

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Charlotte 49ers

Aaron Fearne

Giancarlo Rosado

Postgame Press Conference



You guys overcome a 12-point deficit. What was the halftime message and how do you think the guys executed the game plan, especially down the stretch?

AARON FEARNE: Well, first point was the rebound battle. Two was I thought our guards out the top were just playing too tight on the ball and it was opening up a big pocket behind off the ball screen, which the guard was getting downhill, was putting our bigs under too much pressure, so we just adjusted to drop the guard back deeper towards the three-point line, just to try and keep our defense a little bit tighter behind the ball. That really a lot because it took away a lot of their penetration to the rim, because I think they had 28 of their 30-something points in the first half just in the paint.

So we knew we had to take that away and make them have to make shots on the perimeter, which we did a better job of, and we were better on the glass. I would say we won the second half on the glass. Really the instruction was just to keep believing, keep fighting, dig, dig deep, and the guys did that.

Q. Coming into this tournament I asked what needed to fall right for the team. You said you had to do the little details right. What would you say your team did on that in this game, especially the free throws?

AARON FEARNE: I'll let G answer that question.

GIANCARLO ROSADO: Coach said we it's hunger time in the season and we got to make big-time free throws in big-time situations, practice free throws every day. He's really big on it and we know we got to execute.

AARON FEARNE: Yeah, I mean, just the details or the focus going into the game was play with force and play with details. We did that for sure in the second half, a lot better detail, a lot better force. And what I mean by that, having physical force, mental force, had mental toughness, emotional toughness. Yeah, it was a pretty high-level second half.

Q. G, you took a bit of a hit there right at the end of the

Charlotte - 64, Rice - 61

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

AARON FEARNE: Yeah, I hard-fought playoff game. Coach Lanier does an awesome job with this team. He has for a long time. They play hard, play physical, gets 'em to play really hard and physical, and you got to meet that fight and that battle.

We didn't shoot the ball very well the first half. There should have been a lot of opportunities for to us rebound and we did a very poor job of that. That was definitely talked about at halftime about that. Then the fight that the guys showed in the second half was -- I said to them it was inspirational. It was unbelievable, the fight. It's been there for -- it's been there all year.

This has been an awesome group to coach. I know some results, obviously, haven't gone our way, but the fight that they show every single day and show up to practice and get after each other, I get after 'em, you know, just to keep pushing and keep pushing. That's why do you what you do day-to-day, so you can give yourself a chance at this time of the year.

I know over here watching from abroad in Australia back in the day, I mean, crazy things happen this time of the year, so why can't it be us and that's how you just have to keep motivating the guys.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions, please.

Q. You mentioned kind of a battle in the second half.



game. Talk about what it was like getting that rebound to kind of seal the game and then hitting those two clutch free throws with the season on the line.

GIANCARLO ROSADO: We knew it was going to be a fight. Last time we played Rice it was a fight. They crashed the glass hard. Their coach coached them hard, but our coach coached us hard too. It's playoff basketball. It's time to fight and rebound.

Q. Obviously this is one game in the conference tournament, but you guys did break a streak of nine years without a conference tournament win. Will you talk about how that feels to get that monkey off your back?

AARON FEARNE: I mean, it's obviously fantastic to win at this time of the year. I know in that time, we've also had some double byes and stuff like that, which that's a massive accomplishment to do that too because you definitely -- I would rather be in that situation than be in this one. This is a difficult challenge ahead, but not impossible.

But, you know, I don't think that that gets talked about enough. But look, again, to get a conference tournament win is massive. You know, it's belief. I know I've been talking about this for a long time, and I knew it's been there, that fight has been there. It's just the little details, the little 1 percenters need to be a little bit better and not put us in difficult situations, the little mini runs.

And I know that stuff happens, but those mini runs have got to be minute, you know, because at this time of the year it's just a play here and there and tonight it was exactly that.

Q. Having a game under your belt now in the conference tournament, you're going in facing Florida Atlantic tomorrow. Can you look ahead to that? Is there a benefit to maybe getting the rust out and shaking off maybe that?

AARON FEARNE: Yeah, maybe (laughing). Ask me that tomorrow. We're going to have to really recover well tonight and this afternoon. You know we've played them twice. We're going to have to have as much energy in the tank as we possibly can store.

But just like Temple last year, they were in exactly this situation and they blew through the tournament and beat some pretty good teams, us included. So, yeah, I mean, we've got the kind of playoff -- if you want to call it the playoff nerves out, maybe. I mean, we're going to play in a different arena tomorrow, but the guys will be ready for that. We'll be ready to fight. There will be no doubt about

that.

Q. The last possession there they went with the cross court skip pass. You guys read that, reacted, got your hands on the pass. Was that something that was seen on film, something you expected from this Rice team?

AARON FEARNE: No, we just talked about like situations, if they're screening on certain angles, then we would guard them certain ways. I think we actually did mess up the one screen, left the big guy wide open underneath. Which really wasn't going to hurt us, obviously the three ball was going to hurt us. But, again, G just made a big read and made a difficult catch on that side of the floor. And that's experience, right. You sniff out those situations, and players make plays. And he made some plays. Like I said earlier, he made a massive rebound, knocked down some free throws and was part of that last stoppage that they couldn't get a shot off.

GIANCARLO ROSADO: I would say in situations like that you can only get to certain things, and you really got to get a three off, we was up by three, so everything is going to be on the perimeter. So you just got to really switch everything, and Coach gave us clear instructions and we executed them.

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