

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Vanderbilt Commodores

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Jerry Stackhouse

Jordan Wright

Ezra Manjon

Postgame Press Conference

Vanderbilt 77, LSU 68

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with Vanderbilt. We'll ask Coach Stackhouse for some comments on the game.

Coach.

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I thought that was a great game tonight. Again, our guys came out and set the tone early. They played last night. We wanted to come out and bring a lot of pace to the game. I thought we brought that.

We were physical and we moved the ball and we shared the ball. We were able to get a little separation early. We knew they were going to battle back. A tough team. A lot of size. KJ Williams is a load, but I thought our guys competed for 40 minutes, and that's how we secured the win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. After what happened in Baton Rouge a few weeks ago, anything extra beating LSU after that?

JORDAN WRIGHT: For sure, for sure. They ended our streak. We had a five-game winning streak. We wanted to extend that. Could have been nine or ten.

It's a tournament game. That's what we're playing for, keep our hopes alive. They were in the way. We didn't want to put any added pressure on ourselves about who the team was playing. We wanted to accomplish our goals, winning this tournament.

ERZA MANJON: Yeah, I agree with everything he said. We feel like we owed them one. We wanted to come out



here, play aggressive, play our game, just be us.

Q. Jordan, you had 15 rebounds tonight. How important was it for you to get those boards in?

JORDAN WRIGHT: For sure. I mean, the last two games we got pounded on the glass. Wanted to make sure tonight that wasn't the case. Just trying to do my part, put on whatever hat is needed for this team. Tonight it was rebounding. I just want keep that going for us.

Q. You lost Liam at Kentucky and still won that game. How much confidence does that give you going into tomorrow night?

ERZA MANJON: Yeah, it just gives us a lot of confidence. We know Liam was a big piece to our team. We know how many pieces we have. We know QMB and Lee Dort are dominant forces. They do little things that help us win. We're pretty confident. We're confident against any team, so we're just going to go out there and play our game.

JORDAN WRIGHT: Yeah, I agree with what he said. Liam, the presence he brought for us was great. QMB has stepped up, taken advantage of this lead role. We definitely miss Liam, but we're going to play with the guys that we have and go forward and try to win games.

Q. Jordan, with the NCAA tournament numbers and everything, how much are you guys talking about that, studying it, saying if that happens...

JORDAN WRIGHT: Our goal is to win this tournament. Wherever that lies, whatever happens after that. We get the automatic bid if we win the tournament. That's our goal. We don't get into this team loses, that team wins. We just want to go out and win this tournament.

Q. Ezra, I know Paul Lewis is a guy you worked with a lot. What have you seen from him recently?

ERZA MANJON: Man, his growth, just being comfortable in the game. I'm sure you guys can see it. What did he have, like 11 points tonight? He's just confident. He's a hooper. That's all you can really say about him. He goes



on and competes. We love Paul Lewis. He's getting better day by day.

Q. What did it mean to do it in Nashville?

JORDAN WRIGHT: It's incredible. A great feeling. I feel like we're at home tonight. The gym was loud. A lot of fans here. The students were great, gave us a lot of energy, especially late, when they went on a run early in the second half.

It's great having it back in Nashville. We had it last year in Tampa, kind of missed that home feeling aspect of it. But the students were great. We really appreciate them coming out as well as the fans.

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

Q. Jordan mentioned the rebounding struggles in the last two games. Tonight was a lot better. What did you see from your bigs?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I just thought it was a conscious effort from everybody. Q had five, Tyrin had five, our guards really had to help out. Ez had three, and Jordan was all over the boards. I thought he was good on the offensive boards as well, having three. 12 big defensive boards. He's capable of doing that. He wears a lot of hats for us. I think when he's not focusing on scoring or assisting or anything, just playing the game. You don't really have to call a lot of plays for Jordan. He's a guy that's just going to find a way to make things happen. He's been doing that in a positive light for the last four or five games. He's on a good stretch right now.

Q. After KJ Williams did what he did in the first matchup, did you approach him any differently this time?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Yeah, we did change the matchup on him a little bit. We used more of a four man on him. Those guys know how to shore up a little bit more. Our five men not only can play in coverage. I thought Q did a good job. They were guarding him for a stretch as well.

He's a tough cover a guy that has that type of size, comfortable on the block. He can post up. Coach uses him in a number of ways that makes it difficult to prepare for him. He's a good rebounder as well. They had five offensive rebounds tonight, you know what I'm saying?

College career coming to an end. He had a great career. He had a great season this year for his team.

Q. How unique is it to play Kentucky so soon after playing them last time? Do you think there's any advantage for either side?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: We're both going to be prepared. We played each other a number of times over the years. We kind of know some of what they're going to do. They know what we're going to do.

It's going to be a battle of competitors. Guys got to come out and perform. There's not going to be any tricks where we're going to come out with some miracle game plan that we're going to beat them with, or they're going to beat us with.

It's just going to be two teams that have to compete. You got to come out and make plays, make shots, defend. Oscar presents a load for us. We had a load tonight. We dealt with a load a few games ago. We know what we're dealing with there.

We just got to come out and battle and compete, and we'll feel good about that if we come out and do those things.

Q. When you guys beat Kentucky, you spoke briefly with your relationship with Cal. Elaborate on that a little bit.

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I think a lot of it is just the respect for his longevity, his tenure. He's one of those guys, I mean, I watched the "30 for 30" on him. I think I saw how he battled, how he cares about his players, cares about his guys. Kind of changed my perspective on him a little bit just from watching that, digging a little deeper in it. You kind of see.

You hear noise all the time about people, but until you kind of dig deep and kind of pull the layers back a little bit. That was fun to see. I kind of felt like I was in his shoes a little bit when he was playing Chaney and those guys, trying to beat them. You know what I'm saying?

Kicked our ass for quite a few times, and we finally got a chance to knock them off. I saw some parallels there. Just when I saw him this summer, we were out recruiting. I just made my way over to him. I think he was getting in the car. I just told him I respected him, watched the "30 for 30," had another level of respect for him after really not just seeing Cal and Kentucky, all this and that, the kings of the SEC. But able to see who he is, how he cares about his players, saw some parallels there.

Q. Last game Kentucky played without their point guard. They also did that a lot of the second half

against you guys. Is there a special way you prepare when there's uncertainty about the kind of lineups you run?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: They got a talented team. Throughout their roster, talent has never been an issue. I think there are other guys that stepped up the very next game. They went out and I think they beat Arkansas. Reeves had a big game. We were able to contain Reeves a little bit in our game. We know what he's capable of. We're going to get a lot of attention, as well.

Again, we know -- Wallace, whoever, we don't worry about that who is. We know we have to compete, play well, pay attention to our game plan, execute our assignments on both ends of the floor to give ourselves the best chance to win. If we do that, we feel like we can beat anybody.

Q. Curious about Ezra. I'm not sure anybody in the country can stay in front of him. What kind of issues does he create?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I think it starts on the defensive end. He really initiates our defense, the pressure that he puts on the ball, his ability to get through screens, get under screens. It helps our bigs out tremendously.

He's just a great kid, just a great person. I mean, I'm glad that he's one of the leaders of our team. He talks about Paul Lewis, he's helped Paul Lewis tremendously this year. Having to go up against that every day, that type of speed and tenacity on the defensive end has really improved his game and given him the confidence to come out and get 11 points in his first SEC game.

I think you can attribute a lot of that to not just Ez but to all of our older guys. They've been around, they understand what it's about to be a part of this program, be a part of this system, and they're really the gatekeepers of this program.

Q. Tyrin Lawrence shot 67 from the field tonight, had 22 points. How excited does it make you to see that out of a guy that you have such a good relationship with, and how do you feel about the future of your backcourt?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I mean, it was great. Tyrin was aggressive coming downhill, shooting the basketball, getting to the free-throw line. I thought he was really good defensively, too. He was a key matchup against Miller tonight. Miller was 0-9, 0-6 from three. I thought he brought it on both ends.

He's special when he's able to get downhill, when he's focused. Not only makes plays for himself, but makes

plays for his teammates as well.

Hopefully we can get our rest, come back with the same urgency. I think that's the key. That's what I always talk about Jordan, urgency, him and Tyrin playing with urgency. When they do that, it feeds the other guys. Ez always has urgency. When those three are all clicking on the same system, same cylinders, then everybody kind of picks up their game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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