

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Missouri Tigers

Cuonzo Martin

Postgame Press Conference



Missouri 73, Georgia 70

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to get going with coach. We'll take questions.

Q. Yet again we saw another team come back against you guys down the stretch. You were able to close it out at this time. At one point you went 5 1/2 minutes without a basket. What do you have to do to close out better at the end of games?

CUONZO MARTIN: Well, respectfully I think we just have to win the game. I think we are who we are at this point. Simply put, we are who we are. We're going to make a mistake here, turn it over, bad shot here, whatever it is. For 24 games, that's who we are. We just have to find a way to win the game at this point.

I'd love to give you six or seven different things. You can look at my notes from two weeks ago, probably the same. Just find a way to win the game.

Q. Kobe Brown steps up in the second half. How does he stay in that mindset? What is it about him that allows him to jump in there when he needs to? He's done it several times this year.

CUONZO MARTIN: The thing with him, he's continuing to do it and get it done, just to play with an edge. He's a different player when he plays with an edge. He's driving the ball, assertive. It's not so much you calling plays for him, just being aggressive. You can tell it's going to be one of those games when he's good when he's attacking the offensive glass, he's being strong, he's driving the ball at the rim. Because when he settles on the perimeter then he's not as good. When he's attacking the rim, making plays, he's a different basketball player.

It's not necessarily, it's my number, it's time to play, nobody is making shots. It's just him being aggressive and assertive. Because we have different ways to get him the

ball. Just being aggressive and being on the edge.

Q. Early on in this game a lot of shots were rimming out for him. What did you think of him in the second half?

CUONZO MARTIN: The thing we talk about as a staff before games like this, this type of venue, both teams come out kind of chess match, see how things are going. Guys are missing at the rim. Anxiety. I said it in a good way. All that goes with one-and-done, so to speak. You have all that.

Then once guys settle in the second half. Same way with those guys, they settled in the second half and it was a different basketball game. I'd like to think we'll be better tomorrow just because we had a taste of it. Now it's just basketball.

Q. Georgia watched the LSU film, how to defend Jeremiah. What kind of message did you say to him about how they might try to take him away?

CUONZO MARTIN: I don't think they did anything, just like LSU. I think it's the key, if they're doubling Jeremiah, we should get clean looks every time.

I think with Jeremiah, like I said to him before, sometimes you have to score through the double, first and foremost. Then you get a defense score. I thought he rushed some of his shots around the rim. I thought he rushed some.

But he's just too big and strong. I think he has to embrace it and not be so quick to pass it out, make plays, get to the rim, force the defense to get there on the double quick, then everything else can happen.

It's not necessarily anything we haven't said already. Just him being assertive.

Q. You had 19 points off 13 turnovers. What went into getting those steals? How important was it to get down in transition and capitalize?

CUONZO MARTIN: It's just have being active, being



aggressive. When you have a guy like Wheeler, you're talking about a guy that accounts for 67% of their offense. He gets to the rim, he makes plays. It's easy to say stop him. He's shifting, he's getting down in some kind of way, and then he makes other stuff happen.

But the key is for our guys, when you get surrounding him, be big. Make him go over the top of you. Just have active hands. Don't get back-doored. They do a great job of back-dooring. I thought we did a great job of embracing that part.

Q. What do you think of getting another crack at Arkansas?

CUONZO MARTIN: I'm looking forward to it. Again, I feel like, just in my opinion, we had a chance of finishing in the top two or three, you have to say two or three because Alabama took care of business. I think when Tilmon went down for us, it took a lot out of us as a team.

But they can say the same. Justin Smith didn't play the first time we played them. Tilmon didn't play the second time. I'm looking forward to it. As a ballplayer, this is what you play for, this is what you look for.

Q. I wonder if you could describe the atmosphere here, to what degree you had to make your own energy.

CUONZO MARTIN: We've talked about that all year, creating your own energy. That part I'm sure every other team has said the same thing. Create our own energy. I thought our pitch had great energy. For our fans that were in here, you could feel them, you could hear them.

Again, it goes back to just simply basketball. Just like we went on a roll against Oregon. There was nobody in the gym then. It's basketball. You create your energy by getting steals, dunks, getting layups, making open threes, getting stops on defense, and have some fun because right now it's just one game or go home. So you got to win games.

Q. Through a good portion of that second half, Sahvir Wheeler and Justin Kier only had three points between them. What were Drew and X doing to keep those two at bay most of the half?

CUONZO MARTIN: I think it was a combination of Drew, X, Javon, even to Mark. We had different guys. But Drew had the bulk of Sahvir. Again, that's not an easy assignment. What we just said, if he beats us, make him beat us going right, or make him beat us shooting pull-ups. You can't allow them to just keep turning the corner.

I think Jeremiah was very good in the ball screen. That's why we started playing with Mitch, and then we started getting stops. We can switch five different ways with Mitch. I didn't think Jeremiah was very good in defending the ball screen.

Q. I don't know if this falls in the 'we are what we are' territory, but the decision making on offense with some shot selection, is there anything you can do about that at this point or is it just trying to move on and advance?

CUONZO MARTIN: There's always things you can talk about. I'm not sure how much you can do about it because you still have the same personnel. You don't have much time to practice. But those things you talk about, you watch it on film, be prepared for the next one. That's what it is.

But it's not as if we have a lot of ball handlers and decision makers. You got guys that they're good at what they do, so we good when everybody is clicking off. The key is taking care of the basketball. You can certainly talk about it. We'll watch film about it. We'll keep moving forward.

Q. I don't know if you can really have momentum when you go into halftime. X's shot there to beat the buzzer, did that give you some life in the locker room?

CUONZO MARTIN: Oh, I think it did. It was a good shot. I didn't think we played very well in the first half. We did enough. I thought they had the edge in the first half, outside of that one shot. I thought we missed a lot of shots at the rim.

But, yeah, it was good. The guys, they understood coming in at half, tightening the screws, do what we needed to do to be successful. And we did there.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, coach.

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