

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Temple Owls Adam Fisher Steve Settle III Sam Hofman

Postgame Press Conference

Temple - 58, Charlotte - 54

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

ADAM FISHER: That's just a gritty, tough Temple basketball game, right? Like, it's 18 points in the first half, but our guys have figured out away to stay together, be connected when shots aren't falling. That's what we told our bench, we need you now. Don't be there when things are good. We need the bench alive when we're having trouble scoring the basketball.

But again, the trust in these guys, their effort, they're relentless. It's been awesome. I'm excited for these guys to enjoy this and get some rest and come back tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Sam, I wanted to ask about the film session. I don't know, Coach, you said last night maybe two film sessions today. The attention to detail, it seemed as to what you guys had to do defensively against each individual guy was so on point. Did that start there? What did you identify in like knowing all those assignments?

SAM HOFMAN: Our preparation has been the same all year. We don't, like, approach the game differently now that we're in the tournament than prior during the season. I think we're starting to just glue together more, communicate on the defensive end more, and it's definitely showing.



Q. After that kind of first half where maybe you didn't hit all the shots you wanted to hit, what was the conversation like at halftime and how did you guys regroup and come out so quickly to start the second half?

STEVE SETTLE III: Yeah, it was great talking in the locker room. We realized we weren't putting the ball in the basket and despite that, we were only down four points. So that was encouraging. As bad as we were playing, we were still right there. We knew we had to hit couple shots and they fell in the second half.

Q. What was your team's defensive approach in this game to just toward the end of the game basically prevent Charlotte from scoring as much as they usually do?

ADAM FISHER: We had the same approach that we've had all season. Towards the end of the game, we switched a little bit more, obviously, trying to not give up threes at the end and then rebound. But these guys just do amazing job. We talk about being elite communicators, and I think you saw that tonight. Even times where maybe we shouldn't switch, we had to because they talk. We tell our guys all time, if you say it, do it. We trust you guys while you're out there and it's a huge credit to them. They have been awesome.

Q. Late in the game free throws going up. You had your eyes closed as they were going up. Just what were you thinking in those moments as it was getting closer to the end?

ADAM FISHER: You're not supposed to see that. You're supposed to be watching the free throws. Again, I just believe in these guys and just for me, I'm thinking, all right, if we make or miss, what do we do? So I'm just gathering my thoughts so we can help these guys with what's next. And just, again, proud of these guys for making enough for us to get the win tonight.

Q. Steve, the defense has really stepped up ever since the tournament started. You held Charlotte to very low shooting percentages. Just what's the intense -- or the



added intensity to the tournament been like for the team?

STEVE SETTLE III: I just think it's our focus. I think our coaches come up with a great game plan and we just try to execute as best we can. We flipped the page quick and get on to the next team.

Q. You lose 10 in a row and now you're 7-2 in your last nine games. What was the turning point and what does that mean for you, especially in year one?

ADAM FISHER: I'll use the same joke every night. Thanks for reminding me about the 10 losses. I appreciate that. I hope I'm reminded tomorrow night while I'm smiling too.

I think the turning point for us, to be honest with you, was we were playing good basketball. Six of those losses it's a possession game. I think when you believe in what you're doing, you don't have to change things. People want a drastic change, or this or that. No, we just got to keep doing it and do it a little bit more. I ask these guys all time, give me a little bit more.

If you've got 13 guys that give you a little more, it makes a big difference, and that was our big thing. Winning's a skill, and I think when we got that first one, right, it was big, it was, that, hey, we can do what we were doing and win. It reminded us of the things we were doing in November.

So I think collectively it was just, A, finally getting over that and then doing what we do, believing, hey, this works, let's stick with it.

Q. For the players, we saw the celebration out there. You guys were obviously pretty excited. What did it mean to you to advance again?

SAM HOFMAN: It means a lot. We put in so much work and to finally see the results turning our way, it means a lot. We kept on believing in each and we kept on saying every single day, but it definitely feels good to play our best basketball right now when it matters most.

STEVE SETTLE III: Yeah, it's great to see, you know, you put in so much work, you put in so much time, and like you said, we lost 10 in a row. But we could have hung our heads, but we still showed up to work every day to sort of see that payoff when it matters most, it means a lot.

Q. Florida Atlantic up next. You guys were able to limit Vlad Goldin to only 12 points in that matchup. How were you able to do that and what is the game plan looking like tomorrow as you guys try to pull that one out? The last time you guys had 'em within two in

the second half.

ADAM FISHER: I've got absolutely no idea yet. We'll go back to the hotel, we'll watch film. I don't say that to be funny or anything. We just literally -- our focus is this is a one-game tournament, one-game tournament, and that's what we did. We watched film. Look, Dusty May is an incredible coach. That team is unbelievable. We all saw what they did last year and what they have done this year. I don't think they get enough credit for what they're doing this year. They have so many weapons.

Again, we'll go back, we'll watch that film. Some of our assistants have already started scouting it, and then we'll come up with our game plan tonight, let these guys rest, and then be ready to go tomorrow.

Q. Sam, when you hit that go-ahead three, first of all, how much confidence did that give you and did you feel like that was maybe a special turning point in the game? And Steve, how much confidence did it give you to see him do that?

SAM HOFMAN: I try to keep my confidence up regardless if the ball goes through the hoop or not. I know we put in enough work to know what shots we can take and can make. I'll just try to bring energy, no matter what. I think it definitely helped to see the ball go through the hoop and encourage the team and bring that spark.

STEVE SETTLE III: That shot was a big shot. I'm going to trust him to hit that 10 times out of 10. So if he's open, I'm going to get him the ball.

Q. I wanted to ask, last couple nights you've hit some shots with guys right on you, but it seems like with your height, how clear a look are you getting on some of these what look like really highly contested shots?

STEVE SETTLE III: I mean, I guess they're difficult shots, but me and Coach Jordan work every day, so I'm just doing what I do every day and just trusting. And coaches have confidence in me, and I'm starting to get that confidence in myself, so that's what it looks like.

Q. In the second half, it's been five games in a row everyone's tried that 1-3-1, which has been a little bit of a kryptonite. Did you solve it a little bit in the second half?

ADAM FISHER: I think we executed a little bit better tonight with it. I think that's where the film helps you. We watched that. They showed it in the first game. We know it's coming. So again, proud of these guys to be able to respond to it and get better.

Q. Sam, I apologize, I have to ask you about something from last night. You had that drive from probably 20 feet away. ESPN guy called you the dancing bear on that play. Between that and that 30-foot shot, you're like how are those two -- you know, can you describe those two plays from last night?

SAM HOFMAN: (Laughing). Yeah, special moments. I mean, I'm confident in myself, but it was funny to see my teammates' reactions on that, on both of 'em, actually, but definitely the drive because that's something they haven't seen too much this year, like Steve addressed yesterday.

Q. Tonight you guys only committed six turnovers and on the season, you have the lowest turnover percentage in the conference. What does it mean to have a team that even when they're not shooting well, they're still not going to turn the ball over and get frustrated?

ADAM FISHER: I think it's a great testament to our guys. We talk about everything we do we got to go meet passes, these small details. That's how we start practice every day. We do the things that you do every day. So we'll start with ball handling, then we do a passing drill, every day, just to work on that. I thought these guys in the second half were awesome. I could be wrong, I think we had six in the first half and we addressed it at halftime. And great credit to these guys. They played on high alert and I think you see as a team comes together you want to play your best basketball as the season goes on and I think our trust level is increasing and guys are meeting passes and looking for the next one. It's something we worked on all year, but it's a great testament to these guys.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Jordan's second half performance. He had missed his only shot that he took and he comes out in the second half, goes 5-8, grabs six boards and 11 points. How important was he kind of helping you guys surge in that second half and take over?

ADAM FISHER: He was awesome. We do a Temple toughness award in the locker room after a game with mini boxing gloves. We've done it all season long. He was the guy that won those tonight. It was his rebounding, his toughness, and the way he responded.

I got to give my coaching staff great credit, all our coaches. A lot of guys talk to him at halftime, and just kind of give him that, Hey, we need you, we need you. And, man, he stepped up right from the start. We talk about it all the time, we got to put our egos aside. Who is going to have it

going one night. The next guy we got to keep going. But I am so proud of him, the way he played in the second half, he delivered. That's what big-time players do.

Q. You just brought it up, Temple tough. It's something that we've heard throughout the years, a bunch of different programs use. Just how you define that with your program and how amazing it is to see it fully on display, especially in these last few games?

ADAM FISHER: Temple tough. Growing up living outside of the city in Bucks County, I would watch Temple games and you would hear it, right, the great Coach Chaney teams, Coach McKie teams, Coach Dunphy teams, they always talked about that stuff. And we've brought back so many former players and almost every single former player comes back, they speak to our team, and they all talk about Temple tough. So I think it's something that we needed to establish as our identity, but it's because we talk to our former players, it's a players' program. I think Temple tell tough is when you score 18 points, but you're guarding, you only give up 22, you're rebounding, you're being physical, you're guarding without fouling, you're setting great screens, you're the first team on the floor. Like, that's tough, that's gritty.

Part of Temple tell tough is having fun. That's the element we're trying to bring to it. Like, we got to work hard but we got to enjoy it. These guys are smiling out there. They're having fun, they're enjoying it, and that's something that's exciting for me as a coach to see.

Q. To the student-athletes, just to see how these last few games have come together, you've been able to be chameleons to score a lot of points or to gut it out in a game like this under 60 points. Just what you can say about your ability to do different things on any given night to come away with a victory, especially recently.

STEVE SETTLE III: I think the biggest thing for us is hanging our hat on the defensive end. Some nights shots are going to fall, some nights they're not, but our defense has to be consistent and I think that's been the key factor in these couple games.

SAM HOFMAN: Yeah, I agree with Steve. Just focus on the things we can control. We all put in enough work to trust in the shots that we take, and whether they go down or not on a particular night, it's kind of out of our control, but whatever we do on the defensive end, the details, the communicating, that's something we can control every night. So that's something we should focus on.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

