

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Florida Atlantic Owls

John Jakus

Tre Carroll

Matas Vokietaitus

Postgame Press Conference

Florida Atlantic - 64, Charlotte - 59

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

JOHN JAKUS: I want to give you an A-plus on saying Matas's last name right. Not everybody does that. That was perfect. That was unbelievable.

We're thankful for today. I think the event's a wonderful event and the whole setup from the locker rooms and the way you're treated to the game itself was first class. I thought our defense was also first class, held 'em to 35 percent or less from the field. I think they really decided that they were going to have to make threes to beat us. They shot 27 and we did just enough to guard the three-point line down the stretch to win.

I think we were a little bit upside down with our free throws and our three-point shot ourselves, but there was just enough plays down the stretch where we were okay. I thought Tre's two free throws, that Baba three, and then when we saw Matas in the last few minutes, I thought the two blocks and those rebounds he got were really the difference.

We're thankful for all those things and in March one more day means we get to be a family for one more day, so that's the most important part.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. It looked like in the first half there, Charlotte was trying to muck it up a little bit, get physical. Was there



any message on how to kind of overcome that? And also, 42-18 in the paint, was that the answer to their physicality?

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, I mean, basically we just said ignore it. The hardest part about it wasn't that they were grabbing cutters or there was those little scuffles. I thought the refs did an unbelievable job to shift the game in the second half and let some freedom of movement happen, so I want to compliment them.

But it's every time there's a scuffle the game stops, and we want it to run. So it's not just that there was little interactions between both teams. It was more that it was slowing the game down. So our main message at halftime was, like, let's move away from that so we can get out and control the pace a little bit.

Q. How much would you say the 15-day road trip to Charleston helped you guys down the stretch there, kind of focus in when Charlotte was making a run, but you guys finished it off?

JOHN JAKUS: I think our defense carries, and that's something we've had to continue to learn throughout the season, but we certainly, before Christmas, played as hard a schedule as anybody in our league, besides Memphis, and we put ourselves in these road-neutral situations constantly, and I think these guys did show some maturity down the stretch to perform in a neutral environment. So hopefully we'll shoot better in this neutral environment tomorrow, but I thought the toughness was there to close.

Q. Tre, you come off the bench, you get two and ones, you hit 'em both. What was your mentality kind of coming off the bench there in the second half to give the team a spark?

TRE CARROLL: It's March. I don't want to go home yet. No one else wants to go home either for this group. We want to win as many games as possible. Obviously, we came here to win, nothing less, and I just wanted to come in and provide energy, do the best I can to uplift the team because I feel like that's my job as a leader, so to bring

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energy to the court no matter what is happening, and thankfully, I was able to do that in the second half.

Q. Matas, early on the offense was flowing through you. What was working for you to kind of set the tone for FAU?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: I don't know. I'm just doing my things -- trying to do my things every day, what I can do. I try to listen to Coach and it was nothing special, just I think effort and just play.

Q. You were scoring the ball early, but in that last possession late there, you kicked out to Baba, and he hit the triple after you guys had been struggling. How big of a shot was that and did you know he was going to be there or did it just work out that way?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: Oh, I think started driving the ball, I saw Baba on 45, and I thought it would be like big-time if he'll make it, so he just made it.

Q. Looking ahead towards tomorrow at Tulane, you guys were in that game and then Tulane on their home court closed it out strong. What's going to be the difference in this one here tomorrow?

JOHN JAKUS: We'll look again, but we've done some pre-work. I don't think we handled the matchup zone as well as we should have down the stretch. And then I thought some of their cutting and their five-out action really gave us an issue. We'll look to clean those two things up and we'll get more details over the next four or five hours, but we're clearly going to have to play better than we did at their place.

Q. Obviously, facing a team for a third time having won the first two games, it's obviously going to be very difficult to win for the third time. What was the biggest difference you saw from this Charlotte squad compared to the first two times you faced them as you played them throughout today's game?

JOHN JAKUS: I thought they controlled the pace better. I thought the ball screen coverage that they had was better, to be honest. Then just in general, I think they found a rhythm to the way that they wanted to beat us. We were able to get to the 80s in both games and they kept this game below 65.

So those three areas probably would be the key, and then they made it really clear they were going to use the three-point line to win, and we did just enough there. But I would say those were the four adjustments. They shot the three more, the ball screen coverage was a little better,

and then the control of the pace was much, much better for them.

Q. Tre, obviously, for a day where the free-throw line was frustrating, you happened to come through in the clutch for your team, 6-6 from the charity stripe. How big was it for you to make those free throws, especially those last two in the final seconds of the game?

TRE CARROLL: It was very big because it's -- if they hit that three, it's a tie ball game. If they hit the -- you know, if I missed it. But if they made it and I made the free throws, it's a 2-point game at that point. So I believe it's a momentum-changer that I'm making those two free throws, it kind of defeats them a little bit. But down the stretch, I know the coaching staff believes in all of us to make free throws down the stretch and I was thankfully able to make 'em.

Q. Matas, you had two blocks on the day on top of the 17 points and seven rebounds you had today. How important is it for you to emphasize yourself on both sides of the ball to be as effective as you were today?

MATAS VOKIETAITIS: I think right now, it's we don't care about personal stats. We just want to make March Madness and nothing more.

Q. Tre, among the many honors you received from the conference this year was the Amir Abdur-Rahim Sportsmanship Award. If I could just ask what that meant to you. It was selected by the head coaches, one, and then, two, to have the Abdur-Rahim family here to present it to you, what did that mean to you today?

TRE CARROLL: I'm super thankful and blessed to receive that award, especially since it's a first-time award. Sportsmanship goes a long ways outside of basketball. I think being able to show sportsmanship shows who you really are on and off the court, and I was blessed enough to have that opportunity to meet the family and receive the award. And I'm just super thankful and blessed and I don't take it for granted. I just love the opportunity, like all the awards, but obviously, my mindset is to do whatever I can for the team and get to March Madness.

Q. I wanted to ask about Devin. I saw him in the late-game rotation a little bit more than usual. What led to that? And it seemed like his on-ball defense was kind of big there late. How big is it to have a freshman who can do that off the bench?

JOHN JAKUS: Yeah, we went offense/defense with him and Nico. That was probably the main adjustment. We

hadn't done that before. And then I would say, secondary, that him and Ken seemed to guard the ball down the stretch a little bit better. They were isoing Nico at times, but we felt like we needed Nico on the offensive end to make our decisions and reads.

So there was enough dead balls for us to go back and forth and that was the main reason why we did it. But Devin, the last two and a half weeks people are starting to see what we see every day in practice. He has a chance to be the Defensive Player of the Year in this league if he sticks around and we hope that he does.

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