

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

SMU Mustangs

Rob Lanier

Emory Lanier

Chuck Harris

Postgame Press Conference



what we practice. I thought we've had some confidence issues out of that Florida trip. I felt good coming out of Birmingham that we had cured some of that, and that we were ready to go.

But March is different and it doesn't matter what anybody's record is. They brought a level of fight and we didn't respond, so it manifested itself in some execution things on both ends.

Q. Did this Temple team look different from the one you played back in January?

ROB LANIER: No. We had a tough game against them. We jumped out to a 15-point lead at our place. They came back, they led in the second half, and it required for us to find a way to win the game. So it was similar in that regard. The difference is we didn't have enough resolve to find a way.

Q. When you got hurt, obviously you looked like you were in a world of pain and saw you on the bike and jogging a little bit. How bad did you initially think the injury was and how much did you have to lobby your coaches to get back into the game?

CHUCK HARRIS: It was the same ankle I sprained about three or four games ago. Initially it obviously was hurting, but the med staff just had me keep moving it. It eventually got warm and I told Coach and them that I was ready to go.

Q. What part of your game was affected the most?

CHUCK HARRIS: I just didn't have the same first step, I guess, but, yeah, that's about it.

Q. Going off that, how much did not having Chuck to close out the first half and for most of the second half kind of hurt you guys kind of adding on to that offensive struggle?

ROB LANIER: Well, we went into the half with the lead, and we were able to manage it. I do think it was more about it changed the rotation coming out of halftime. We started a different lineup and there was some uncertainty

Temple - 75, SMU - 60

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

ROB LANIER: All the credit has to go to Temple. They came in with winning five out of seven games, they played with confidence, and they played with more fight and more toughness. We always say, going into games, who is going to play the hardest the longest is the team that's going to prevail and they were that team tonight. So they deserve the credit.

I thought we came out with the right intentions, as we always do. I really have enjoyed coaching this group this year. They play hard, they play together, they really have improved. So we started the game with the right energy and approach, but the key is to be able to sustain that. We thought we could wear them down. Instead there was a time in the first half where we looked more tired than them. So credit to Temple and the job that they did tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. What broke down offensively for you guys in the second half?

ROB LANIER: I don't know. I think a lot of times the breakdowns on both ends are a byproduct of other things. So it manifested itself in some missed shots and some poor decisions. But again, I go back to Temple. They were physical, they were tough defensively, so that had something to do with it. We have gotten into a thing here the last couple of weeks where we've gotten away from

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as to whether or not he was going to be able to return. So our rotation changed a little bit and obviously when you get a guy who is getting 13, 14 a game and he's not there, that can affect what you do.

But it's still -- you know, for us, at halftime they were shooting 50 percent from the field and 44 percent from the three-point line. Chuck brings a lot to the table, but we're not asking him to be, by himself, our best defensive player.

So we weren't missing that. We were missing his ball handling, his skill, and his poise offensively, but we could have mitigated some of that with better defense ourselves.

Q. Next time you guys play it will be members of the ACC. What do these next few months look like as you prepare for that?

ROB LANIER: We'll have some time to think about that. We may not necessarily be done playing this year, so we'll see what lies ahead. In the weeks ahead, we'll get back to work. This off-season and in this landscape in college basketball is really unique, so in the next few weeks, we'll start to figure out where we stand with everything.

Q. Sam Williamson played 15 minutes. I was curious if he was injured or limited in any way physically?

ROB LANIER: No, no, we were just trying to push some buttons and find a spark somewhere. We went to a smaller lineup, and Ja'Heim was giving us something and we needed some shot making, and we were just searching at that point. It really had nothing to do with him being hurt or him doing anything wrong.

Q. How tough was this last kind of final stretch of the season, you talk about that Florida trip, to kind of finish the tough way that you guys did this season?

ROB LANIER: Yeah, I would say that it stands out because of what we had done prior to that, right. We had gotten better. We had positioned ourselves in such a way that when we went to Florida, we were 34 in the NET. These guys did that. That was a real thing. So we had positioned ourselves and made that game a big game, and a big-time team responded in a big-time way. We got humbled in that game. Then we went to South Florida and got the same medicine. We needed to respond, and to be quite honest with you, through the UTSA game and the ECU game, we still hadn't gotten off the mat. And I had felt like the practices were always good, the attitude was always great, and the fight in the UAB game was very similar to the fight that put us in a position going into the FAU game to begin with. And we didn't finish the game, execution, free throws. But it wasn't effort, engagement, spirit, we had all of that. We needed more of that tonight

and it didn't, we didn't have it tonight.

Q. In the two seasons you have been at SMU we have seen the record flip, and the success this season is something that I think needs to be, obviously, focused on and appreciated. Just what you could say about how this transition happened so quickly and how this team has elevated its game from last season to this season in such a big way.

ROB LANIER: Well, it's the players. When I got here I stepped off the podium with basically five scholarship players. And we were new, this is at a time where the transfer portal is just kicking in and NIL has become a factor in the decisions that young people are making. We weren't operating in that, at that level at that particular time. We were fortunate that we brought in eight new guys, and with that group, zero toxic energy. And through whatever disappointments we experienced last year, we had a group that was a part of laying a foundation for the growth that we want to make, the direction we want to take the program. We had 10 guys return. And those returners, along with Chuck, Tyrique, B.J., Denver and Ja'Heim, we had a group that was able to embrace them and transfer the information that they had gained the year before, and the pieces fit in a way that we had some chemistry to build on. We didn't have a huge margin for error, and we became one of the best defensive teams in the country through 20 games. We didn't maintain that down the stretch, but we did set a foundation and a standard for what we wanted to look like.

Q. As you set forward, knowing that this is the last game in the American Athletic Conference, and I know it's down the road, but you'll be in the ACC next season, what do you think about the level of competition that you received in the AAC, because you got to experience Cincinnati, Houston, UCF, and now experiencing six new teams coming in, so how would you describe the level of competition as you get set for a new chapter?

ROB LANIER: Yeah, I don't think there was any drop off. Obviously, Houston is a different animal. Everybody that faces them is seeing that. But top to bottom, what's happened at USF, the job that Aaron's done at Charlotte, the impact that Florida Atlantic has made on the league, the leadership in the league has really done a good job creating a situation where the league is really formidable. It's a great conference. We played a tough schedule. We played a good Big Ten team that was ranked in the top 25. We played a good Florida State team that's well coached and has got length and athleticism. We played a ranked team in Dayton. Those games were tough. I didn't feel like they were tougher than playing at North Texas or at Florida Atlantic. So I think going forward this league has certainly

prepared us for what lies ahead, at least to the point where we won't go forward with any delusions.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you very much.

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