

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 12, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Nate Oats

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama 85, Mississippi State 48

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Nate Oats. We'll have an opening statement, then take questions after that.

NATE OATS: I think we answered the questions about whether our guys can come out ready to play at 11:00 tip. Told them whatever they did do, get ready for that one, try to repeat tomorrow.

It was nice to get the win. The fact Mississippi State was able to beat Kentucky kind of made our guys wake up. Plus they played us really tough two games in a row. I thought it was close all the way to the end both times we played these guys.

I think our guys really locked in. Really goes to the senior leadership making sure the guys are locked in. Petty told me they were going to be locked in. Obviously, him and Herb, Bruner, just three seniors that start along with Shack being with us as long as he has, really made sure everybody was locked in.

I thought everybody gave us great minutes. Reese came off, played really hard. Rojas was great again two games in a row against Mississippi State. We've gotten unbelievable minutes out of Rojas. Quinerly has been playing great for us.

If we can keep the energy up. I thought offensively the turnovers were down, we only had 9 turnovers, assists were up, the ball was moving.

We made shots, but we didn't shoot it unbelievably well. 36% is probably a little below average. We shot it well and often. I thought we took care of the ball. I thought our energy was good.

They ended up out-rebounding us by eight. I thought other than that defensively we were -- they kind of got the



rebounds late. Defensively I thought we were really locked in for a good part of that game.

THE MODERATOR: Question.

Q. Your rotation going forward, if Primo is not able to return, Darius Miles and his performance today, could he enter the rotation? Also, talk about John Petty's career, 301 made threes now for him, and what he's meant to this program.

NATE OATS: So the rotation-wise, we don't know on Primo yet. Hopefully he can play tomorrow. Hopefully it's not much. We'll wait on that MRI and see.

If for whatever reason he can't go, obviously you got Quinerly playing great, Keon Ellis playing great, Darius Miles could be in the rotation. I love Darius Miles' game. I think he's going to be really good for us coming up. You can see how talented and skilled he is. Put him out there at 6'7", he's basically playing the point when he's out there a lot. He could help us for sure if we need to add some depth.

If we're fortunate enough to win tomorrow, we got to play a third day in a row. It was nice we were able to keep the minutes down. We only had one guy go over 20 minutes tonight, that was Quinerly. You look at the starters, Primo played the most at 19. Nobody else had more than 19 minutes. Hopefully those guys are all fresh for tomorrow.

As far as the question with Petty, 301 made threes, he came right out of the gate, hit those three in the first half. He's a great shooter. He's turned himself into an unbelievable overall, all-around player defensively, offensively. I mean, you look at plus-minus, he led the team today in plus 32. In the 18 1/2 minutes he was in the game, we were plus 32. That speaks to how good he's become at everything other than shooting. And I think he's one of the best shooters in the country.

He's a senior. Wants to win. Is getting guys locked in. I can't say enough about what he's meant to this program, what he's meant to us in the two years since I got here. Him and Herb, I thought they kind of paired up great.



Look at Herb's numbers today too. I know you asked about Petty, and Petty was great. Shoot, if I'd have played Herb 5 more minutes, probably end up with a triple-double. He played less than 17 minutes, he's eight points, seven rebounds, seven assists to go with zero turnovers. You can't get more much efficient than that in 16 1/2 minutes of play. Really happy with his play as well.

Q. Herb and Petty seemed to take offense a little bit at the idea they can't play well in these 11:00 a.m. starts. How much of a talking point was that? What sort of adjustments did you make this week?

NATE OATS: We talked about it. We said it's out there. We told them they got to change something up. We tried to get them up a tad earlier, see if they could get going a little bit before breakfast.

I thought the walk-through was good. Make sure we're a little more vocal in walk-throughs. It's one of those deals, you're not going to do a shootaround on the floor when you have an 11:00 tip. Just tried to get them here a little sooner to get a few more shots up when they were on the floor.

But, yeah, I'm glad they took offense to it because we've got another 11:00 one tomorrow, then if you throw out the Daylight Savings Time, you've got another 11:00 one the following day. It will say noon on the clock, but it's really the exact same time because of Daylight Savings Time. We've got three days in a row, 11:00, 11:00, 11:00. We're going to have to play well in all of them if we're fortunate enough to win tomorrow to get to Sunday.

Q. From an analytic standpoint, especially in the first half, were those as efficient numbers-wise that you've seen out of this team this year?

NATE OATS: Yeah, 100%. I mean, you look at the first half, I think we were a .55 on defense. The offense, I can't remember what the offense was. It was pretty good. As a matter of fact, I've got it somewhere here.

I think we had four turnovers, is that correct, in the first half? When we're not turning the ball over, we're really good. I think our HDI company has 1.35. You look at the halves, the first half we were 1.38. The second half was wasn't too much further behind than the first half. To be almost a 1.4 against Mississippi State, who's actually a really good defensive team, I think it says where our offense is right now.

That's our guys. They're taking care of the ball. They're sharing the ball. 20 assists, nine turnovers. Herb Jones

essentially starts at the point for us, seven assists, zero turnovers. You can't say enough about the play he had today.

Q. I don't know how aware you are, but obviously Duke had a positive test and had to drop out of the ACC. Virginia earlier today as well out of the ACC tournament. Their status for the NCAA tournament is up in the air. Now Kansas, as well, with a positive, out of the Big 12 and their status is up in the air. Does that make you as a coach, you know you're in the dance, got a chance to make a run, does that make you nervous about playing the next couple days here instead of just holding up, make sure you get to next week safe?

NATE OATS: No. I mean, I think our medical crew has done a great job. You could say that. We're going to control what we can control. We want to play games. I think somebody told me we were one of nine teams in the country to play all 27 games you're allowed this year. We've said that from day one.

I'm really glad I'm coaching in the SEC during this. I think our league has done a better job than anybody else in the country handling this thing. I'm really glad I'm coaching at the University of Alabama. Because within the SEC, I think Alabama has done as good a job as anybody handling this stuff. Clarke, Jeff Allen the header trainer, our team doctor, Dr. Bittner who's on the trip, they've all done a great job.

Our players, some of the players have had it, some are still within their time. We still have some that haven't had it. They've got their masks on all the time. They're making sure. They know what we've got riding on the line this year. I think everybody is doing a really good job.

My family is not staying with me here. They're in Nashville, staying in a different hotel room. Pretty much all the assistants, same deal. Their wives, children, whoever, we've put ourselves in this 34-person bubble they've allowed. We're trying to keep those 34 people away from everybody else to make sure we don't have anything like that and we can continue to play the games we have to play.

Q. Sometimes it's a tough sell to a team, when you say if you play passionate, animated defense, your offense will come. That goes beyond run-outs. It really does help your offense. How difficult a sell has it been?

NATE OATS: Yeah, we've always tried to sell our teams. When you play fast, it's a lot easier to play fast when you're running off stops. If you've got to take the ball out of the

net every time it's a lot harder to play. You can still play fast, but not nearly as fast as you can if you're playing off stops.

With this group, I'm going to be honest with you, I don't think that's the main motivation. I think the motivation is they want to win games. They know how good we need to be defensively to win games. When we get the stops, we're able to run. I think when we did run, even if we didn't get layups in transition, we got the cross matches you're looking for when you push as hard as we do.

Quinerly hit that three in the corner because they had their five man on them. We got a lot of that where Quinerly ends up with a five, Shack with a five, Petty, whoever. They cross match because they have to take whoever is sitting in front of them when we're pushing as hard as you can.

The more stops you can get, rebounds, the more of that type of stuff you can do. The offense looked really good. To be honest, if you're looking at our offense, we were pretty good everywhere, to be honest with you. Off the steals, we were a little higher.

To be honest with you, off the defensive rebounds, for whatever reason, our numbers were not as good as some of the other ones today. But usually it's a little bit better.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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