

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## North Texas Mean Green

## Ross Hodge

## Atin Wright

## Latrell Jossell

### Postgame Press Conference

North Texas - 77, Tulsa - 59

**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:** I want to start out by congratulating Coach Konkol and Tulsa on making it to the quarterfinals. I've got a lot of respect for Coach and the program that he's building. They battled a ton of injuries all year long, played without Jared Garcia for most of the season and then the rest of their roster sprinkled in and out. They never really did get fully healthy until now, so I have a ton of respect for them.

As far as the game and us, I was disappointed. Honestly, like, I was disappointed defensively in the first half. I know you're going to look at a stat sheet and say, Well, Coach, you guys shot 30 percent from the from floor, you shot 15 percent from three. But honestly, I felt like it was like our defense that was kind of leading to that sum, you know, fouled too much, had some breakdowns on some things we knew were coming and just didn't execute. And then I think you start feeling a little of the pressure, you don't make a couple shots.

And so I was more disappointed defensively. That's what I challenged our team with at half. I thought we did a much better job, obviously, in the second half of playing. Still fouled a little too much, but they got good players. Keaston Willis has had an incredible career. I've known him forever.

Just felt like we were finally able to stop some -- string some stops together, made simple plays offensively, and I



thought Jasper's three to start the second half kind of got the lid off a little bit, and then Massie hit the big one to give us the lead, followed by Trel's second half kind of explosion. And that's what I love about this team and love about Trel specifically. We challenged him at halftime to play better. He knew he needed to play better. He didn't take it personal, took the accountability, and he came out and had a monster second half, and Atin really kept us in the game in the first half when we were trying to find our footing.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions, please.

**Q. You talk about the struggles in the first half. What do you think really turned it there in the second half for you guys?**

**ROSS HODGE:** Our ability to get stops without fouling. They shot -- where is it? My eyes are getting really bad. Our guys laugh at me. Sometimes they think I'm making up stats in the huddles, but I actually just can't see them.

They shot 15 free throws in the first half, which was entirely too many, and it's hard to get into a flow offensively when you're taking the ball out of the net. So I think right out, if you take away the first possession of the second half where we gave them three cracks at it and fouled a three-point shooter, if you take that away, we were able to stop them without fouling, get in transition a little bit, play with a little more offense flow, and play organically instead of walking the ball up the floor every single time, having to run a set play against a set defense.

**Q. You guys have been so good defensively all year. Is that a comfort that you get to turn to that defense to really get you guys going at that point?**

**ROSS HODGE:** Yes. Yes, you got to be careful this time of the year. It's not a light switch. You got to be able to execute for 40 minutes. But we do know -- and this group has no panic in them, and they do know -- they have played in enough games and we've played in enough games together. They don't really panic, ever, and just settled in and executed defensively and then the offense

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usually follows.

**Q. Latrell, what did you see defensively there in the second half that really helped you guys get that game turned around?**

LATRELL JOSSELL: I just seen us settle in, really. In the first half, we was making mistakes that we usually don't make. I feel like that just came from first game, just -- and credit to them. They played good in the first half. They made us do things -- put us in positions to make us do things that we didn't want to do. I feel like the second half, we settled in, kind of got under our feet and made better decisions defensively.

**Q. You've been on a roll here offensively late in the season. You had the 42 and then the good regular season finale and then again tonight. What's gotten you going here late in the season?**

ATIN WRIGHT: Just making sure I'm aggressive and putting pressure on the defense to get a stop, trying to get to the foul line. Coach told me I need to get to the foul line more, so I've been trying to do that. And it just opens the game up. They have to guard and it makes them more tired on offense. That helps us get stops. So, yeah, honestly, just being aggressive and putting pressure on the rim.

**Q. 2,000 points for your college career tonight. What does that mean to you?**

ATIN WRIGHT: Oh, yeah, I did hit it. It means a lot. I was talking to my cousins the whole week talking about, Man, I hope I get 2,000. But honestly, I just wanted to win. But, yeah, it feels good. There's a lot of college time played, and I mean, a lot of experience, but at this point now it don't really mean nothing. I'm happy I got it. We just got to win.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about 24 points tonight. Ever since that 42-point performance against Charlotte, have you adjusted to teams keying in on you more?**

ATIN WRIGHT: Honestly, I feel like teams have been playing me like that most of the season. I think it's just staying relaxed, not getting too jittery or anxious on offense, letting it come to me. My teammates start looking for me all the time, so when I'm getting it, I just tried to make the right decision every time. If that means going to score, going to draw a foul, that's what it calls for.

**Q. Latrell, the atmosphere and the intensity of tonight's game, there was a moment in the first half where there was a loose ball and multiple players hit**

**the floor, grabbed that rebound. What was it like out there on the court?**

LATRELL JOSSELL: Obviously, it's kind of like every game. This conference got a lot of teams that compete. You're not going to come into no game and not get hit. You got to be ready to fight, compete every game. So it felt like pretty much every game we played.

**Q. There was a moment where you guys got a shot clock violation. You turned to the crowd, tried to pump them up. What was that reaction like when that defense started to click and all those adjustments started to pay off in that second half?**

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, I mean, ultimately we talked about it. If you're going to win this tournament, you actually got to win each game, but whoever probably is the best defensive team over the course of this weekend is ultimately going to win this tournament. We came up a little short in our goal to win the regular season championship, and we were second in adjusted defense, and Memphis was first in adjusted defense.

Yeah, I was really happy for our guys and, you know, super thankful for all of Mean Green Nation that came out here and it kind of feels like a de facto home game when you see all that green out there.

**Q. Big game for Atin, 24 points. Just thoughts on the way he contributed today.**

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, I thought he was aggressive. I thought he actually he had some really good looks in the first half, as we all did. I thought he should have had about 35, if we're being honest. But he was aggressive, got to the foul line, and just made simple plays, which we've been talking to him about. I mean, three rebounds, two assists, no turnovers, made the right play.

When our team as a team is, like, committed to just making the simple play while being aggressive, then it kind of opens up for everybody, and that's where you see, like, B Lo had 10, Trel had 10, Jasper had 11, Moulaye had nine, really in the second half only. Grant had eight. So it just kind of spreads all the way around and it's what you expect from senior guards on this stage.

**Q. Another one of these those senior guards kind of sparked that 12-0 run with Johnathan Massie's three that gave you a little lead. Did that feel like the stretch that put things away there?**

ROSS HODGE: No. It's always nice when you're coming back to actually get a lead, though, psychologically. Like,

you want to be able to -- you kind of feel like you're climbing uphill and running uphill, and you want to get there. And it was a big shot, and these guys can tell you, man, I think everybody's just so happy for Massie that he gets to play, and they get to see.

You guys don't get to see. They get to see, like, nonstop treatment for three weeks, staying up there after we play games until 1:00 and 2:00 in the morning doing all that work with Matt, who is incredible, and Doctor Christy, Doctor Matthiesen.

So for him to get out there and play and make a shot like that, it was an awesome moment for him.

**Q. Latrell, you couldn't really seem to miss there in the second half. I think you went 3-3, two from deep. What was your mindset going into the second half?**

LATRELL JOSSELL: Really just play better. Like Coach said, I was aware of my plus/minus at half, and plus/minus don't go up by you just scoring. It go up by you doing a lot of other things. So that just came from me locking in and wanting it, to be honest.

**Q. Atin, you've had 42, you hit 20 multiple times this year, but just does it feel good to have a performance like this on a big stage today?**

ATIN WRIGHT: Yeah, I mean, winning, honestly, ultimately is the best feeling. No, honestly, not really. I just want to win two more games and, yeah.

**Q. Your early thoughts on tomorrow's semifinal matchup between either UAB or ECU?**

ROSS HODGE: Yeah, the longer you go in these deals, obviously you got to continue to play a little bit better. Our team knows we need to play a little bit better, regardless of who we play tomorrow. You got the defending conference tournament champs and the pre-season Player of the Year. Coach Kennedy does a great job.

Then Coach Schwartz, what he's done at East Carolina is remarkable with that team.

So whoever it is, we know we'll have our hands full and we'll have to play better tomorrow than we did tonight. But we're super thankful and we're grateful to still be playing in this tournament, for sure.

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