

National Invitation Tournament: Seton Hall vs Georgia

Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Georgia Bulldogs

Mike White

Jr. Silas Demary

Noah Thomasson

Semi Finals Postgame Press Conference



Seton Hall 84, Georgia 67.

MIKE WHITE: Just wasn't our night, really wasn't. Like to credit Seton Hall, of course, and got respect for their program. We wish them all the success in the world in their last one. Ought to be a great game and look forward to watching it. Wish we were there, obviously.

Tonight was a microcosm of this entire season with this team in that we showed a lot of resiliency, of course. Really struggled to find a way to convert from two, from three. Credit Seton Hall's defense, of course. Their physicality, their wall-ups, their gap discipline, enforcing a lot of kicks. We had some decent looks early that didn't go, and we tightened up a little bit offensively.

I thought we gave in a little bit defensively mid first half, but the last 30 minutes of the game, especially the last 15 or so, this team did what it's done all year, and that's just keep fighting, keep plugging. We got some guys banged up, of course. You know, we've had some games where we've had some leads that we didn't quite hold onto, and then we've won some games where we came from behind with some significant deficits.

These guys enjoy playing with one another. It was an emotional locker room. These guys accomplished a lot. Getting to the NIT Final Four is an honor to be a part of this tournament, and to get to 20, of course, to play our best basketball down the stretch, all positives.

It's been an honor working with these young men. Silas had a big-time freshman year, of course, and then RJ Sunahara, Russell Tchewa, and Noah Thomasson to my right, we wish these guys the best. They were awesome to work with all year. Noah is a great young man, and had a

big season for us.

Q. Now that your freshman season is over, looking back, what was that experience like, and what's your mindset going into your first off-season as a college player?

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: My first season I feel like there was a lot of adversity at times just with the team and us figuring out how to play with one another. A lot of new faces coming in. Honestly I just kind of -- early was kind of quiet learning from the older guys and guys got on me that I need to use my voice. Because if I want to be one of the leaders on the team and guys listen to me, I got to voice what I wanted to be seen.

Honestly, I feel like I had a great freshman year, confidence. Even Noah to my left, I was picking his ear every day. He was leading me. I mean, I feel like I had a great freshman year just thanks to everybody that I was around.

And just going into the off-season, I just want to work, just get better at my game every day, day in, day out, always try to figure out what I can get better at every day and then just figuring out what's next for my team and I.

Q. Seemed like the game could not have gotten off to a much worse start. Did you feel like you were too tight or loose? It looked both ways different times.

NOAH THOMASSON: Credit to Seton Hall. They kind of got out and were physical, and they did really good things defensively. We knew that coming in, so they just made a run early and it was just kind of hard for us to get back in the game so credit to them.

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: Like he said, they threw the first punch early. We were able to take that punch and we threw punches back, but I feel like coming out early within that first -- we knew we needed to hit them first and we kind of did and kind of let them take their first hit and that hurt us early. We were just trying to dig ourselves out of a hole the whole team.

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Q. Have you played any teams similar to them in the SEC? A lot of people I feel like the BIG EAST is a very physical, grinding league. Do they bring a different style or are you familiar with that style?

NOAH THOMASSON: They are physical like many times in our league, Texas A&M, Auburn, Tennessee, those different teams. It felt like an SEC game. It wasn't a drop-off between the conferences. BIG EAST is a good league. Coach Holloway does a lot of good things over there. Credit to Seton Hall.

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: Like he said, obviously BIG EAST is a good conference SEC, night-in and night-out, it's a dogfight. There was no dropoff with the physicality. I felt like we, I don't want to say we laid down but we were kind of unsure if he wanted to fight through that initial punch, and obviously like got to be better.

But there was no big drop-off between the conferences. Obviously Coach Shaheen, he brings toughness to any team he coaches. You look at Saint Peter's, you look at his past, all his teams are tough. Just coming into it, just know that we were going to play a tough team and there wasn't no drop-off.

Q. As you look on this NIT run, how do you use this to build for the future of the Georgia program?

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: You have something to talk to the guys that we want to look to through the portal, and even freshman guys that's coming in. We can use it as we had a postseason, and we can see that obviously we could be a good team. We made a deep run. Obviously we didn't make the goal we wanted.

But shows we are trying to turn Georgia around to a winning program, and this is just somewhere you should want to be.

Q. Second half specifically, you guys tied them at 42. Something you guys can build on specifically looking at them and staying with them in the second half the way you did?

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: Yeah, obviously we scored the same amount of points as them in the second half but it's a two-half game.

The first half, feel like even if we score a little bit more, I feel like the game turns out a different way. Obviously we have got to get a better start and we have to be start better on the defensive end and corral defensive rebounds and second-chance points. Obviously that first half hurt us.

We know we can score with the best, but this has been the defense all year. We have been up and down all year on the defensive side, and you know, just it kind of hurt us tonight.

Q. You touched on this before in previous interviews, but the last game with the Bulldogs, how do you feel you are leaving the program compared to how you came in?

NOAH THOMASSON: I know I'm leaving it in good hands. We came a long way from June when we started with a couple practices to now and April, and you know, losing in the NIT.

I said in the interview a couple -- yesterday, I wouldn't have picked a different school if I had a chance to do it all over again. I hope I can say I was a Georgia Bulldog for life even in my short time here. I'm very thankful for the coaching staff, the administrative staff, the higher-ups at Georgia. I'm very thankful for what they brought for me. I could sense that on my visit, and it's something I am glad to be part of, and anybody in the portal, Georgia reaches out to you, this is a special place to be.

MIKE WHITE: Talk.

NOAH THOMASSON: Go 'Dogs. I'm not saying this just to recruit. This is the best decision of my life. I couldn't ask for anything as well. I've had a great career, and this is my favorite one, even in my short time here.

Q. You were talking about how Georgia needs to look to the portal for other guys, and what you wanted to help turn this program around, have you definitively decided you are coming back next year or do you need time to decompress and figure out what's going on?

SILAS DEMARY, JR.: Definitely going to decompress. Obviously we are playing basketball since June. Honestly just take some time away and relax and rest my body. It's been a long season. So obviously going to have those conversations, but obviously just going to take my time and just make sure I do what's best for me.

Q. A lot of people felt Indiana State and Seton Hall should have been in the NCAA Tournament. What does it say they are the last two teams in this tournament, and do you think they could have won a game or more in the NCAA Tournament?

MIKE WHITE: I think all four teams that were here could potentially have done damage in the NCAA Tournament. Honestly, the way that we played, again, we just won at Ohio State and at Wake in back-to-back games. If we play

it that well tonight, potentially, we're going on to the championship game.

Not to take anything -- Seton Hall just beat us by 17 points. They were better than us tonight, of course. They have had a great year and they had a strong argument.

We have a lot of respect obviously for the NCAA Tournament Committee. Those are hard decisions.

Seton Hall and Indiana State, obviously if both of them made the tournament, they definitely would not have looked out of place in my opinion. It's all opinions. Going to be a great game.

Both of those programs showed up tonight and took advantage of a great opportunity. Out to be a great crowd. Game 1 atmosphere out there was fantastic. I had not gone out in a doubleheader or tournament environments like this, it's been a long time since I said -- as I'm down there in the coach's locker room, let me see what all the noise is out there in the gym, what's it all about.

I enjoyed just watching a high-level basketball game in that first game with a great environment, and we'll be tuned in and watch it closely in a couple nights.

Q. I was just curious what your thoughts were on -- I mean, from where I was sitting, you lost this game in the first ten minutes.

MIKE WHITE: Yeah.

Q. And to what do you owe that? I think at one point, you had missed ten shots in a row and they made five in a row and the lead just kept growing and growing. Anything you can put your finger on?

MIKE WHITE: The ball would not go in. You haven't heard me say that all year, and Seton Hall is a really good defensive team. It's not like they gave us anything easy but the open threes that we had early, just didn't go.

And then we had a couple at the rim that didn't go, and then all of the sudden, our body language changed a little bit. We had been really loose and confident in the past month, and that wasn't our demeanor in the last 30 minutes of this game.

Played just as hard. We fought. Got some extra possessions. Got some stops. Got out in transition. We even had three or four very poor numbers, possessions, three-on-twos, two-on-ones, four-on-twos, they were empty possessions, and those can be deflating. Hence, 67 points. Just couldn't get it to go. 5 of 26 from three for a

team that really relies on the three. We've struggled from two all year. We convert threes. We convert free throws. Just didn't do a good enough job there.

Q. You said all year long that when the ball stopped bouncing for this team, you thought that they would be fighting. That seemed to be the case tonight. What does it say about their basketball character, and how do you go about continuing to identify that characteristic in players as you recruit for the future?

MIKE WHITE: Through film, we'll make sure that we're bringing guys in here that are highly competitive; that are playing to win. You know, we certainly didn't do that all the time and I don't know that there's one team in college basketball that does that 40 minutes a game. For young people, you can get lost a little bit, and you can lose focus at times in terms of what's most important.

It's a team sport with a lot of individual aspiration, obviously, and that's what we're all fighting. But these guys here that I had a chance to work with for 37 games in 10 months, what a long season. We started practice June 1st or somewhere in there. We're awesome to work with because best practice team I've ever coached. I'm sad it's over.

But yeah, basketball character, character off the court, guys that like being around one another, that's what it says about their basketball character; that they like to compete, that they are resilient.

Q. You talked about how long this season was and obviously it just ended but how quickly will you guys have the conversations with who is coming back, who is not, the staff, all the pieces that go into next season?

MIKE WHITE: Very quickly, I don't have a day or time on it, but it will be very soon. Our mindset was on potentially advancing and playing for a championship.

But we'll have those discussions as a staff tomorrow morning.

Q. Curious, what part of the culture that you built this year are things that you absolutely need to build on next year as you're looking to rebuild the program to the next step?

MIKE WHITE: Resiliency. Mental toughness, at times we displayed at a really high level, at times. For instance, when it wasn't going for us early. It wasn't where it needed to be. We had three or four big leads there in conference play that we were not able to hold onto.

Again, examples of mental toughness that moving forward we can reference in the future as we -- as we build to where we want to get to. The positives, though, again, the resiliency, the camaraderie, the work ethic in practice, there's a lot of positive looking back on this season. We were a much more competitive team, obviously, against Power Five teams, against SEC teams, than we were a year ago, and we look forward to taking more steps in the future.

Q. It's April 3rd, early morning, and I know you had one foot in this past season or the season that just ended and one foot in the transfer-portal-evaluation-type thing. What's it like now to kind of move forward to next year?

MIKE WHITE: It's disappointing, honestly, because we were close. We were a game away from competing for a championship.

I really like working with these guys. It was an emotional locker room. I've lost in several NITs as an assistant and as a head coach, and it's different than losing in the NCAA Tournament, just being honest, obviously, and we were super honored to be a part of this tournament as we always will be.

It was unique, though, with this group. These guys were devastated downstairs. It showed how much they care for one another and how much they intended on playing another game.

We'll recover but we've got to do it quickly because we've got work to do. We've got meetings to have. The way we played down the stretch has got me ready for practice in June. I'm excited to figure out who our roster is going to be, what it's going to look like.

And we all as a staff, we all need -- in this business, especially in today's day and age, you can't get a week or two but we probably all need about 48 hours to regroup a little bit at some point once that roster is in place, and then I'm ready to get back to work. I'm ready for practices in June.

THE MODERATOR: We want to thank you very much and wish you nothing but the best of luck in the future.

MIKE WHITE: Likewise. Thank you, guys.

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