

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

North Texas Mean Green Ross Hodge

Aaron Scott

Rubin Jones

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.

ROSS HODGE: You got to give Coach May and his team a ton of credit to come back off of last year's Final Four run and stay together, which very few teams do in this era of college basketball, and put personal agendas aside and get everybody's best shot throughout the whole year. You got to give them a lot of credit, man. I think their championship experience and their experience together, again, they have been playing together for three years now, and I think that experience shines through late in games. There's such a comfort level with everybody out there on the floor. They made a couple more plays than we did, but you got to give them credit.

On our end, I thought we fought really hard, not only tonight, but all year long and super thankful for our team. Obviously we fully intended on winning this game and playing tomorrow, but like we talked about in the locker room just now, the thing that you will miss the most -- obviously you want to compete and you want to win at the highest level, which we all do, but really, at this time of the year, you're just looking to try to find one more day to watch film together, one more meal, one more film session, and I hate that we won't be able to do that, but I'm extremely grateful for our group, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. It seemed like the difference in that game was the run that they made late. What did you see over the

course of the last few minutes of the game that maybe helped them to pull away?

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, I would have to go back and watch it, to be honest. I thought Rubin's fourth foul call was a big one. They had us chasing, and then his fifth one was on a bang bang. Again, he's our most experienced player, all-time winningest player, in the history of our program so you certainly feel better when he's on the floor.

But despite his absence -- and again, I would have to go back and kind of look at the film, I felt like we got some pretty good looks that just didn't go in. I thought Jason Edwards had a couple really clean looks from the top of the key and it rattled in and out and then Aaron and Rob are both playing their tails off and they run into each other and collide, and then it leads to a layup on the other end of the floor. Davis made a tough basket on the baseline. Again, I thought we got the ball in some spots that we wanted to and just couldn't get it to go down.

Q. You played three very close games with FAU this year. They came out on top each time. Just what have they done to kind of get those wins down the stretch?

ROSS HODGE: Made one more play than us. Made one more play than us.

Q. Rubin, what did you see late in that game? Do you think just their experience had paid off in these three games that you've played against them?

RUBIN JONES: Definitely. I mean, a lot of respect to them. They got a really good team, a really good coach. I mean, they stay together better than any team I've basically played in my career. They're definitely a special team, but that experience and that togetherness, honestly, is what put them over the edge every time.

Q. Are you guys proud of what you accomplished this year? You guys had such a rough year with you getting hurt, CJ got hurt, Buggs is out five games, and you battled all the way through to put up close to 20 wins. Do you feel like you guys did some positive things this year?

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RUBIN JONES: Definitely. Every time anybody went down, I don't see nobody like get with their head down. We just got the next man up mentality all year long. C Mo got in the game a couple times, tussled in the post, getting steals, deflections. We're deep, honestly, but we didn't end it how we wanted to.

Q. Aaron, you went out the other day. You were able to come back today. What happened and why were you able to come back today?

AARON SCOTT: Yesterday? I was feeling better today. I wanted to be out there with my team. I know it's win or go home. I didn't want to let my team down.

Q. You were sick the other day?

AARON SCOTT: Yeah, stomach problems.

Q. But you were able to kind of get recovered to the point where you were able to play well today?

AARON SCOTT: Yeah, yeah.

Q. This year you completed your first season in the American. What has the competition level been like and what can you take from this season to take for the foreseeable future in this conference?

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, I felt extremely fortunate to be part of this league. I think these guys can echo that statement. The games that we got to be a part of on the stages that we got to be a part of, the venues and the other coaches and the other players, really, really thankful that we were able to be a part of it. Yeah, it was great competition at the highest level and, yeah, just happy to be -- just thankful, really thankful.

As disappointed as I am right now, and I am crushed, there's also just a deep appreciation for these guys and really everything. Super thankful.

Q. Obviously clearly an emotional time, but reflecting on this squad and everyone that comprises this team that's fought so hard this season, just what it means to you to have the gentlemen that you have, including the ones sitting next to you.

ROSS HODGE: You said it several times. There's no words that I can even try to accurately portray how much Rubin Jones, obviously Aaron Scott, how much these guys mean to me personally. They mean a lot to me as a basketball coach, but on just the personal level, their investment, their trust, like I said, I can't even put it into

words. I'm eternally grateful and forever in debt to these two guys to give me an opportunity in my first year to be successful. If it wasn't for these two guys right here, I don't know how it would have turned out.

Q. To the student-athletes, in response to this, just what Coach has meant to you as the leader and the navigator of this program.

RUBIN JONES: It means everything. Before this year even started, me and Hodge was like this. I mean, it wasn't too much off the court. I wasn't going far. Everything on the court, he's the first person I'm going to. The relationship just grew from our freshman year and I wouldn't want to play with anybody else or play for anybody else. I don't regret nothing.

AARON SCOTT: He means a lot to me. Before he even took the head coach, he told me he wanted me to be a part of the team or he would have not took the head coaching job. That means a lot to me. I don't take none of that stuff for granted.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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