We're not going to blame it on one player not being here, from one player not playing well. It was a team effort, and we didn't do what we needed to do to win.

OMAR ORABY: Yeah, like Byron said. We're one team. When one person does a mistake, it's all of us. We're all held accountable for that mistake, and we just have to pick them up, play as hard as we can and try to win the game.

Q. Coach, I notice you have 18 for 21 for Utah circled from the free-throw line.

COACH CANTU: Yeah, I thought that was a key part of the game. We were 7 for 9, but we only had 9 attempts and they had 21. That's a lot of points. So you do a good job defending and we ended up fouling and putting them at the line. We actually fouled them three times at the three-point line, which is just kind of giving away points. We

try to be aggressive and contest all shots at the three-point line, but we might have been a little too aggressive in committing fouls.

But 21-9, we need more attempts to even it out. We held them to 38% overall, which is pretty good. But I thought that was a big factor in the game.

Q. Bob, are you able to recap this two months and what it's meant to you and your career and this whole experience?

COACH CANTU: For me, personally, it's been a great experience. I've been very fortunate just to be at SC for 12 years as an assistant and to have a chance to be a head coach in this league and coach against great coaches and great teams and get that experience.

I'm thankful to our guys who I thought responded and worked hard for me at practice and at games. You know, we had one win last year and we had nine this year. That's a big improvement. Six wins to 14 wins is a big improvement. I think any time you go into the champion of the league's home court and win at UCLA, that's something to be proud of, and you beat Arizona, and you beat Stanford on the road, and you beat ASU and you beat Washington. We had a lot of good wins. It's a tough way to end the season.

But for me, personally, I'm thankful to the administration for giving me the opportunity to be an interim coach and get this experience. I'm thankful to the guys for competing and playing for me.

Q. Do you have any idea where you'll be next year?

COACH CANTU: No, not really at this point.

Q. So USC does finish with a losing record, but do you think it would be good for this team to possibly get a chance to play in a postseason tournament that doesn't require a winning record to be entered in?

COACH CANTU: Yeah, I mean, NIT has shown interest in us. I don't know if we'll be able to make the NIT or not. But if we did, we'd definitely want to participate in it. So we'll have to wait and see. We played a very difficult schedule. If you look at who we've played in the preseason, our record is not great.

If we would have probably played five or six bye games, then the record would have been different. But that schedule is what we did, and it gave us opportunities to compete against the very best in the country.

Q. Can you describe your feelings towards Coach Cantu, and would you like to see him back at USC next year?

BYRON WESLEY: I feel like Cantu's role was really difficult to just get thrown in there in the middle of the season. We were having a so-so year, and what Cantu did for the team, I'm always going to be forever grateful. He coached us with passion every day. He came out with energy and he's just a good person. He's somebody you want to be around, and I couldn't be more thankful for Cantu to be our coach.

OMAR ORABY: He was put in a very difficult situation in a very crucial point in the middle of the year, and we had some very tough games ahead of us. But he did a great job, and he did a great job of bridging us all together and just motivating us and doing his job very well every day. I'll be thankful for him for what he did and for not giving up and for working hard every day.

We've got some great wins under him, and we've played great. So, yeah, I think he did an awesome job of leading the team.

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