

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Arkansas Razorbacks

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Eric Musselman

Davonte Davis

Anthony Black

Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas 76, Auburn 73

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Arkansas. We'll begin and ask Coach Musselman for some general thoughts on the game.

Coach.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Just really proud of our team for leading 37 minutes of the 40-minute game. We wanted our shot diet tonight to be by paint points. 48 of those. We felt rebounding, especially defensive rebounding, would be the key to the win.

I thought out-rebounding a very, very good rebounding team in Auburn by 18, I thought our entire team did a great job, led by Devo's 10 rebounds, nine of them on the defensive end. He was also assigned to Wendell Green, which meant he was out on the floor, guarding at the three-point line, yet he still seemed to track down nine defensive rebounds.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. What did you think of Nick's shot? What was the plan there? Devo, when y'all both answer that, I thought you were on Green on the last shot. What did you see on the last shot by Green at the end?

DAVONTE DAVIS: Yeah, we believe in Nick, of course. We know Nick can make tough shots like that. He's a scorer. We believe in him in situations like that.

On the last shot by Green, it was pretty open. It was a good play actually. But luckily Nick closed out. We

practiced on that. I think he did a pretty good job on closing out, contesting the shot, made it go short. I think he did two great plays on the offensive end and defensive end.

ANTHONY BLACK: I mean, early in the game Nick wasn't really scoring like he usually does. We were telling him to keep going, second half they're going to drop.

When it came down to it, I think we had a couple empty chips in a row. I think we had a couple turnovers. I missed a layup.

We trust in him. He's one of the best scorers in college. He made a good move and made a big shot.

On the back end, Devo was chasing, but he also helped contest the last shot to get the stop to win the game.

Q. Do you take extra pride in the hustle stats?

DAVONTE DAVIS: Yeah, for sure. That's what our team is built off of, the small things such as getting on the floor, getting offensive rebounds, extra possessions.

I feel like if this team do that as a collective group, it will be hard to beat us, for sure.

Q. I think you were up 16 to four on second-chance points. What did you think of the rebounding and second-chance points?

ANTHONY BLACK: I mean, second-chance points are big because we know in March a lot of games are going to come down to a couple points, the last two minutes.

We just got to do the small stuff like that, just make plays like that, try to get any edge we can.

But yeah, I mean, that was a big key to the game for us, offensive rebounding, second-chance points. We did a pretty solid job of that.

DAVONTE DAVIS: Yeah, for sure. I think Jordan Walsh really helped us on the offensive boards, when he get in

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there and crashing the boards right behind his man, when his man is going to try to offensive rebound off of their misses.

Also with a couple other guys such as Makhi, he did a really good job on the offensive end, getting offensive boards as well.

Just a collective group, if we do that, like I said, it will be hard to beat us because we can extra possession which equals extra points.

Q. What do you think about the A&M?

ANTHONY BLACK: I mean, they're a really good team. They play really hard. We have to go back and watch and see what worked, what didn't work, come out with a good game plan like usual and execute the game plan, try to play harder and more physical.

DAVONTE DAVIS: Yeah, just like AB said, looking at what we did wrong and fixing those small things, executing towards the end of the game. I think that was a huge emphasis for us playing A&M twice previous to tomorrow.

I think if we take care of the ball, because they're a great defensive team, I think it will be a tough battle because A&M is a good team. I think we'll pull a win off.

Q. Anthony, in the second half you slipped, came up hobbling. Are you okay?

ANTHONY BLACK: Yeah, I'm good, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach.

Q. You forced three turnovers before they were able to make a shot from the field. Was that a point of emphasis for you?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, we felt like we had to get off to a good start defensively. Before the game, we do have a lot of young guys, we have a lot of guys that have not played in SEC Tournament play, big games like this.

We just talked about the two things that you control, rebounding and defense. No matter how nervous you are, no matter how much angst you have, it should never affect your defensive rebounding or defensive position or defensive intensity.

I thought start the game, maybe a little bit of angst offensively. Obviously the 19 turnovers is of great concern. But I thought from an effort standpoint we were really

good. I thought we played with great physicality. I was worried a little bit about the physicality as well.

I thought our young guys especially stepped up and did a great job physically. Jordan Walsh in particular. I thought Makhi Mitchell did a really good job, Kamani Johnson gave us great minutes from a physical standpoint, as well.

Q. How would you describe the sequence with Nick?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Obviously Nick, the biggest thing in basketball is when your play dies, who can go manufacture their own shot. Obviously for us in the past it's been Mason Jones, Isaiah Joe, JD Notae, guys like that. We have missed Nick in that exact type of situation.

We have lost a lot of close games. We just talked about this game has its own theme, its own identity. Forget what's happened in the past.

Nick read the defense well, was really aggressive, as well. He wanted the ball in his hands. I thought our guys did a good job of finding him and not rushing a shot. We rushed a shot about a minute and a half before that.

For a freshman to make that shot in an SEC Tournament game, that's a big shot.

Q. I wanted to hear your thoughts about the matchup tomorrow against A&M.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Well, we played 'em twice. First of all, they're really well-coached. We as a staff have incredible respect for Buzz Williams. He does a great job.

They're physical. Their up-front guys, Coleman and Marble, rebound the basketball. They score points in the paint. Obviously they have two-star players in Wade Taylor and Radford. Those guys, I actually love watching 'em play. Radford has incredible toughness. In my opinion might be as versatile as any player in the league because he can guard one through five basically, for sure one through four.

Then Dennis, he's a really great complementary guy to the up-front physicality of Marble-Coleman and then the backcourt of Taylor and Radford.

Q. Alabama has been a big story on and off the court this season. What do you tell your guys about guns? Do you have a gun policy?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: For sure we have a gun -- guns are prohibited on our campus unless you're certified by the state. The expectation for all student-athlete is to follow

the university policy.

Q. In a tournament setting like this, you got a quick turnaround in between games. Do you think a turnaround like this could help you the week before the second round, for instance, where you play two days after?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I mean, I'd love another five days to prepare, but that doesn't happen.

We've been in these positions, meaning our staff, in the past. Not many of these players, other than Davonte Davis and Kamani and Cade Abrogast and Lawson Blake.

The background of being in the NBA, getting ready for quick playoff turnarounds, 82 games, playing them back-to-back-to-back games, you can't give your guys too much. Obviously A&M, they're going to be more well-rested. We understand that. They played themselves into that position, where they're going to have more rest because of what they did during the regular season.

Now we have to get back, trainer has to do a good job, guys have to get in ice baths. Then we have to not overload the guys but give them some themes and things that we have to try to take away defensively.

We're going to have to do some on the floor, but mostly in the video room and meeting room. But we do have A&M film going in the locker room right now, I promise you that.

Q. Your team had 48 bench points tonight. How much of an impact did that have?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: We changed the starting lineup tonight and just talked to the guys about there's really not a starting group. I mean, we're a team. We're playing in post-season play, which it's our playoff, so to speak. You can't worry about anything but being really supportive of your teammates when you're not in the game. Then when you're in the game, play your role that's been established throughout the course of the season.

I thought Kamani gave us great physicality. Picked up a couple fouls. That was probably predicted that he was going to go in there and bang around. We didn't freak out when he picked up the two. We kind of told him that's what we wanted you to do, go in there and mix it up.

Then Makhi came in and did a great job. He's only not started one game this year. I thought he came in and was fantastic. That's what you want. Jordan Walsh started a lot of games for us. His minutes were incredible, to be honest with you. For a freshman to come in off the bench.

Like I said, he started most of the year, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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