

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 11, 2022

Arkansas Razorbacks

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Coach Eric Musselman

Au'Diese Toney

J.D. Notae

Chris Lykes

Postgame Press Conference



LSU 67-Arkansas 79

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I thought the first half, obviously, a battle of two great defensive teams. Not two good defensive teams. Two great defensive teams. I thought that Chris Lykes's push at the end of the first half was really, really huge for us momentum-wise to go up with a short, small lead.

Once we got the regroup and talked about some of the coverages and change to playing a little bit more on the side than in the middle of the floor, we went out to that 13-1 run. And I don't know what it turned into after the 13-1, but really focused group to end the half and really focused group the first couple of minutes in the second half, and we shot the ball much, much better in the second half.

Q. I was going to ask the couple of guys -- Au'Diese, your ankle must have been feeling pretty good. How does it feel and what was it like to play like that? And the dunk at the end, I guess you just got excited. Could you talk about that?

THE MODERATOR: Is that all for the same player?

Q. All for Au'Diese.

AU'DIESE TONEY: It felt good to be back out there with the guys. Especially missing that Tennessee game. It was just -- my ankle was feeling good. I was going with the momentum and just having fun out there.

Q. I don't think LSU liked that dunk very much. I know you're not in the business of doing things LSU likes,

but did you just feel like, hey, man, I'm going to do it, it's right there? What was the thought process?

AU'DIESE TONEY: It still was time on the clock, so I just played until the buzzer went off.

Q. Maybe to J.D. and Chris, what did you think of what Au'Diese did and how did that help y'all?

J.D. NOTAE: We needed Au'Diese, honestly. He brings so much defensively and offensively. And just his energy. He just going to bring it every single time, and we -- he brought a lot of energy today. First half he kept us going with his offensive rebound. Just being there, finishing, and he kept going.

CHRIS LYKES: Kind of what J.D. said. We missed his versatility in the Tennessee game, and he showed why he is really important to our team today.

Q. The question is for you. Just curious how you felt during warmups today and just an overall thought on your game and the impact that you had?

CHRIS LYKES: It's March. Important game. I know the guys starting off, they came with great energy, and my goal was just to sustain it and come out there and pressure the guards.

I felt like they were tired because we pick up the ball, we pressure them. I wanted just to keep going with that, and it worked out for us today.

Q. J.D. and Au'Diese, can you comment on Chris's game and the lift he gave you off the bench?

J.D. NOTAE: Electric. He was just being Chris Lykes out there, honestly. Just speed, being aggressive. Just killer mindset, and we needed that.

AU'DIESE TONEY: Piggyback on what J.D. said. Chris is just that dog. He has got that dog in him, especially coming off the bench like what he did today and the last couple of games. He just had the momentum going when he came in, the whole momentum change, and he kept

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that foot on the gas.

We needed that from him.

Q. J.D., last year LSU knocked you guys out of the SEC tournament. Was that in the back of your mind today and wanting to knock them out this year?

J.D. NOTAE: Yeah, for sure. Just remembering that last play when I turned it over last year, that just stuck with me too. Just wanted to beat them every single time we play them.

Q. Au'Diese, I know in the last LSU game the offensive glass was a huge kind of problem for you guys, and then you dominated on that front today. What was the key to that for you guys?

AU'DIESE TONEY: Coach was just preaching to us in practices that we got to beat them on the glass. You have to win this game. If they beat us on the glass, they're going to stay in the game or get a chance to win, and we just took that and came out with the boards.

Q. Maybe this is for J.D. and Au'Diese. No offense, Chris. LSU, after they won yesterday, said they were real anxious to play you guys. Understand the way you swept them. But you guys beat them three times and they're obviously an NCAA tournament team. How does that feel? And did you realize that they said, hey, we want another crack at Arkansas?

J.D. NOTAE: Yeah, we heard all of it. We wanted to use that as our own motivation. Like, they want to play us, so we're going to bring it too, so that was our momentum -- I mean, our view of it.

We wanted to come out here and win, and that's what we did. We know they got a hot net, so we wanted to take it.

AU'DIESE TONEY: Just like he said, we had all the film and just kept watching the interviews they had. They just said they want us bad, so we just got locked in and came out there and played.

Q. You guys are one win away from an SEC championship, but I wondered, a couple of days ago when you were on that yacht, were y'all scared at all when Muss was captaining the ship? Chris.

CHRIS LYKES: I've got faith in Coach Muss. He told me he was going to take care of the boat, and it was a good environment out there, so... (Off microphone.)

Q. A&M, they're obviously hot. They beat Florida and

Auburn. What are your thoughts on two pretty tough games? What are your thoughts on playing A&M, maybe Chris and J.D.

CHRIS LYKES: A&M is real gritty. I've played against buzz and V Tech a number of times so I understand what he likes to do in terms of dynamics of the team.

But we got to be ready to play. They're going to bring it. They're coming off a huge win, so just like today, we got to be ready to play.

J.D. NOTAE: Just to piggyback off what Chris said, they just had a big-time win and they're going -- they're trying to get to the championship just like we trying to get to the championship, so it's going to be a dog fight.

We just have to come out ready to play.

Q. Coach, 22 seconds left in the first half. Coach Wade gets that technical foul. I believe the Hogs 16-0 after that. How big of a turning point was that in the game?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I think it was -- that's two points or whatever. I've gotten a few too, so, I mean, I don't think that was -- other than the two free-throws we got, so I don't ever really say much about somebody else getting them, because I probably get more than anybody.

But, like I said, I thought that Chris's pull-up jumper at the end of the half was really, really important for us momentum-wise.

I thought the steals that Chris had in the first half were momentum-type swings.

And then, like I said, at halftime they did a great job, our team did, of making a couple of adjustments on where the ball was placed in pick and rolls, and I think that that led to some clean, easy looks.

Then even when they tried to trap, they left Trey Wade. I thought it was -- we had told Trey to dive to the rim, and he did. And then he made a great pass for a dunk to Au'Diese.

So just at halftime we were able to kind of take a deep breath, relax, and discuss some of the things, and got great player feedback as well.

Q. Coach, Chris has been up and down this season, and then pretty up the last couple of games, so just what's been going right for him as of late?



ERIC MUSSELMAN: Who is that, Chris Lykes?

Q. Chris Lykes.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Chris is -- you know, he is a dynamic player that when we talked to him during the recruiting process and then we were behind closed doors, I felt that there was going to be five games this year where he just came in and dynamically changed the whole complexion.

I didn't know what five games, obviously, or where it was going to be, but we don't win that -- I think it was in the Northern Iowa game -- without his big performance, and certainly today.

Obviously, LSU, when you look at their national steals, where they rank, where their defense ranks across the country, we needed Chris to be an extra ball handler.

You know, he was patient. He wasn't the first one off the bench; I don't think he was the second one off the bench; he came in and did a phenomenal job for us.

Q. (Off microphone - regarding Au'Diese.) ...and did you expect him to put up such significant numbers today?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, I thought the training staff and the doctors did a great job. We were concerned that he couldn't play at Tennessee because we kind of felt like he might have the possibility.

He had already taken an X-ray prior to the Tennessee game. It came up where there was nothing, but then when he had the pain prior to that game, again, our medical staff was phenomenal.

As soon as they landed, they did an MRI. There was nothing on the MRI, so it was basically like a really bad bruise right around the fifth metatarsal. It really wasn't even an ankle.

I always want guys to practice, but they held him out probably a day longer on Wednesday not practicing, which was really, really smart. And then Thursday he was able to shoot and run up and down and felt really good.

Then before the game, you know, how do you feel? Went through shoot-around today. It was great. He was not in the starting unit even yesterday. Made the decision to start him once he said that he was fully healthy.

And I talked to the medical people, and if it was a ligament or something, there could be further damage, then we probably wouldn't have played him, quite frankly. But

because it was a bruise and just kind of pain tolerant. He wanted to play, and we wanted him to play.

Q. I wanted to ask about Jaylin Williams. There was a play. It was chaotic late in the second half. He had the ball near midcourt almost, and he found a teammate at the basket for a layup. What sort of calming influence does he have out on the court?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: He is phenomenal. We just played a 40-minute game against, again, as high a pressure team as you can play against.

And as you all watched -- who handled the ball against the press as much as anybody? It was Jaylin, quite frankly. He was back there with one of our point guards the whole game as a trigger man, and his decision-making, his ability to see over the defense, his ability not to try to make home run plays.

He is a very, very safe passer, and he has high basketball IQ. In reality, we play with a point center. We have an extra point guard out on the floor, and of late we've -- we did it a couple of times in the last two games.

We did not today where he actually brings the ball up the floor and runs the point guard and our guards are running off the baseline, because we have great trust in him with the ball.

Q. Coach Musselman, what do you think about holding this event in Tampa in this arena? And, also, I wanted to ask you, and this may intersect with your college career, but do you have any memories of being here with your dad and the Tampa Bay Thrillers?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: For me it was -- it's awesome, obviously. I mean, I have a lot of friends that still live in Sarasota, which is where my dad's home was. Obviously, coaching at the Bay Front Arena, which is 27 minutes away, or whatever.

Yeah, I made a lot of great memories. I was mad at Coach Calipari because he drove down to Sarasota to see Dickie V, and I didn't get an invite. I told I could have made that drive blindfolded.

But I love it. I got rehab on my shoulder today out by the pool for an hour. That's a lot better than getting rehab in a hotel room. Our guys, you know, to be able to go out on a boat and be able to experience the weather that we are, I think it's awesome.

Q. Eric, first of all, what do you think about being 3-0 against a really good team like LSU? And then after

that, can you give your thoughts on playing A&M again? What do you expect? Obviously, they've already played 85 minutes because they had O.T., and you guys I think would be fresher.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: One of the things that we talked -- a lot of times you pick and choose what you tell your team. I mean, I have a lot of trust in these guys, so I have been really honest with them about the Net for the last five days.

I've been very honest with them about what a potential loss could do today and what a potential win could do, because of the body of work that LSU has done during the course of the regular season, so this -- it was a huge win to be able to beat them.

I don't know what the Net numbers say. I don't know. We're probably still behind them, although we beat them three times. How that works, do not ask me. I'm not a spokesman for the Net. It's whatever in my opinion, but hopefully there's a semblance when the selection -- if their Net is higher than ours, they recognize that we did beat them three times, once at their place, once on a neutral floor, and then once in Bud Walton.

Q. Your thoughts on playing A&M. You split two pretty close games. Just kind of -- and the fact you guys should be a little fresher, I would think.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: A&M, tremendous respect for Buzz Williams as a coach. He has a group of guys that, much like us, they got hot at the end of the year. They've done a phenomenal job of late of playing really, really good basketball.

When they went through their losing streak they were able to work their way through it, much like we did, and so we know we're playing a team that's playing with great confidence.

We're going to play a team that believes they can win. We're playing against a team that is fighting for their NCAA lives tomorrow, and so we're going to get their best effort because they're really, really competitive and a tough-minded team just like their coaching staff.

Thank you.

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