

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Florida Atlantic Owls

Dusty May

Johnell Davis

Vladislav Goldin

Nick Boyd

Postgame Press Conference

Florida Atlantic - 77, North Texas - 71

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

DUSTY MAY: We're very grateful to come away with a hard-fought win against a program team and staff that we couldn't respect any more. Every catch, every possession -- I lost my train of thought.

Very proud of our team to fight and compete and to just find different ways. These guys, they're very confident. They expect to win, but they don't expect it just to happen. They go earn it and I thought down the stretch the last five minutes the 50/50 basketballs, the rim protection, our grittiness really pulled us through and allowed to us get a few baskets in transition and it came down to these guys making plays, these guys to my left, big-time rebounds, big-time shots, great screens. I thought our screens were as good as they have been this year down the stretch. So very proud, but in any tournament format, it's on to the next.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Questions?

Q. How much did last year's experience help you all just maintain your poise in those situations like you faced tonight where you're in a tough game?

NICK BOYD: Last year and this year, both years, especially this year, we faced a lot of tough teams and everybody was gunning for us and wanted our name. So



this whole year we just been fighting and fighting and we just stayed together and it's just another game where we just stayed poised, believe in each, and get a big win as a team.

JOHNELL DAVIS: I couldn't say too much. He really said everything for us.

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: I can. (Laughing). I feel like we practice the same way we play. So we have, like, so many close games in the practice, so even people who don't get like too many reps in the game, they are still ready to play because that's what we do in practice.

DUSTY MAY: I just see a group that has had extremely high expectations and they have never been afraid to fail or not live up to any expectations for a moment. It hasn't been easy. There's been some bumps in the road, but at no point did these guys ever fear of what would happen if we didn't get it done, and whatever get it done means, we don't know, but these guys, they hoop, they play fearless, and they do it together.

Q. It seemed like the difference in that game was after they went up three and you guys were able to clamp down defensively and hold them scoreless for at least probably close to three minutes. What went on in that stretch that you guys were able to just clamp down and prevent them from scoring for so long?

DUSTY MAY: I felt like we were much more physical in our ball screen coverage, and our rim protection improved. That was really -- they made some of those tough twos and then down the stretch, they missed and we were able to come up with the rebounds. They started sending so many guys to the glass, it allowed us to get out in transition and steal a few -- I don't want to say easy baskets because even the pass up ahead to Vlad, the touch pass to A Mart was a special play to have that wherewithal presence.

Q. You guys subbed out Vlad and Johnell with 13:20 to go in the second half, but the others were able to come in and keep it within three points. How important is it to be able to give your players a rest there in the second half in games like that and not

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miss a beat?

DUSTY MAY: In my mind, we don't have a second unit. We have a group that's in the rotation and now Lorient's in the consistent rotation. It was foul trouble. He would have played more minutes. But that stretch we have confidence in everyone on our team that checks in a game. For the guys that didn't start or the guys that aren't playing heavy minutes to be able to come in and impact like they do, it's a luxury that we have.

We have a lot of good players in that locker room that don't get a chance to do it as many possessions as others, but they give themselves up for the team.

Q. Vlad, 21, 10 and 2 tonight. Can you just talk about how you're feeling today. You looked explosive inside the paint. You were definitely moving around and just bodying people. Can you talk about your performance tonight.

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: That's what will -- again, I've heard this question, like, for a couple times already, and I talk to Coach, and he told me I need to play more physical, be more present down there, so that's what I tried to do, and I guess it pays off.

Q. Johnell, only six tonight in the first half, had 12 in the second half. What was working more for you in the second half that wasn't really in the first?

JOHNELL DAVIS: Just stop trying to look for fouls when I would drive to the basket. I know every time I look for a foul I tend to miss shots I normally make.

Q. Obviously tonight was a game where you relied more on your inside game, not relying on the three ball as much. How much of an affect did that play helping you guys clinch the victory tonight?

DUSTY MAY: Well, we're very confident that we can play any style and figure out a way to win. A couple things that really stood out were -- I guess you heard Vlad's line, but Nick Boyd on the glass and then Nelly wasn't in a good rhythm and when he came back in after that 12-minute media, I thought he got probably the biggest rebound of the game that probably we shouldn't have got and we turned that into a little bit of energy and momentum. Those are the plays that really jump out to us.

Q. Going into the tournament this time around, what have you seen in this game that makes you confident that the next two games you can build off? Is there anything specific that you saw here that you liked?

DUSTY MAY: Absolutely. This time of year when you watch a team play -- I know I at least do -- I watch and see how connected the guys are, and do they look like they still really enjoy playing with each other, playing the game in a good rhythm, and then just staff and players have a good interaction as well. Usually those teams that have those two things, they're playing late in the season, they're usually a high seed, and then those are the teams that scare me. So that's what gives me a lot of confidence with our group because of how connected they are and, good, bad or ugly, they stay together and find a way and trust each other and know that on any given possession, game or night a different guy is going to do what's necessary to find a way to win.

Q. This being your first season coaching inside the American Athletic Conference, but obviously familiar teams with six of you coming in from Conference USA. Just what the experience has been like and the level of competition, you once again are heading toward the semis?

DUSTY MAY: Level of play has been higher than I and the staff had anticipated, because the computer metrics said there wasn't much of a jump. Sometimes stats and numbers can be manipulated and they can lie, and I feel like we were lied to by the numbers. It's been tough. It's been grueling. Every single night in our league it's been a one- or two-possession game, it seems, and just like tonight, I would anticipate this next game we're getting ready to watch is going to go down to the final few possessions with two teams competing at a high level. It's been a well-played, well-coached league and it's been a lot of fun.

Q. Vlad, for you, the game was tied at 62 a piece and then you got your own offensive rebound and were able to get the shot, plus the free throw and that eventually led to the win; it also fouled out Rubin Jones. Just what you can say to bring me into that play?

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: We knew if we were going to play hard, if we were going to stay together and keep making, like, effort plays, getting 50/50 balls, it's going to it's going to help to us win over the course of the 40 minutes. That's probably what happened, because, again, we stick to that and we got defensive rebound, we got a foul, they get fouled out, that was the plan and that's what worked.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you very much.

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