

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 11, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Georgia Bulldogs

Tom Crean

Postgame Press Conference

Missouri 73, Georgia 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for coach.

Q. Wheeler and Camara both get double-doubles, close to 50%, hold Tilmon in check. If I would have told you all those things, would you have felt good about a win tonight?

TOM CREAN: Absolutely. No question about it. It's crazy, both teams were 26 I think of 60. I think that's what it was. This game came down to possessions. It really came down to four more free throws, four more free throws for them, two more second-chance points for them, one more three for us.

But this thing was so close. It was the free-throw shooting. We missed some opportunities. But I'm proud of their effort. I hate when you can look and know that the free throw difference made a difference in the sense of the ones that we missed because we went to our walk-through today, we shot layups and jump shots for about nine minutes. We shot free throws for about 25 minutes. We shoot them all the time. Unfortunately at times they just don't go for us.

Our guys battled extremely hard. They never flinched when we got down. It was a highly contested game. The lane was hard to come by, it was hard to get things in that lane, but our guys kept working to figure it out. We had an opportunity at the end to tie it and we just didn't get it.

Q. I know it's unfortunate to lose in this fashion, but you did exceed expectations in terms of where you were projected to finish in the conference. What are your final thoughts on what you were able to accomplish?

TOM CREAN: I'm sorry, I'm really not there yet. I'm just not. I don't mean to be that way, but it's very hard to go from this game to reflect. Plus we've told the NCAA we will



definitely opt in to play in the NIT. We'll work very hard at that and hope that we have that opportunity.

I think we've earned it. If you're taking power conference schools that have done good things in their conference, outside of the NCAA tournament teams that we'll have go, we would love to continue to be in that.

I didn't say good-bye to my team in the locker room. I'm certainly not going to reflect on the season yet because my mind is not in either one of those places, so I apologize.

Q. For lack of a better word, how can you politic to maybe get into the NIT?

TOM CREAN: I hope politics aren't the issue. I mean, I think letting people know we want to be there, we'll be excited to be there, we'll show up. There's no question about that. Post-season is post-season.

But I think we have to continue to make sure we let people know we want to come. I don't want to say it's an outside chance at 14 wins, but if we're going to take power conference schools and all the automatic bids are out of it this year, things of that nature, I would really hope we deserve it.

I think we'll have plenty of teams in the NCAA tournament. I think the fact that we've beaten teams that are going to be in that NCAA tournament, I would think that would hopefully serve us well.

Q. Sahvir Wheeler, obviously if P.J. knocks down that three at the buzzer, that's 14 assists, 14 points. Pretty incredible as the smallest guy on the floor. Everything runs through him. I did want to throw in a question, I think he sat for about five minutes in the first half, your offense really stalled. You were trying to get him some rest. Surprised he didn't come back after the media timeout, but anyway...

TOM CREAN: You're not wrong. I'm playing risk/reward on that. I don't want to play him 38 to 40 minutes. I just think that's so hard in a close game. I want to try to get him through that TV. We tried to extend it just a little bit.



You're not wrong.

But when it's a 40-minute game, you got to know your players, they all think they can play 40 minutes, but can they play 40 as effective as they need to be. Usually the answer is no. So I wanted him to be as effective as he could possibly be. You could tell the way the game was going that this was going to be a grinder because of the way both teams run. Both teams got back in transition, as well.

That's all that really was. We love having Sahvir on the floor, obviously. We're asking him to do a lot. He's got to be able to get a couple blows. I go home at night when I don't get him any rest, I really wish that I did.

None of the kids think they need the rest. It's coaching decisions you have to make knowing it's going to be a long game, like I said. He's doing a fantastic job, getting better. His improvement from one year's time here to where he's at right now this year, amazing, absolutely amazing.

He has not wasted many days, whether it was during the pandemic at home in Houston or with us. There's no doubt about that. And he's got a future.

Q. Sahvir and Toumani were talking about top five or six finish next year in the SEC. Do you want to let them speak for that?

TOM CREAN: Yeah. Unfortunately I'm sorry, I never get to that. We want to finish the right way if we can, then certainly we have to recruit and add what we need to add to this team, then we start to build towards next year.

I'm not there yet. I'm sorry. I'll do a post-season thing at some point when it's post-season for us, I'll do something where I'll be in a better frame of reflection. It's just not right now. We'll have that come when the time's right.

Q. When you look forward to potentially playing in an NIT, if the opportunity is granted, what can a team gain from that experience, whether it's playing against another quality team, getting those extra practices? What can be the benefits?

TOM CREAN: Learn to play in March. You learn to play in March. You learn the value of what March is all about. The more that you can get that experience, the better you're going to be. No doubt about it.

The practices are important and things like that, but more importantly it's the game experience, being able to achieve that. I really hope that they do.

The last thing I want to do right now is not coach this team. 21 years as a head coach, and we certainly had some good young guys like Sahvir, Toumani, Tye Fagan that really stepped up their games. When you bring in Justin and Dru and P.J. to this, the maturity and the professionalism, day in, day out work that they've shown, that makes a ton of sense.

I'm not ready to say good-bye to those three, especially with the fact that it's a free year for them if they want to come back. We'll deal with all that. I told everybody after the game, biggest thing we can do is take a couple of deep breaths, let's just see what happens.

Q. What do you think of the fight y'all showed through this game says about this team and their attitudes?

TOM CREAN: What do I think what?

Q. Just the fight that they all showed.

TOM CREAN: The fight. Absolutely, yeah. You should have seen our walk-through in the second floor of the Marriott, Vanderbilt University Marriott last night. I mean, we were wearing the carpet out. These guys, they were locked in.

Now, Monday's practice left a lot to be desired. I think we were still reeling from a game we thought they should have won on Saturday if a couple things go different for us in that game. We were disappointed because we felt every step of the way we were going to win that game. We prepared all week to win that game. We just fell a little short with it.

Monday's practice wasn't very good. But at the end of the day Tuesday, Wednesday, our walk-through today, all those things... There's teams this time of year that really have no interest in playing. They're just going through the motions. It's passive/aggressive.

That's not what this team is. That's where the fight comes from, the fight, passion, those things come from. They want to play. They enjoy being around each other.

Especially in a year that we've had like this with so many different things, we're going to feel the effects of from a long time in sports, when you're building teams, says a lot about the way they worked. I'm very proud to have coached these guys, proud of their fight and their efforts.

Q. The last timeout, P.J.'s attempt at a three-pointer, is that what you drew up?

TOM CREAN: There was a corner option with Justin, a

curl with Toumani to screen P.J.'s man. We felt we had the look. I don't think in his eyes he felt he had a clean shot so he took the dribble to get it. We had two options. We had the corner and the loop cut across the top.

Q. Were you frustrated by the lane violation? What do you say to Justin after a mistake like that?

TOM CREAN: They ran the lane violation to the letter of the law. I just wish that every part of officiating in a game like that is then going to be run to the letter of the law, whether it's play around the rim, body and cutters, body and drivers, all those types of things.

I mean, was he right on the call? Yeah, he says he was and I'm sure he is because he broke the plane of it. Was it a mistake? Yes. Do I blame Justin? It happened and you got to move on.

It is what it is. The fact that it's a two-point game... It is what it is. We still had a chance to win the game at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

TOM CREAN: Thank you, everyone.

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