

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Missouri Tigers

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Head Coach Cuonzo Martin

Postgame Press Conference

Missouri 72, Ole Miss 60

CUONZO MARTIN: Great win for our guys, our team. It's not easy beating a team three games in a row. A tremendous amount of focus. We held them to 60 points in three games which is impressive with a team that scores and moves the way they move and guys that make plays off the dribble.

I thought we did a great job of getting in the paint. I think that was one of our biggest emphasis to get the ball in the paint and also to get out in transition. 40 points in the paint against a team like that that plays a physical brand is impressive. We just continued to attack and tried to make plays at the rim, and when three-point shots present themselves, we're ready to take them. Good win.

Q. For any of you guys, you really came out the aggressor in the second half. Was there any message at halftime that resonated with you guys or anybody speak up? What was the difference?

THE MODERATOR: Let's call on a particular player.

Q. Kobe.

KOBE BROWN: I would say just really staying within what we do. We can't come out and get complacent with a lead.

I know we were tied at half, but we had to come out and play like it was 0-0. We've been in these -- in those situations before. We let the game slide away from us, so we emphasized on we didn't want to go home. We want go onto our next game, so we have to make everything count.

Q. This is for Ronnie. The performance in the first half, you scored 14 points, including a few three-pointers, kind of keeping Mizzou in the game. What kind of -- what kind of flow were you in in the first half making three straight -- three-pointers and scoring



11 straight points, and how were you feeling?

RONNIE DeGRAY: I felt good, Kobe especially finding me for wide open threes. I felt like the rim was the ocean, and everything was going in, but really shout out to Kobe and the other guys for finding me and just me knocking down my shot.

Q. Javon, at halftime, did you guys talk about getting hot offensively, or how did that go down, or were you guys just getting open shots, and how did the ball movement improve the second half?

JAVON PICKETT: I would say just getting the ball in transition or on the make to the basket to get it out quick. We talked about just getting the ball up the court a little bit faster. Four and five get down. I thought like we did that in the second half, and it led to some easy points.

Q. Kobe, you and Trevon had accounted for 12 defensive rebounds. Just what was working for you guys on the defensive glass, and how were you guys working getting to that -- getting the ball in transition after that?

KOBE BROWN: We knew we had to get rebounds in order to win the game, so we tried to make sure we got our hand on it at the very least every time the ball came off the rim. Especially on the defensive end. Try to get a hand on it, tip it open or grab it ourselves. We can't win without rebounds.

Q. Javon, you have been really outspoken defending and talking about Coach and your staff here the last couple of weeks of the season when things were going rough. Just how much motivation is that for you playing for Coach and your staff?

JAVON PICKETT: It's very important. I believe it's very important to everybody. They go in every day. You know, just making sure that our game plan is right. Like I always say, it's always up to us to go out there and follow through with what they tell us to do, but they give us the blueprint every time, and it's just on us to make sure that we go out there and continue to compete. Follow their footsteps, tell



us what to do, we'll be fine.

Q. Coach, you guys slowed down Joiner there in the second half. I think he only had three points and 1 of 7 shooting. How much was he a point of emphasis going into the locker room, and what do you feel the defensive adjustments were that made that possible?

CUONZO MARTIN: Scouting report-wise I think everybody in the league thinks the same way. Joiner and Murrell, I think you have to find a way to contain those guys. They get their shots and make plays and they shift off the dribble and shoot the ball. It's not easy defending those type of guys.

The biggest thing with guys like that, no angle. He has to shoot over the top with pull-ups. If he shoots pull-ups, great. If you give angles, he is at the rim. They have guys that can make plays and make shots. You have to keep them in front of you, which is easier said than done. That's the key. He has the ball in his hand, so you are not going to deny him the ball, but you have to make it look tough.

Q. You guys are now 12-2 when you guys out-rebound your opponents. Can you talk a bit about what kind of went into that tonight and how you're going to go into it tomorrow?

CUONZO MARTIN: It's always an emphasis for us to be a good rebounding team. It doesn't always turn out like that. This is one of the areas that we spend a lot of time with ball screen, defense, rebounding, you know, one-on-one defense. That's something we do every day in practice, but you know, we still have to continue to get better at that, but we were just good at it. We collectively did a good job. Our guards did a good job of coming down to get rebounds, and it was a plus for us.

Q. Cuonzo, last year when you were in the conference tournament, you knew you guys were playing NCAA tournament afterwards. How different was the approach this year, just the way that the stakes are kind of set up for you guys this season?

CUONZO MARTIN: Well, you have answers as a coach, and you have answers as a man. As a coach, it's one game at a time. Like I said to our guys, I asked them what will it take to win this tournament, and they said we got to win five games. I said, no, we have to win one game, one possession at a time, and we have to focus at a high level. Each guy has to be accountable for each other. We also have to be grateful for the opportunity just to play the game. We put forth an effort. You get so consumed with it. Let the chips fall where they may, but it's no more pressure than just trying to win a basketball game because

tomorrow will present itself, and the sun will come up, and let the chips fall where they may.

Q. What can you expect from them --

CUONZO MARTIN: They did a great job -- they did a great job of turning us over in the press. I thought we had a good opportunity, especially in the second half settling in. We're familiar with it, so I think we'll be better prepared just to kind of go through it. I think we had six turnovers in the first half, but we'll be better prepared.

Q. Can you talk a bit about Trevon's defensive performance, six defensive rebounds, three blocks. Can you just talk about how important he was on that end?

CUONZO MARTIN: Very, very important in my opinion. He should have been an all-league freshman. You look at the numbers, production of freshmen in this league. There's no question about it, the way he impacts the game. Blocks shots. High-level rebounder. Shoots the three. Scores around the rim.

He just continues to improve. He is a guy you'll be talking about that played in the SEC next 10, 20 years down the road. He is that level of guy, that level of person. There's no question, he should have been an all-league guy as a freshman, and we have some great ones in this league, but he should have been one of them.

He played well. He played well tonight. What makes him good, he has a humble approach, and I would consider him a good guy. He is not consumed with all the other stuff. He is a good guy. He is a good teammate, and that's what makes him good in my opinion.

Q. Coach, in the first half, Ole Miss was doubling Kobe Brown almost every time he touched the ball. What adjustments did you make in the second half to make sure he was a more focal part of the offense?

CUONZO MARTIN: Nothing. We wanted him doubled. I think he did a great job of finding guys. I think the key is late in the first half and into the second half we made shots out of the double because he did the right thing with the ball. Then when he didn't double, he made one-on-one plays. That's the biggest key with any double. When you are making shots, it opens it up. Now they're hesitant to double, and that's what you saw in the second half, and he was aggressive in making plays.

Q. Coach, how do you prepare for a quick turnaround for tomorrow?

CUONZO MARTIN: Oh, the guys would love that because that means we're not practicing, but it's the same thing when you practice three or four days in a row. I mean, you are with each other. I love these times because when you show up as a team, your fans are here. These are beautiful times. You don't get these times often, and you go with a game plan.

You're not doing anything new this time of year. You can draw up one play, and it might work, but you're not doing anything new this time of year, man. It's a culmination of everything we worked on, and here we are, and it is what it is.

Q. Cuonzo, could you talk a bit about just the balanced scoring you guys had. Obviously, Kobe and Ronnie both in double digits, and then you had a few guys on nine points. Just how important that was for you.

CUONZO MARTIN: Oh, very important because this is an unselfish group. They don't mind going to Kobe when it presents itself in a double. I think where we've grown as a team, we now have Kobe, Ronnie, and Trevon taking advantage of when they have switches and smaller guys on them. They all want the ball now. That wasn't the case earlier. Even Kobe was somewhat hesitant, but they all want the ball in a switch, and now we're a different team. When we get the ball, they're aggressive and making plays.

Q. What does scouting look like for a guy like Xavier Pinson who you are extremely familiar with his play style and how he is going to try and attack you guys?

CUONZO MARTIN: Well, I can't give you that insight because you will write it, and if you come by the hotel, I'll tell you after the game, but I can't give it to you now.

We're familiar with him, but they have a talented team. It's not like you're just defending him. He does a great job of distributing the ball and making plays for them, but they have talented guys, so it's not just one guy.

Thank you.

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