

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Texas A&M vs Saint Mary's

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Paycom Center

Texas A&M Aggies Coach Bucky McMillan

Rashaun Agee

Ruben Dominguez

Media Conference

Texas A&M 63, St. Mary's 50

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by are Ruben Dominguez, Rashaun Agee and Coach Bucky McMillan. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach McMillan and open it up for questions.

BUCKY McMILLAN: I thought we played really well. It was an elite defensive game by our guys in every facet of the game.

Sometimes we catch some teams when they're off. I thought their shooters shot well. They shot 44% from three, made ten threes, and we still had a double-digit victory. That means we did a lot of things well.

Forced turnovers. We had a higher offensive rebounding rate in the game. That was very important because they're an elite offensive rebounding team. They take care of the ball; they run good offense. Good players, well-coached.

I was proud of our guys. Total team effort. I thought offensively we were patient enough to get the shots that we wanted. Everything that we discussed in the plan we put it together, and that was really good.

We knew this game would be a battle, but we came here not just for one game. We came here to play in this game and play our best in the next game, so our guys, the recovery, the focus has to be the same for the next game. Everybody remembers your last game of the season, and we want, whenever that is, if it's a national championship game, we want it to be remembered as a great game. So we have to put that same focus and energy into the winner



of this game between these two teams playing now.

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

Q. Rashaun, you guys forced a ten-second violation on their first possession of the game. How do you feel like that maybe set the tone for your defense, and what did you see from the effort you guys had start to finish?

RASHAUN AGEE: It completely set the tone. Just being able to come out with that type of defensive effort, I feel like it brings energy to our team, and also deflates the energy on the other end, because it's understanding that, I mean, this is going to be our game.

Q. A lot was made about the height disparity and their advantage there. Yet, how were y'all able to outscore them in the paint?

RASHAUN AGEE: I would say doing it as a team. Understanding that it's not just one of us that has to come in and playing a part. We're also rebounding, but attacking the glass and also attacking the paint, understanding that the way you attack shot blockers is getting into their body, attack the paint relentlessly, and then once you attack the paint like that, then you're able to get kick-outs for open threes.

Q. Ruben, you really caught fire at the end of that first half. Kind of what started that, and what was going through your mind during that stretch?

RUBEN DOMINGUEZ: You know, I feel like when I get going, everybody on the court is just trying to root for me. Yeah, it's not the first time I do that. I feel good. I feel like however I shoot it, it's just going in. And first is screaming for them to "pass me the ball." I love it. I feel very good to be out there with these guys in March. It's a blessing.

Q. With this being each of your first NCAA Tournament games, what did you appreciate the fact that you guys were able to go out and take advantage and move on?

RASHAUN AGEE: Absolutely. You know, Ruben got more years to come in this, but man, it's my first



opportunity, but also me being a senior and not being able to have another opportunity, I'm just thankful. I'm blessed. A lot of things happened this year throughout, also, me dealing with some early on in the year, but ups and downs of the team. I'm glad we was able to come out here and, you know, be focused and understand that each game in this tournament matters.

RUBEN DOMINGUEZ: Yeah, me too. I feel like this is not given. This is earned. We did it, so, yeah, I just feel very good for the guys, for the seniors. Their last year here and get the opportunity to be out there hooping with your guys and just enjoying. It's very good.

Q. Coach kind of talked about being patient. How hard was it to be patient with your shots and the shot selection?

RASHAUN AGEE: I would say I feel like it wasn't super hard, because it's something we've been harping on, taking good shots, understanding that when you hear the shot clock coming down, that you don't have to force the first one. You know, there's a lot of time, way more time than you think there is.

I mean, I even tell my teammates, you may throw me a pocket pass, and I may not like it, and there may be 6 seconds on the clock, but I'm still going to continue to try to find something else, because we may get a great shot in the last 6 seconds, because the defense will eventually stop.

Q. For either one of you, did you get a sense that they were fatigued? If so, when?

RUBEN DOMINGUEZ: Yeah, I mean, I feel like from the first play of the game, they were not used to that style of play and that rhythm. Basically in the first media we were like, they're tired. They're not used to this level of contact in every play, pressure, and yeah, I feel like that was the point.

RASHAUN AGEE: Yeah, absolutely. I would say exactly what Ruben said. Early on in the game you can sense that fatigue was going to play a part later in the game, but also, just continuing to pressure the ball, I feel like helped us continuously.

Q. In the second half they made a more concerted effort to kind of get the ball down to the post, and there was a string there where they missed a bunch of layups while you were defending. Was there one that sticks out that is especially gratifying that you kind of looked back and saw that it didn't go in the net?

RASHAUN AGEE: There was one where he caught it super low; I was like, oh, my God. He actually missed. But, I mean, just trying to make it hard for 'em. People miss layups; they make layups. I mean, they're great bigs. They're big, so I mean, every opportunity we can get is always great for us.

Q. What level of physicality did it take to kind of get some of those outcomes against those guys who were so much taller compared to any of the other games you played this year?

RASHAUN AGEE: I would say it takes a great physicality every game. Every game you should come out ready to hit somebody before they hit you, because you got to understand that, I mean, they think -- they're going to think other things about you, so you have to set a standard.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. With the way y'all were able to keep their points in the paint down, that disparity of what you all were able to do, what can you say about the level of physicality that Rashaun and those guys brought down there?

BUCKY McMILLAN: They did a great job keeping them out of the paint. We held a really good passing team to 8 only assists on the night and forced 18 turnovers. That means that you did a really good job on defense and you didn't allow them to get drop-offs in the paint, which I thought was really good.

We had 15 assists in the game to 10 turnovers. That's a good sign.

So I think it's team defense and a collective effort to make sure that we did that and that we didn't give up drop-offs for points.

Q. Rashaun and Ruben seemed pretty confident early on that their physical style is going to be too much for St. Mary's. I wonder if you had that same feeling early in the game.

BUCKY McMILLAN: I mean, you don't really know until you're out there what's going to transpire. I know this, that we took it personal, this game, obviously, that they're a great offensive rebounding team, and we knew that we would have to really do a great job around the glass and around the rim. And that's a credit to them, and I thought our guys really fought and rebounded the ball really well.

A lot of the points in the paint that we gave up in our last game against Oklahoma were off of offensive rebounds.

I'll say this with St. Mary's, it's a little unfortunate for those guys, because we played our second worst game of the year in the SEC Tournament. For all the Aggies out there, I literally apologize to them. We just weren't ready to go. There was something off in rebounding the basketball. We were soft. It really helped us get ready for this game, you know. I told someone that that last game probably helped us really understand tournament basketball and how physical and how hard you have to play on the glass.

Q. A lot of big performances from guys playing in their first NCAA Tournament game. How pleased were you with them and the way they played, guys like Rashaun and Dominguez and maybe just not letting the moment be too big for them?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, you can live when you leave it all out there, and I thought it was really one of our better games when you look at possession-by-possession basketball, just giving everything you got.

That's really what you want. Whenever you look back on your last game, whenever that is, you don't want to have any regrets. The last thing we wrote on our board in the locker room before we walked out, there was no regrets, like, let's not have a regret, where we're like we decided not to block out, not to run through, not to dive after a ball. We put in too much for that.

That's what I was pleased of more than anything, more than scoring, more than anything like that. Our program is built around hard work, playing hard, playing unselfish, and playing fearless. I thought tonight our team represented that really well.

Q. I was just curious to see how special that was as a coach to get your first NCAA Tournament win with A&M.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, it was great. We want to make all the Aggies proud out there. I told you I was really disappointed with our -- it's hard to beat a team a third time. The SEC Tournament, for those that traveled, I felt bad about that. I really did.

We had so many people rally around this group, as you know, just to get here. We had literally no returners on the team, late to everything, and our deal was we wanted to get to the NCAA Tournament, because I thought we could win in the NCAA Tournament. That's what we want to do, and everyone that came and watched on TV, we wanted to wear that maroon proudly. Win, lose, or draw, we want that. We want to make sure that that continues with the effort and the standard that we're going to play to.

Q. How much did your depth and maybe if you felt like y'all were faster, how much did that play into your game plan?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, I don't think we had anybody in the game -- that came in the game not play a good game, so, you know, depth matters, but it doesn't matter when you come in there and the depth gets outscored by a lot, right? That didn't happen in this game. Our depth came in there and they played really well.

And I challenge our guys this time of year. Like, you know, they say styles make fights and all that this time of year. I understand that, but really players make fights. You know what I'm saying? And I challenged these guys for the past couple of weeks about when you are lined up across from your guy, you have to start taking the game a little more physical, like, I got him, he's not scoring on me. Like, Coach told me I got him, I'm cutting his water off. And when I go to the basket, this guy is thinking the same thing, and I got to go fight for my baskets.

I think that our guys all took that challenge in this game, and you could see it. There was blood in their eyes when they were matched up on defense and when they had an opportunity on offense to finish through contact, to step up, be ready to make an offensive rebound.

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