

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 12, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Arkansas Razorbacks

Eric Musselman

Postgame Press Conference

Arkansas 70, Missouri 64

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome in head coach Eric Musselman. We'll take questions.

Q. J.D. had some kind of stomach virus or flu bug. How do you think he played considering he was ill?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: He played phenomenal. He threw up at one point, then he did it again at halftime. Didn't know if he was going to come out and play the second half.

I think it's some food, to be honest with you. I haven't felt great all day. That's what I'm assuming it is. I thought he was awesome offensively in the first half with the 16 points. We needed his points. Obviously we turned the ball over way too much. Our bench really, really good with 34 points.

I thought J.D. in pick'n roll was really, really good for us. The difference in the game really, both teams turned the ball over. We won by six, we outscored them by six points off the turnovers.

It's a really good rebounding team. I thought we did an excellent job rebounding with our small lineup. Obviously we went with Justin Smith a lot at the five spot. I thought Ethan played his minutes really well.

It's a good win. Now we got to get ready for this next game.

Q. Of all the shots J.D. hit, the one late, what did you think of that? How big was that?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I mean, it was huge. We needed a basket. We were milking the clock a little bit from the 2 1/2 minute mark on. Huge, huge basket for us, without a question.

That's what he is. He's a guy that makes these shots that



you sit there and say, No, no, no. Oh, good shot. It happens all the time. You kind of have to live with giving him a lot of freedom to take those shots.

Q. You held Tilmon tonight to nine points, fouled out, zero rebounds. Talk about the defensive performance on Tilmon tonight.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, that's all we talked about. When they won the game against Georgia, we got together as a staff, we got together as a team last night. We wanted to sandwich him, dig on him in the post. We wanted to double block him out. We knew that we were probably going to have to go small during stretches. I thought our small lineup was phenomenal. I thought they made catches more difficult in the post.

Obviously we tried to put in as many pick'n roll situations as we possibly could to try to get downhill a little bit. Really proud of us double blocking out, not just relying on one person to try to block him out because he's such a great player. We did a great job of just limiting his touches, as well.

Q. Do you recall ever having a game on both sides with that many offensive fouls? How difficult did it become to find a rhythm offensively?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: The play calls, at least from our end, it was hard. They're such a good defensive team. I thought they played with really good desperation. I mean, you're talking about a team that was ranked high earlier in the year. Coach Martin does a great job. It was a physical game. I don't know what it looked like on TV, but live it was a physical game.

I thought defensively you're talking about two really fundamentally sound defensive teams. I thought the guys guarding the ball did a great job. Then I thought from a ball-handling standpoint, for us, I thought we had some guys try to get a little bit, lower their head, lower their shoulder a little bit too early on some of those charges that were taken by Missouri.

Q. At this point you've won 12 straight in SEC play.



Do you worry about keeping it going? Or is tomorrow the only focus at this point?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, tomorrow is the sole focus, for sure. Not thinking about anything else at all. To win this many games in a row, at this particular time of the year, is overly, overly difficult.

Having said that, we played well enough to win tonight. I thought we came out, played much better in the second half than we did in the first half. I thought defensively, just defensive rebounding was a big part of that as well. To outscore them by seven after being down by one in the first half, I thought we did a good job the last 20 minutes of the game.

Q. Justin flipped that switch again offensively in the second half. What did you think of his game tonight, his demeanor coming in?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Well, he's been working on that flip shot for about the last two weeks. It's kind of like a push shot. Antawn Jamison used to shoot that shot all the time where he gets it out of his hands really quickly. It's not a jump hook. It's not a midrange shot. It's just a quick push shot. I've noticed him working on it on his own a lot of late. He converted a couple of those that were really important.

Early in the game, certainly when Tilmon was on him, we were trying to go at Tilmon and get him into foul trouble because we felt that was an advantage for us potentially because Justin is a little bit quicker and Justin is really more of a 4-3. So to have a five on him...

I thought Tilmon did a good job. Justin turned the ball over too much in the first half, but I thought he regrouped at halftime, came out, played a really phenomenal second half.

Q. Do you think he may have taken things a little bit personal, given two Missouri guys were selected all-league over him?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I mean, I think that we as a group have too much team thoughts. I mean, everybody has to try to self-motivate themselves before every game as best they can. Whether he felt that way or not, I'm not sure.

It was really a hard-fought game.

Q. Their three guards in their backcourt were a combined 12 of 33 from the floor. Talk about how you're able to negate that team defensively.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, I mean, Devo Davis, a really

good defender. Jalen Tate, really good defender. I thought those two guys with their length. Then the guy that's probably improved the most for us defensively at the guard spot is J.D. Notae. He continues to get better from a defensive standpoint.

It was really important for us not to put Pinson on the foul line. I think he's averaging ten free throws attempted against us in the two prior games. If he's not, that's what I told the team before the game. I think that's what he was.

It was important not to put Dru Smith, those two guys, we did not want them to have a high volume of FTAs. Keeping them in front of us was a main priority from a defensive standpoint.

Q. You look at Moses Moody's stat line, only five points. He seemed to excel defensively. What were your thoughts on his performance today?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I mean, I think, first of all, they did a phenomenal job on Moses. You could tell that their game plan was to limit Moses' touches. I thought in the first half we just had too many guys running to the basketball. Then we talked about going backdoor. We talked about being decoys if they're going to face guard you or try to eliminate your catches. That's just one game that Moses just didn't score the ball a lot. But I thought he did a lot of other things for us from a defensive standpoint, from a rebounding standpoint.

The good thing is we get another game tomorrow.

Q. You've talked about the Arkansas crowd all season long, despite only having a little over 4,000 people. It seemed pretty Razorback red. What kind of impact do you think the fans had tonight?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I mean, I didn't really see any Razorback red until today, but I saw a lot on the streets as we went to shootaround, as we came to the game, which was really neat.

I was a little worried yesterday when I hadn't seen any, or the day before. But I think our fans knew, much better than I did, that they really didn't need to show up until tonight at 6:00.

I thought they were phenomenal for us again, just like they are every home game. We had a great crowd here, for sure.

Q. Do you anticipate with a lot of people not being able to get off work on a Friday, being Saturday, the weekend, you'll see even more people for the semifinal



matchup tomorrow?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I'm not really sure. I hope so. Hopefully we'll have more. I don't know the situation with the tickets and stuff.

But I would anticipate us having a few more people, yes.

Q. With this self-scouting that you did, is part of that the reason that there was so many turnovers, offensive charges? Is that knowing your opponent part of that self-scouting on your team?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Well, I think defensively we were really good tonight. I really do. I mean, I thought we let them shoot too high of a percentage, for sure, especially in the first half. But I thought our second half defense holding them to 37%, 25% from the three, was really, really vital.

Yes, I did think that our guys had a pretty good knowledge of the personnel and strengths and weaknesses of their team. But hopefully I didn't screw us up from an offensive standpoint because, my God, did we turn the ball over too much.

Q. It seemed like the pace was to Missouri's liking, but you won kind of a grind-it-out, physical game. How did you feel about that?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Really happy. I tried to put five guards out there so we could score the ball a little bit more in transition. But they do a great job of getting back in transition. They actually did a pretty good job running the ball opportunistically.

But I think that we've proven, whether it's the Texas A&M game the other night, whether it's tonight, that we can kind of win in a fast-paced game, which we prefer. But we can also win in a kind of grind-it-out game as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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