

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 12, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## South Carolina Gamecocks

## Frank Martin

### Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 76, South Carolina 59

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with an opening statement from coach.

FRANK MARTIN: Yeah, got bit by the same bug that's bit us all year. Just not physical enough. Then offensively you play a real good defensive team, you got to score. We got scoring from our bigs. Couldn't get anything from our guards. You can't make jump shots, can't get to the line, can't make layups, it's going to be hard to beat a team like Ole Miss that's got some really aggressive scoring guards.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. You mentioned a few weeks ago to call the season disappointing might be a little bit of a disservice. How would you describe it considering everything you've been through?**

FRANK MARTIN: Well, I'd like for maybe the people that cover our team year-round to report it the same way that other teams that have gone through the same situations that we've gone through. Maybe be understanding what our players --

If you want to say I coached bad, be my guest. But to say disappointing after what our players have been through this year, that's sad. That's really sad.

You want to say I'm not good at my job, fair game. Go report whatever you feel like you need to report. But it's been hard. It's been a real taxing year. It's really hard. We have a certain way that we do things. Other people do things whatever way fits them. What we do is based on a daily approach of work ethic, of commitment, of understanding, of repetition that creates the toughness and the connectivity that our teams have always played with, here and before I got to South Carolina.

Unfortunately this year, it's made it really, really hard.



That's why when anyone refers to the team as being disappointing... You have the right to ask and write and report whatever you choose, and I respect that, I got no problem with that, but it's not fair to our players.

You want to report I've done a really bad job, fair game, go do that. But what our kids have been through this year, the word 'disappointing' would not be a word I would use to describe what we've been through.

**Q. With tonight, why did Keyshawn and Jermaine not play? What was your message to the team after playing a game without three key pieces available tonight on the floor?**

FRANK MARTIN: All three are dealing with physical injuries. Just the mental toll that it's taken on all three is not fair. It's been extremely difficult. At the end of the day I'm not going to put winning games above young people's mental health, young people's physical health.

The guys that came to play today were great in practice and they were competitive early. We just can't sustain it. It wasn't lack of depth, because those guys have been playing up until today. And it's the same bug.

There's certain moments in every game, when you play real good teams, that your mettle, your spirit gets challenged. It's been a fight all year for us to find the discipline and the toughness in that moment of those games to continue to fight and have the discipline and toughness to deal with that moment. Today was the same thing. It was unfortunate.

I didn't say much to the players after the game. I'm not a big rah-rah guy before the game and I'm not a big boom-boom guy after games. I make simple comments.

We spend a lot of time talking off the court when we get home. Obviously those conversations and player meetings and all that, I need two or three days to recompose my brain, then I'll get started with all that stuff.

**Q. It seemed like every game, a big difference in the game was that one big run that a team made. Going**

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**forward, how can you go about maybe correcting that for next year?**

FRANK MARTIN: It gets back to what I just explained about our spirit. We hit these dead spots offensively, then our resolve defensively kind of goes away. That first half run, Minott was standing under the basket while his man was ball screening. The guy drives the ball, he gets out of the way. I don't have an answer why he did that in those two back-to-back plays that really kind of showed the lack of resolve in a difficult moment of the game. Why did he do that? I have no idea. I wish I knew.

Again, his first day on campus was January the 6th. He actually didn't get to practice a couple days. I was not at practice till January 18th or something like that. I've never coached the kid. I'm still trying to figure him out as a player and as a person.

I'm excited about him, but those are the moments that I'm talking about. When we can't put the ball in the basket, it's impacted our spirit. If you remember back to when I first got here, Thornwell, all those guys were freshmen, we go through really bad spurts offensively when they were young, but Thornwell's spirit, Dwayne's spirit, Michael's spirit, (indiscernible) spirit would never allow bad shots or missed shots to be broken. That's been a struggle with this team.

I've got to sit back, figure out this crazy year, the things I did, how I managed it, and see if I'm ever faced with a similar situation if I got to do things differently than I did this year. But I can't figure that out right now. I got opinions, but I got to separate from the season and be at peace mentally.

**Q. You mentioned before today, then today again, how frustrating this year has been, how difficult it's been on the court and off. Now that you're at the finish line, this season is over for you guys, what emotions are you feeling right now?**

FRANK MARTIN: Same one that was the other day at Kentucky. I need to separate from the season so I can evaluate what I did and how we did things, the decisions that I made.

I'm just thankful that I feel really good again, that I've got the energy and the desire. January 18th, I ran practice and I came home and I fell asleep at 6:30 at night. I just fell asleep on the couch. I'm back to where I feel really good, energetic.

Here's the thing. This has been a crazy year. Our team was impacted. I handled some things differently this year

than I've handled it my whole career. I'm at peace with things, that this is not year one or year three in my coaching career. This is year 36. I hope you guys understand that. Some of you guys haven't been alive as long as I've been coaching. 36.

I'm at peace with how I do things and how my teams play. We didn't play that way this year. Like I told you guys the other day, you want to act a certain way or react a certain way, whatever, based on this year, you have the right to do that. But there's eight other years previous to this year where my team played completely different than this year's team.

I'm at peace with that. I just have to figure out how I handled some things so I can do my job a little bit better.

**Q. Some of the issues you had on the court, how confident are you those are fixable issues going into next season or is that something you have to detach and figure out?**

FRANK MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, you guys cover our team. Did you see those issues last year with the same players? I didn't. I have zero concerns that the issues that we had this year are an abnormality.

It hurts, too, when you lose Mike Kosar. Then you lose Alanzo Frink who is your best big guy going into the year. Then you don't get practice time with the young guys that have to replace him. It complicates things.

I can tell you that life is real simple. If you look at the teams that finished one, two, three, four, and six in our conference, they were not disrupted because of COVID. They went straight through the season. They might have had a player kind of kicked to the curb for a couple days, but their teams weren't disrupted. That's why they've played the most consistent of all the teams in the league.

**Q. To clarify, the television crew said Bryant and Cousnard didn't play because of coach's decision. Is that the same thing you're saying to us now as to why they did not play?**

FRANK MARTIN: I mean, didn't you hear what I said? I said all three are dealing with injuries, then mental health. I'm worried about mentally where they're at. I mean, I can't be more than honest than that. I don't know what answer you want me to give. I'm going to look out for my players under all circumstances. They need to be in a place where they're at peace and they enjoy the moment and the game.

I don't know where you're trying to go with it. That's your prerogative. But, I mean, I would hope after nine years you

know I'm not going to lie to you.

**Q. When they say 'coach's decision', it makes it sound like a disciplinary thing. This is all a physical, mental situation?**

FRANK MARTIN: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, they're in trouble, you're going to find out about it. Why would I make it up right now? I would have told you. What's the popular line? There's a popular line that every time players don't play, it's like the same quote every school kind of emails to each other. Violation of team rules.

It's not what it is, man. This year has been ridiculously taxing on our players mentally and physically. When you take seven weeks off of competing, then have to throw your body around, seven weeks of being locked up in an apartment, I don't know why that's so difficult to comprehend. Then all of a sudden you come out and two days later you have to play in a game. You haven't done any conditioning, running, contact. It makes it really hard.

There's a reason in football you practice hitting, because the game is violent. Well, basketball is the same way. There's a lot of contact and physicality. You have to train your body. That's why I said earlier, we do that through the way we practice.

I know you guys used to sit there and laugh at me when I first got here because all I talked about was practice because I was trying to create a mindset of how we can practice so we can play a certain way. It's all connected. We didn't get that opportunity this year. It is what it is.

That's why I'm telling you, I've got to reevaluate the decisions I made and figure out if I handled things the right way or not. I'm talking about once we got back from COVID on January 18th.

Obviously decisions I made didn't work. So I've got to reevaluate some of the things I did. But I'm going to protect players first and foremost. I'm never going to put winning a game above what's right for a young person.

**Q. With all the adversity the players went through, what does it say about your team that you didn't have anybody to quit or want to opt out?**

FRANK MARTIN: Yeah, I'm really proud of the guys. It's frustrating. The hardest thing I've had to manage coming down the stretch is that we didn't win enough games. When you start losing, there's certain things that are not acceptable. That's where the mental health component comes from, because these guys are used to winning, they're used to winning. It's not like they're used to what

happened this year. Then things weren't working out, we were losing games. We just couldn't get to the right place.

But I'm really proud of the players. The easy thing, they all get their year back. After seven weeks of being shut down, losing some games, the easy thing would have been to walk in, say, My little toe on my foot hurts, so I'm done. I'm going to opt out the rest of the season. That could have been the easy thing to do.

Instead they came in every day. I mean, I don't want to speak for them because I don't sit in here when they do interviews with you guys, but I think they've handled themselves like gentlemen. That's a credit to who they are.

The disappointing part of it is the game results. That's been just like this year, an abnormality to how I've lived my life for 54 years. It's been an abnormality for our basketball team the way it's been, especially here at South Carolina, my first eight years.

Thank you.

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