

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 13, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Nate Oats

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama 73, Tennessee 68

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

NATE OATS: Thought Tennessee really came ready to play. Without Fulkerson, I thought they had a great plan. They came out and played a lot better than us in the first half, shoot, even at the beginning of the second half. I think we got down 15, if that's correct, before we went on the 14-0 run.

A lot of respect, a lot of credit to Tennessee, how they came out and played. I think for us, it was one of those gut-check wins where the guys expect to win. I think we're 6-3 in one- or two-possession games this year, last year I believe we were 4-7.

I think it's one of those deals where our guys have changed their attitude. They expect to win. We ended up out-rebounding them after we were down eight at one point on the glass. Our defense picked up significantly in the second half. We had multiple guys step up, make big, big plays.

Obviously Herb and JQ with the scoring. You look at a guy like Keon Ellis, with the defense he did on Keon Johnson the second half. The three he hit off Herb's pass out of post. You look at the three Reese hit, that was huge when we needed to him in the run. I thought Reese's minutes were great. I thought it was a combination of a lot of guys stepping up, making big plays.

We obviously have to play a lot better on the offensive side. We've got to play a lot better in the first half tomorrow or we're going to be in serious trouble. We got to the championship game, now we got to get it together again.

We had some pretty good players that struggled today that I think hopefully will get themselves ready to go tomorrow.



THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Josh's status? You mentioned Keon, how he stepped in in Josh's absence.

NATE OATS: I didn't think Keon had a particularly great first half, but I thought his second half was unbelievable. I thought just his effort on defense, the job he did on Keon Johnson. He was in there getting deflections, loose balls, hit the big three, attacked the rim, made his free throws. He went to the line twice there late in the game, went 4-4 at the line when we needed him to. I couldn't be happier for Keon.

Primo is kind of day-to-day from what the trainers said. I know he got a lot of work in this morning, he's going to get a lot more in this afternoon. We'll see where it takes him.

If he's not good enough, we won't play him tomorrow. We'll try to get him back for the NCAA tournament at some point. It's not something where he's going to be out, where he requires surgery or anything like that. He should be back playing this year, whether it's tomorrow, next weekend, Sweet 16, hopefully we get him back here soon.

Q. They were kind of mid-ranging you to death there. A lot of folks were ready to make this game a referendum on style of play. Is a game like this more proof that with your defense, general toughness, almost cold shooting proof?

NATE OATS: Shoot, I'd like to know what they ended up shooting. I'm actually looking at our box score now. I mean, they made a ton of midrange twos. What do they have them for? They shot 41%, which still ends up to be -- no, they shot 46% on them, which ends up being .92, which is exactly where they were at for the game. It's kind of where they were.

Our defense is a .92. That's what they shot midrange. Our offense was a .96. We only shot 25% from three, that's only .75. Maybe the analytics played out in their favor tonight a little bit. We feel like over the course of time, over the course of a season, over the course of 40 games...



That game right there, it is different styles, but it really just came down to who wanted to play harder, who could get more rebounds. All the analytic stuff, I'm not thinking about any of that. We think about that when we put stuff in back in the summer and fall.

We're thinking about how to get stops, how to get rebounds. We're not letting them shoot midrange. We'd like for them to shoot them, then contest them, and try to make them miss. Shoot, they were making a ton of them. In the first half, they just kept getting to their spot. We didn't do a good enough job contesting them. We didn't do a good enough job keeping them from getting to their spot. It was great offense for them for most of the game, to be honest with you.

Q. Beyond the chance to win a tournament title for the first time in 30 years, what that means to your players, are you thinking at all about the chance to get up to the one line tomorrow? Does that matter to you at all?

NATE OATS: You know what, honestly that really didn't come into play in my mind till you brought it up. I would think if we would win tomorrow, I don't know if there's got to be something else happen or not, I don't really know honestly. Once I get locked into the conference tournament play, everything else is kind of out the window.

We're just playing. We got to get locked into figuring out who is going to win, LSU or Arkansas. They're both good. We split with Arkansas, beat LSU twice. But LSU is super talented.

We'll watch this game here. We'll hunker down in the war room with the staff, try to figure out a game plan for beating whoever it is, let the chips fall where they may on that stuff.

I don't know. I guess if we want, we'd have a pretty good shot at getting a one seed. Somebody told me there's maybe 25 teams in the past however many years that have won the regular season and the tournament in the Power 5 league. Then 20 out of the 25 got all one seeds.

I would think we'd be in good company to get one if we won both. If we don't, we have no control over that. We control how hard we played. We're going to try to bring it as much as we can.

Q. Never mind what happens tomorrow, really good teams win the way that you guys won today. Do you think today helped make that case for you regardless of what happens tomorrow?

NATE OATS: I have no idea. I don't know what the

committee is looking at, to be honest with you.

I will say this, when you play poorly on offense and still figure out a way to win, which we've done a lot here in the last month and a half. Our offense has kind of fallen. I think at one point we got up to 10th or 11th in the country. I think we're mid 30s right now. Shoot, today's game may have dropped it.

But we're number one in the country on defense coming into the game today. Our defense based on the second half performance maybe stayed at one.

I think defense can carry you. I think the teams that make runs have to be good on both sides of the ball, offense and defense. Our offense is definitely capable. I think we've said it a lot, how we make shots, our offense should determine the margin of victory, not whether we win or lose. I think that played true tonight. We didn't win by a lot like we did yesterday when our offense was flowing, but we won the game based on our defense.

Q. You get in the postgame, you certainly mentioned Herb, but he's not the focal point of what you even talk about. What does that say about what you expect from him, what he does for this team?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I mean, 21-13 4 assists. Yesterday he played 16 minutes, 16 1/2 minutes, had 8-7-7. If I would have played him 25 minutes, he would have had a triple-double. He's the guy that fills the stat sheet on numerous things. When you look at blocked shot, three steals, four assists. He's doing a little bit of everything.

There's a reason he was MVP now. He could also come out and play hard on defense. We could win a game with him scoring in single digits, too. We have other guys, Petty and Shack. Neither one of them shot it that great. Shack just didn't get that many shots today, to be honest with you. Those guys can step up and really give us big minutes. Herb can impact the game a million different ways on that end.

I think it speaks to how well Herb impacts the game on every different level. Yeah, to have 21 and 13, and people not be talking about how great he was, I think it shows you what we expect out of him every night.

Q. Now that you have the win out of the way, is there a team between Arkansas and LSU that you prefer or match up better with or wherever the chips fall?

NATE OATS: What, do you want me to make it a public statement that I'd rather play one and then they lose and then the other one puts it all over their locker room wall?



I'm going to let the chips fall where they may and see.

I mean, they're both really good. Obviously we lost to Arkansas at their place. Our staff, our players would like to get a rematch, do a better job. We played LSU twice and beat 'em. They're ridiculously talented. Their offensive firepower is as good as anybody maybe in the country. I'm sure they'd make some adjustments and be ready to go. It's hard to beat a team as good as they are three times in a year.

Whichever way it ends up, we talked about it as a staff, who do you want to win. Does it really matter? You have no control over it. Same stuff we tell the players: You have no control over the refs, so quit worrying about officiating calls. We have no control over who we play. Let's just watch the game.

We have scouts for both ready to roll. As soon as it's over, we'll get the guys in, give ourselves a few hours to get this game added to the scout, then we'll get ready to play Sunday.

Q. I thought it was interesting you put Juwan Gary in pretty early. Kind of a flat start. He always brings energy. Just the energy, it's like he gets everybody kind of going.

NATE OATS: He plays super hard. You go back to yesterday, he really impacted the game. He had the blocked shot on Javian. Goes down and gets the dunk on the alley-oop from Quinerly. He's athletic, big, strong.

We're working on getting his skill level up. Ideally able to shoot threes, put on the floor, do all the stuff you'd like a 6'6" guy to do. He's 6'6", 230. Has more physicality to him. We play him at the four and five both.

You know what you're going to get with him. He's going to come in, he's going to play super hard, he's going to dive all over, make plays. He did that again. He had three rebounds in under 11 minutes.

I didn't think we had energy out of the gate. We had some foul trouble with Shack early, which was disappointing because he couldn't really get in the flow today. We also didn't have the energy we needed from some guys. We know Juwan is going to bring energy.

That's the thing I told our guys, everybody contributed to this win. Even though Juwan only played under 10 or 11, Rojas was under 10, I thought both those guys gave us good energy, good minutes. Just got to continue to be able to go to the bench to guys like that. Keon Ellis now in the lineup without Primo. Quinerly comes off the bench,

ends up being our second leading scorer. I can't say enough about the job Quinerly has done.

Different guys bring different things. We feel like we've got kind of the chess pieces that you can put in and you got options. We felt like we were a lot deeper than Tennessee today. Hopefully that pays off.

It was nice we were able to rest most of the guys yesterday, didn't play anybody over 20 minutes. Now Herb and Petty are at 35. We're going to need Juwan, Rojas, some of these guys that played lower minutes. Reese only played 16. Some of those guys are going to have to give us a few more minutes tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports