

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Tulsa Golden Hurricane Eric Konkol PJ Haggerty Postgame Press Conference

East Carolina - 84, Tulsa - 79

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

ERIC KONKOL: We came into this game talking about the few things that we needed to do. We played East Carolina second game of the conference season, so it was a very long time ago, but just in watching them, we knew three things: We were going to have to take care of the basketball; we were going to have to protect the paint; and we were going to have to play with a level of toughness. We took care of the basketball really well. Just eight turnovers. PJ, to my left, had zero and nine assists. There was some really nice play on that end. Unfortunately, we weren't able to protect the paint enough. They were able to get there with 42 paint points, get a number of free throws. It comes right down to the end and just a couple plays here and there.

But I'm really proud of this group, very young and inexperienced coming into the year but got better and better and put ourselves in position here to get this one today, but unfortunately, just fell a little bit short.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Questions?

Q. Curious, down the stretch, when ECU started to employ the fouling technique, was that tough, frustrating at all not getting the chance to maybe get a game-time three off and what did y'all think that have?

ERIC KONKOL: Well, we went with an action we thought



they might foul and we tried to go to kind of a tip play to try to get an opening and it was very close. It could kind of go either way. Felt we were going to get it out of our hands, but they called the foul, and then we tried to play the long game with free throws and even a designed free throw miss and so forth.

But give East Carolina credit for executing that. There's a number of different things. There's trying to get off a quick three and so forth, but we put ourselves in position in a number of different areas to try to execute, but they're tough plays to make when you're down at that time of the game.

Q. PJ, the first time you guys played ECU you had a nice game and then today obviously 29 points a bunch of assists. What is it about playing them that you were able to find some success?

PJ HAGGERTY: Just reading the defense, just seeing how they play, just looking for my teammates, trying to get them good shots, and then when you get them good shots, everything just opens up for me, allowing me to get in the paint, get some shots, and just things like that.

Q. What was the difference in the paint? I know Ausar with 28-10, Johnson 15-13, what made those guys so effective that made them a problem for you?

ERIC KONKOL: Well, they used the whole clock and they kept running action to try to find their way there. Of course, they got some offensive rebounding. That hurt us. But even just late clock plays of them either getting fouled and when we got a little bit undisciplined with our arms and so forth, but we were trying to make plays too. We've been a team that's been able to get steals and get deflections by being aggressive there.

But again, give them credit for some of the things that they did, but just their overall attack. Didn't shoot a number of threes. We went to the zone for a little bit, just to try to keep 'em in front. But they were bound and determined just to keep fighting for the paint. It's something that they have done most of the year. Ausar, he had a great game and he did it with just tremendous activity. He was

relentless in getting down there. We needed to do a better job of just building walls and just trying to make 'em score over the top.

Q. PJ, AAC Freshman of the Year, 29 in the playoff game tonight. You just looked like a leader out there as a freshman. What do you look to try to build on in the off-season in your game and try to make yourself better going forward?

PJ HAGGERTY: Just to get better in every aspect. You can get better in everything in basketball. I feel like I can get better a lot. Just whether it's reading defenses, shooting, just defense, just everything, really. It's not a specific thing I could get better at, it's a lot of things I can get better at.

Q. Can you talk about PJ's, the season that he's had, kind of a history-making season in this conference, and how the future looks for you and him?

ERIC KONKOL: Yeah, I've said this many times, clearly he was the American Athletic Conference Freshman of the Year for the number of things that he did. But he got better and better as the season went on. I'm very, very proud of him. I think about the conversations we had in the recruiting process and all the different types of things that we talked about doing and he's really delivered. You mentioned about his leadership, his maturity at a young age, he's got just an everyday way about him that I think serves him so well. Not a guy that's going to get super, super high and super, super low. He just is a grinder and a worker and is trying to get better and better. I know I had to submit my NABC voting, and I take these things very seriously, but I voted him for Freshman of the Year. I really think he is. You look at his numbers over the course of the year and what he meant to our team in the competition that we had and how competitive we were as the year went along, I don't see a freshman that was as impactful to his team in the nation. So, it says a lot about who he is as a person, says a lot about how him and his teammates work together, but just really proud of PJ.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports