

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 10, 2022

## Florida Gators

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

## Coach Mike White

## Colin Castleton

## Niels Lane

### Postgame Press Conference

Texas A&M 83, Florida 80

MIKE WHITE: Congrats to Texas A&M. A high-level basketball game. I thought our guys showed incredible resiliency, as they have all season to put ourselves in a position a couple of different times to steal it after being down big.

We dug ourselves a huge hole, of course, in the first half. Really proud of the character of these guys. Very, very somber locker room, obviously.

A bunch of high-character guys that left it on the line, and, unfortunately, Texas A&M made some huge plays down the stretch, hit a huge shot, obviously.

**Q. Hey, Colin, just how difficult was that first half from an offensive standpoint, and what were they doing to kind of get you guys out of sorts there?**

COLIN CASTLETON: We didn't play as well as we should have. We came out like lackadaisical, they were getting like too many easy rebounds, and we just didn't play good at all. Everybody knew it.

And the coaches were telling us -- like, it was an awful half, so we did that a couple of times this year just coming out slow and trying to dig ourselves out of the hole, and today it just wasn't enough, so...

I feel like if we obviously would have come out strong in the first half it wouldn't have been that down the stretch, but we just did a bad job coming out, so...

**Q. What was different about the last 1:15 there in the second half and then into overtime, and then the**



**previous 38 minutes, do you think?**

COLIN CASTLETON: We talked about it. We just showed more fight, played better defense, focused on getting stops, which is -- helps us get out in transition and get good looks, which we did at the end.

So they made a really tough shot then, obviously, but we were playing good defense in the second half, and that's what led to the comeback and put us in a good position to win the game.

But like I said, if we would have done that in the first half it would obviously be a different story.

**Q. For both the players, please. Was it difficult -- I think A&M didn't shoot any free-throws in the first half. They shot 38 in the second half. Was it difficult to adjust to how the game was being called at all from one half to the next?**

NIELS LANE: We try not to really focus on what the refs have to do with the game, but at the end of the day the refs don't win or lose a game.

So at the end of the day it's the team. It's our team that needs to pick it up on both sides of the floor.

COLIN CASTLETON: I mean, yeah, it was a little bit of a difference in the game, but I don't think it had any part in the outcome. Like I don't think it was a poorly refed game, so...

We just couldn't worry about that. That wasn't our focus.

But like I said, in the first half we started focussing on that, and that's when we started playing bad defense, not doing what we needed to do. So second half we didn't really care about the refs, and that's what Coach was telling us at halftime, stop worrying about the refs, and we did.

So that's what helped us come back. We can't blame the refs for anything.

**Q. What did that first half do for you confident-wise**



**moving forward? And then for Colin, to see Kowacie come alive like that down the stretch, what did that do for you guys and what does that say about maybe about his upside moving forward?**

NIELS LANE: The fact that the ball was going in the basket for me in the first half definitely gave me a boost of confidence on the offensive end and the defensive end, because it's just natural.

If you are getting it done at the offensive end, then you're going to have more energy on the defensive end. So me having a good game offensively today definitely helped me on both sides.

COLIN CASTLETON: It was great to see him. Great guy. Love him as a teammate. He puts the most work in probably out of anybody on the team. Comes in with the right attitude every day. Something I've never seen from somebody so young. I wish I had that when I was his age.

But, yeah, he is really mature. He just keeps the same mindset. I talk to him all the time and just tell him things that I learned when I was younger. He just soaks everything in, and you can't ask for anything more from a teammate.

I'm sure the coaches can say the same thing. But it's awesome to see because he hits those shots and that's what he is capable of, so being able to just help build his confidence towards the end of this year and then obviously next year for him, it's going to be huge because he is going to be a really good player when it's all said and done.

**Q. Niels, you hit your first couple of shots and your teammates aren't making shots in the first half. Did you feel the need that, okay, I got to help, I have got to step my game up and hit some shots?**

NIELS LANE: I go out every game just to try to win, so the fact that my teammates weren't hitting shots didn't really affect how I played, because I was going to play hard regardless.

But we did pick it up in the second half, but it, unfortunately, wasn't enough.

**Q. I got to ask Colin. Did you think that last shot was going in, or was it just -- just holding your breath?**

COLIN CASTLETON: He got it off clean, and I was just like, dang, so...

I mean, when he shot it, he shot it with confidence, and I was, like, all right, I got to hit somebody. And then it

looked good, so I was just like, yeah.

**Q. What do you attribute the slow start to?**

MIKE WHITE: Another high-level defense in this league. It's pretty common in this league this year, and will continue moving forward. It's the best defensive league in the country. Our game plan from the tip was to hammer it to Colin as much as possible for obvious reasons.

We thought we had an advantage there. Tried it at their place, and we weren't as productive as we want to be with -- as we wanted to be and as productive as I thought we could be today with him getting deep touches, especially in the middle third where he wouldn't be as easily doubled.

We were pretty play call heavy early on, less equal opportunity, and more, hey, let's throw it to Colin and play around him. I thought they did a great job on Colin. I think it's that simple. If I could go back to noon, we probably would have moved it a little bit more and let Colin fall into a couple of post touches based out of our continuities than we did.

I thought they did a great job pushing him off the block, walling him up, high-level physicality. And then, obviously, any time he was off the blocks, the second defender was there by the time he caught the basketball.

**Q. You talked about the banged-up front quarter. How much did having Anthony be ineffective early and banged up as well and not having C.J., how much did that lower the ceiling for that advantage you talked about having in Colin?**

MIKE WHITE: It doesn't help. We got -- Ruj is banged up, of course, and we have three other front core guys that didn't play.

So what do you do? We have to get better in other areas. Guys have to step up. Niels Lane stepped up. Kowacie stepped up. Just didn't do enough. Just didn't do enough.

And I've said this in front of you, Graham, a bunch, and you sit here after a loss and talk about all the things that we didn't do well or we've got to get -- Texas A&M was terrific.

Are you kidding me? 9 of 17 from three, and the shots down the stretch, the shots at the end of shot clocks. Both teams deserved to win, I thought. It was one of those games, so we wish them well moving forward.

**Q. What was the explanation given on the out of bounds call there called with about 15, 16 seconds left? I don't know. Did they get one?**

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MIKE WHITE: No.

**Q. How did that affect -- where we're sitting, you can't really tell, but how did that affect the rest of the game for you in mindset-wise?**

MIKE WHITE: Mindset if it affected us negatively, then shame on us, because you have to move on to the next play.

**Q. Mike, I know that wasn't a typical game at all for Appleby. Was he okay physically? Was it just a rough game? What did you think of his game, and everything considered, I mean, how good has he been for you guys in his time there with you?**

MIKE WHITE: He has been really good, Bob, in our wins. I think he is fine physically. Just wasn't his day. He is as down as anybody. Just struggled to get it going. Credit A&M's defense.

**Q. When you say that the SEC is the toughest defensive league in the country, when you speak with your colleagues, coaching colleagues in other leagues, what do you think their general perception of SEC is this year?**

MIKE WHITE: I pretty much keep to my own, especially during the season. Talk to a couple of family members, couple of friends, but we're just so busy.

When you go out on the road recruiting is when you see a lot of these other coaches at different schools, and coming into this year the consensus is that our league continues to improve from top to bottom, continues to become more talented, and with length and athleticism and fan bases and facilities, all of it, all of these programs are elevating, of course.

And we've just got some really good defenses, I would say. We've got good offenses. We've got good this, we've got good that, but defensively it's hard to score on everybody in this league.

**Q. When you started with your opening comments, you talked about the team's resilience. In some ways does this afternoon feel like it encapsulates the entire season in terms of fighting and not quite getting to where you want to get to?**

MIKE WHITE: Absolutely. Yeah. A two-hour microcosm of the season. Ups, downs, a lack of execution for a couple of minute, an incredible fight for eight minutes, a really productive timeout, a span where we would lose a

little bit of focus or lose control of our emotions a little bit and start pouting about a certain call or what have you, and then leave everything we've got on the floor and come up just a little bit short.

But we've had four or five where we got the other ending and we came out on the right side. Unfortunately, we came out -- we've come out on the wrong side too many times.

**Q. Obviously, the first go-round with A&M in the regular season came down to a foul and a three-point play. This game comes down to a three-point shot. Obviously, you just said, right, some things haven't gone y'all's way this year. Sometimes it has. Is it harder to swallow these kind of losses because your team overcomes so much adversity that you kind of put yourself in and then you're that close and they just make a shot, and you try to defend it, and that's how it goes?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, we've had a ton of adversity too now that we didn't bring on ourselves, and these guys have continued to not make excuses, to fight, to work.

The NCAA won't allow it, but if I call practice tonight at 10:00, these guys will show up at 10:00 and play as hard as they can play. It's a really good group from that standpoint.

But, yeah, we've had too many adversities in-game too, which are part of -- they're on us, you know? We had a couple of close-outs in the first half where we get up -- get a hand up late when the scout is that guy has to bounce the ball, and that's just not quite good enough to be a championship level possession, championship level defense.

We struggle. Our defensive numbers aren't what they should be, what they've been. Our defensive rebounding numbers have killed us all year. Just a couple of examples there. A couple of live ball turnovers today that where are we going with the basketball? You get 18 turnovers. If we have 15, you win a game. You might win the game with 17 of them.

There's just -- there's just a fine line between winning and losing.

**Q. Kowacic is out of his mind there at the end of regulation and even into overtime.**

MIKE WHITE: Yep.

**Q. And then he just doesn't touch the ball very much**

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**after that. Is that A&M designing something there and said, we're not going to let him beat us, or is that basketball IQ with guys taking hero shots when they should be giving him the ball?**

MIKE WHITE: No, our shot, Mark, I'm anxious to go back and look at it. I will. We're not going to play for a few days, so I'll be looking at it here in an hour or two.

But I don't know that we just took bad shots in overtime. Who do you play through, right? App was out and he comes back in. Phlan has it going. He has been really good late game. We've got an all-league big.

We called a ball screen dive, middle ball screen dive situation that we anticipated them blitzing. They blitzed one. We threw it to Colin. He fanned it out to Wacie. If we faced, we had somebody under the rim.

I think that led to one of -- maybe his last open one that he missed, if I'm not mistaken, and then they went into switching ball screens, and they switched it.

It was more of taking what the defense gave us. Kowacie wasn't scoring necessarily out of actions. He was scoring off of continuity and guys, whether it was a driving kick or playing through Colin, a kick-out from the post, an offensive rebound kick-out transition.

We hadn't really just said, hey, let's run a play to get Kowacie a shot all season long. When you look back, could you have done it in his biggest game? Yeah, you could have, but it would have been a possession too where we didn't send Myreon off a ball screen or didn't put Phlan in space in the middle court or we didn't throw it to Colin at the elbow or the block. You could go back.

Because we lost, every play that I called during the game, I would -- I would like to call differently. I just can't go back to noon.

Thanks, guys.

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