

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

LSU Tigers

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Matt McMahon

KJ Williams

Trae Hannibal

Postgame Press Conference

Vanderbilt 77, LSU 68

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to start with LSU. We'll ask Coach McMahon for some opening comments.

Coach.

MATT McMAHON: Thank you. I'll start with just a couple comments here on Vanderbilt. Congratulations to them on the win tonight. I don't know their staff great, but just following them after their loss against Alabama back January 31st, kind of a line-in-the-sand moment for their team.

Credit to them for coming together. I think 9-1 since that game. They've always been really good on the offensive end of the floor. I think their defensive improvement since that game has really allowed them to go on this great run and get in the NCAA tournament conversation. That's a tremendous credit to their players and Coach Stackhouse.

Secondly, to lose a player of Liam Robbins' caliber, really have not missed a beat these last three games. That's to take nothing away from Robbins. Deservedly an All-SEC player. Again, just admire what they've been able to accomplish here in February and March.

Finally for me, sitting here with KJ Williams, just been a tremendous honor for me to have the opportunity to coach him over these last five years. He's what college basketball is all about. He's what coaching is all about. Incredibly thankful to have that opportunity.

I thought our players as a whole, we came down this week, came here in Nashville, I thought we competed. I thought we were more connected on the defensive end of the floor



for the most part.

But unfortunately credit to Vanderbilt's defense, we were unable to score the ball efficiently enough today to give ourselves a chance to win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. KJ, y'all were down eight at halftime. You came out and scored the first seven to get your team back in it. What were they trying to do to you differently with Robbins out tonight?

KJ WILLIAMS: I think they came out with their four man guarding me, a much smaller player than last game. I think they had Liam on me mostly the whole game.

I still came out pretty successful, but it was tough for me to go out and get back because most of the time I'm always having to screen, then they'll switch back somebody else on me. It's hard for somebody else to come back and just go score.

Q. Trae, you got back in the game, had a chance at tying it. Vanderbilt went on a 12-0 run after that. Did they force their will on you?

TRAE HANNIBAL: Yeah, they kind of was playing hard the whole game. They was just out-toughing us, playing through a lot of contact, things like that. Got to some loose balls throughout the game, too.

It's kind of tough. Kudos to them. They had a great game, so...

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you and continue with questions for Coach.

Q. Now that it's over, the entirety of the season, how it kind of crashed tonight after a big win last night.

MATT McMAHON: The season as a whole? Yeah, that's probably a long conversation. Welcome to have it, but just in general, yeah, I think clearly disappointed in the overall result of the season.



You asked me, one of your first questions when I was blessed to get to take to job, What are your goals? My goal is the same every year: I want to help our players and team max out and become the best we're capable of being. Whether that's 15 wins, 18 wins, 31 wins...

I don't think we were able to get that accomplished this year. That's clearly my responsibility. But there's the reality, also, I'm well aware. I'm not an excuse-maker. I don't blame anybody or complain. The reality is we didn't take over the 22-win LSU team that went to the NCAA tournament. We took over a program in crisis, zero players, zero signees. Really had to start at ground zero and try to put a team together and do our best moving forward.

Unfortunately wasn't able to get it done at the level I would have liked to in January and February. Take quite a few positives from the year. Number one, I'm excited and thrilled about the opportunity to coach at LSU. It was a privilege getting to watch KJ Williams come in and be an All-SEC player. The comeback at Wake Forest, largest comeback since 1996 at LSU. The home win against Arkansas.

But at the end of the day, didn't get the job done at the level I would have liked to have gotten it done. We'll learn from it, and look forward to moving into the future.

Q. Getting within one, after the way you won last night, did you feel like you were back in it? Did Vanderbilt do something different at that point?

MATT McMAHON: I think so. I mean, KJ got those quick buckets there. I thought their defensive game plan was good. Really didn't guard some of our guys who struggled shooting the ball tonight. It made the floor really crowded.

At the end of the day in college basketball, you got to have elite guard play. I thought Manjon at the point for them really took over the game with his speed and quickness off the dribble. I thought Lewis came off the bench at the backup point and gave them good minutes. Hit a couple big threes, gives them 11 points. Lawrence has been a really good player all year. Since Robbins went out, he's really stepped up his game to another level. 22 points on just seven shots.

So overall the efficiency of their guard play really dictated that second half especially.

Q. You said you're starting from ground zero. Where is your focus, what this team needs to get to the level you expect it to be?

MATT McMAHON: Yeah, I'd love to sit here and tell you that the foundation is in place. That was the goal going in, to have the culture established, a winning culture, to move the program forward.

But the reality of it is when you finish January and February the way we did, oftentimes you learn what not to do. You learn what corrections need to be made, whether that's in roster construction, culture, offensive, defensive schemes, preparation, whatever it might be.

We'll certainly address all of those areas and make the improvements necessary to move the program forward.

Q. Unrelated to LSU, Ja Morant has been under the microscope. What is your reaction to some of the things he has gone through? Have you had a chance to speak?

MATT McMAHON: Those conversations are private. I love Ja Morant and his family, will always be here to support him as he navigates these very challenging times.

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