

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Auburn Tigers

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Bruce Pearl

K.D. Johnson

Wendell Green

Postgame Press Conference



WENDELL GREEN: I think they was just beating us on the ball screen, our ball screen defense, just out-rebounding us. They beat us the beginning of the first half, the beginning of the second half. I think that's kind of where we lost the game, so...

I think just the offensive rebounding and our ball screen defense.

Q. When do you feel like you guys didn't have enough energy to start off those halves? What was the difference for you to pick it up and make that comeback in the second half?

WENDELL GREEN: Yeah, I think our energy was low, I think, to start the game off. I think, yeah, that's the main thing, our energy was low at the end of the halves.

Q. K.D., what did you guys do well to make the comeback?

K.D. JOHNSON: Basically just get more physical, be the ones that hit first in the second half. Just play with a little more energy. We came out a little sluggish. We needed to get that part up, start hitting shots.

We made shots, but we came out down in the end.

Q. K.D., on the last play, what was the plan? Try to get you downhill?

K.D. JOHNSON: Just try to get me downhill, make a play. Kind of slipped on the end. They just called a timeout, draw up a good play, just didn't go in. I live with that night and day. He's still my teammate, so, you know, that's all good.

Q. K.D., what did you think of Chris Moore's performance tonight?

K.D. JOHNSON: He a warrior. Everybody not going to get him around the country. It don't matter if he playing or he not playing, he's going to have a way to affect the game. He was the main reason we started our energy up. He got

Arkansas 76, Auburn 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with Auburn. We'll ask Coach Pearl for some questions on the game. Coach.

BRUCE PEARL: We're disappointed in the outcome. Kids battled back both halves. Lesser character team I don't think would have. We were physically -- I think physically they bothered us with their athleticism and their length. As a result, we got dominated on the boards, which made it really difficult for us to win the basketball game.

But proud of our kids. Thought the bench played really well, gave us a real chance, which you have to do in tournament play to get great numbers from your bench like that. Could have put us in position to be okay, get that win, be okay for the next night.

That's it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. K.D., how good does it feel even in the loss to come back and bounce back this year in the SEC Tournament, play so well tonight?

K.D. JOHNSON: It felt good for myself. But on the team standpoint, I really wanted to get this win because I lost last year in the same way. I wanted to get farther this year. That was my mission, and I failed.

We just on to the next.

Q. Wendell, what was the key at the beginning of the second half when Arkansas came out and started on that 7-0 run?



on us pretty hard as a team without any coaches doing it. He kind of picked us up in a big way.

He got a couple steals, fouls, free throws. Yeah, he came up major this game.

Q. What goes through your mind when Allen hits that shot to give you the lead?

K.D. JOHNSON: Just kind of get a stop. Everybody get on the same page and slow down, get a stop, not just be everywhere so they can come down to hit a shot. They came down and made a shot, a clutch one. We'll live with that one.

WENDELL GREEN: Just get a stop.

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

Q. What did you feel about the effort the guys came out with early to start both halves?

BRUCE PEARL: You guys, listen, we talk about as far as their effort is concerned, this is ridiculous about their effort.

Arkansas came out with great energy, played really well. Had nothing to do with our effort. You know what I mean? Arkansas jumped on us, played with great effort, energy. It had nothing to do with our lack of effort. Do you think the guys just came out and...

Give Arkansas the credit. Our kids did not start the first half or the second half well.

Q. What is the mindset and mentality as you head into Selection Sunday? There's no more tomorrows promised after this game.

BRUCE PEARL: We talked to the guys about where we'd be potentially seeded, what it would look like. Talked about what are you going to do tonight and tomorrow, traveling back, practicing on Saturday. Find out where we're going Sunday.

Talked about we were going to be somewhere between 8, 9, 10 would be my guess. What the first game would look like, what the second game could potentially look like against the one and the two.

Sort of set the table for them a little bit and tell them, Look, there are 260-something teams that are done and aren't playing in this tournament. Auburn is one of the teams that's playing for a national championship.

I told them I was proud of them. They put themselves in that position. We went through the things that we didn't do, the lack of physicality. Arkansas's athleticism, toughness. Where we got beat. We got beat on not the effort. There were other things. Big guards, very physical. We didn't match their physicality.

But told them I was proud of them.

Q. K.D. talked briefly about this being the second year you guys have gone one-and-done in the tournament. For you personally, when you watch your players, what are your emotions? What do you feel as your players talk about the heartbreak, the feeling of losing?

BRUCE PEARL: Arkansas played really well, so...

Q. K.D. had 13 points in three minutes in the second half. Dumb question, but how huge was he for you guys to make it?

BRUCE PEARL: K.D. is one of our most athletic players from the standpoint of speed, quickness, power. Even though he's undersized. His athleticism showed up for Auburn in a big way out there on the floor.

I thought -- K.D. alluded to Chris Moore. You guys asked a question about how important Chris Moore is. It's a great question. He is important to us. He lit into the bench a little bit there in the second half. I called timeout to get us organized.

We came out, we got a good look, then we got a couple stops. Again, we made two really good runs in both halves, including taking the lead late. Like the kids said, all we really needed was that stop at the end. I thought we got fouled at the end also. K.D. took it to the basket, he got fouled.

Q. Some of the guys in the locker room are talking about Arkansas's guards rebounding. How much of a factor is that when they're crashing from the perimeter?

BRUCE PEARL: It's huge. They got 6'8", Black is a terrific player. I think giving him credit for crashing, but our guys didn't do a good enough job of putting a body on him. I don't recall us getting a foul checking him out. That wasn't an issue. We should have been more physical keeping him off the boards.

Q. What is your favorite Chris Moore story?

BRUCE PEARL: I think the fact that he bleeds in games

more than any player I've coached. Just blood on the floor, man. He's just a hard-playing dude, a great kid, great teammate.

I tell you what, if you could just sort of get a picture of Chris Moore and say that is Auburn basketball, that represents Auburn basketball, I'd be okay with that.

Q. Alabama obviously has been a big national story. What do you talk to your guys about guns?

BRUCE PEARL: We talk about -- as a basketball coach, we talk about lots of things for them as student-athletes. That's our biggest job. Some of it's basketball, but some of it's just life in general. We have conversations about everything.

Q. When Flanigan gets the bucket, your last possession, what happened there, with K.D. coming down?

BRUCE PEARL: I'm not sure exactly what the sequence of things went. I think Al knocked a three down, gave us a one-point lead. Maybe it was Smith or somebody that got a two-point basket. We were down one. I thought when K.D. came down the floor, he got fouled.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRUCE PEARL: The last possession, what we did was with 11 seconds, maybe, I thought if I could get the ball to K.D., get him down quickly, we'd take the two. But they did a good job of walling him off. I knew I was going to call timeout to set up a three ball if I couldn't get the quick -- we didn't get a quick two.

We got a good look.

Q. Can you talk about the quality minutes from Dylan Cardwell.

BRUCE PEARL: I thought Dylan's second rotation was great. His first wasn't. He was tentative. I thought his second rotation was really good.

Again, I thought the bench, you look at the numbers of our bench, K.D. coming off the bench, Chris off the bench, Dylan off the bench, Tre. I thought they all did really well. Again, gave us a chance, when you're playing four games in four days potentially, we just didn't take advantage of it.

Q. Another game where you were down big, come back, have a chance at the end. What does it say about your team that you keep swinging like this?

BRUCE PEARL: Man, they do. They do. Lesser character teams would have quit, laid down. This team just hasn't. I think they like each other. I think they also are grateful for Auburn. Auburn, once again, shows up here in Nashville.

I feel so badly about our fans, the fact that we're not going to get to play in front of them again for another couple days. I feel badly about that. A lot of families are here, went through a lot of expense to get here. We're disappointed that we let them down.

Our guys feel that way. We all do. We're grateful for the support that we get. Arkansas being a really, really good team, to catch them in the first round.

You got to beat good teams to win in post-season. That certainly is as good as you're going to see.

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