

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 10, 2023

Vanderbilt Commodores

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Jerry Stackhouse

Jordan Wright

Quentin Millora-Brown

Postgame Press Conference



Vanderbilt 80, Kentucky 73

THE MODERATOR: Ready to begin with Vanderbilt. We will ask Coach for some opening comments on the game, then take questions.

Coach.

JERRY STACKHOUSE: That was an unbelievable game to be a part of. Both teams were battling, a lot of ups and downs in that game. They got off to a quick start. We continued to battle and weather the storm. Found a rhythm ourselves.

Again, just look at the rebounding numbers, it was tough. They was pounding us on the boards. Our guys, they got timely rebounds, timely key rebounds. Just their fight and their competitiveness is what got us that win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You both hadn't beaten Kentucky before last week. Twice in two weeks, what does that mean?

QUENTIN MILLORA-BROWN: It's huge for us. It's just kind of validation for what we've been trying to build, where we're trying to go.

I think it sets the tone for us going forward that we want to be a winning team, we're going to be a winning team.

How do you feel about that?

JORDAN WRIGHT: Completely agree with that. I think it's turning of the tide for Vanderbilt. We hadn't beat them in how long. First three years, they had their way with us.

For us to beat them twice in a week like you said, it shows the growth we've had, progressing as a team, how we're taking these steps forward.

Q. Jordan, postgame you and Coach were over there with the SEC Network and the fans. What has this scene been like for you enjoying all this?

JORDAN WRIGHT: I couldn't even think over there. They were just so loud. It felt amazing. It's something that we haven't had before. The fan support that we've gotten in the past month, pretty much all season honestly, it's been great. It feels amazing to come out there and be surrounded and have those fans just screaming, howling, yelling your name, yelling Coach Stackhouse's game. The support feels great. Honestly, like I said, I couldn't even think over there. It was just incredible.

Q. Kentucky knocked you all out last year in the SEC Tournament. How did it feel to get revenge this year?

QUENTIN MILLORA-BROWN: It's a great feeling for us. Obviously, like, we wanted a little bit of revenge from last year coming into this year. We knew that they beat us. We knew it was going to be a tough fight tonight.

I think everyone just fought hard, and we all feel happy about it. We know there's still work to be done. We want to keep going forward, keep winning. I think we're all excited, but also we're taking it with the right attitude, that we got to get ready for tomorrow.

JORDAN WRIGHT: Yeah, for sure. It feels good to beat them, honestly, to be honest. One of the biggest brands in college basketball. Any time you get a chance to beat them, feels great. Especially that loss in the SEC Tournament. We had 'em. Felt like we should have won that game. I feel like we outplayed them that last time in the SEC Tournament last year.

So it feels good.

Q. As they were making their run, the shots weren't falling, but you were getting to the line and finishing there. When you're able to go to the line and knock

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those shots down, how good did that feel?

JORDAN WRIGHT: Yeah, it just takes you back to practice. We do our free throw ladder every single day. We don't miss a day. It just takes us back to those moments when you're competing against one of your teammates, trying to move on up the ladder, we go from E to A, you try to work your way up to the A group.

Also a sense of comfortability. When you have Ezra Manjon, our point guard, our catalyst, he's tough with the ball, you know he's going to be solid with it. When he has the ball, it's a sense of comfort. We know when we get the ball and get the opportunity to get free throws, we're going to get stops on defense to make the free throws.

QUENTIN MILLORA-BROWN: Definitely I feel the same way. We work on it every day. It's something we know it's the biggest part of the game really. Like you got to make your free throws when it comes down to the line. Just leaning into each other I would say also. When they're making their run, we have to come together, be just a little bit tighter as a group, be just a little bit more forceful on defense and offense.

Q. Jordan, can you describe just the adjustment of having to play without Liam.

JORDAN WRIGHT: Yes, it's tough for sure. The things that Liam brought to us, can't be stated obviously. The presence he brought on defense, his offense game was hitting on all cylinders when he went out.

This guy next to me stepped up, incredible. Might not show on the stat sheet every night. The things he does for us, such a calming presence, he knows the ins-and-outs of Vanderbilt basketball. When we get stuck, he's always there to help us out, get us in position to win our sets, everything like that. This guy right here deserves that credit. How he stepped up, been a leader for us.

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

Q. What was that scene like for you over there with the fans, the SEC Network?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I mean, it's great. It's a lot of excitement. We're happy for our fans. We're happy for everyone, everyone involved. Commodore nation. Everyone involved. It's an exciting time. SEC Tournament is in our city. We've advanced. It's just a lot of excitement.

Again, just another step to where we want to go, to try to accomplish our goal of winning it. It's great. Little

milestones that happen with this win, being able to have our first 20-win season since we've been here. Again, it feels great.

At the same time we know that there's ebbs and flows in this thing. A few weeks ago, everybody thought that we were down in the dumps. They was dissing. A lot of people had a lot of things to say.

We just stayed within our cocoon of what we needed to do, what needed to happen. Looked in the mirror and said we needed to change some things within ourselves. I thought our guys did that. Give the credit to them.

Our message, nothing has changed since we've been here. I think our guys are getting the reps that they have, just their understanding of what we're doing, how we need to go about it. Plus having great people. That's what it starts with, we have really good kids that go about it the right way, approach it the right way.

Are they always going to do things right? No. They're young people. They're going to make mistakes. But we continue to hold them accountable and continue to love on them the way that we're supposed to.

I think that's what you're seeing right now, you're seeing a group of guys that's playing for each other. I'm excited to get back to the next game.

Q. Few years in a row you have been playing your best here at the end of the year in this tournament. What is it about the way you do things that has lended itself to that?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I don't think we skip steps. I think it's important for us not to skip steps. I think it could get a little monotonous for guys that have been in the program, like a Jordan or Q. We have to go back and teach the young guys. As much as we add things and build on it, we still have to go back and teach the young guys as well.

I think that's the beauty of those guys, having guys like that. Each one, teach one. Quentin is unbelievable with Lee, all of them, Malik. He spends a lot of time showing them where they need to be.

Ez is the same way with Paul, even though he's been here a year. He understands how to play the point guard position. He understands little nuances. I think he does a great job of that.

I think that's why we are where we are. We got tremendous support from the top, throughout all of the noise and some folk wavering about where they thought



our program was. The people that supported us have always been there. This is for them. It's for them.

I'm really, really happy for them, for these type of moments. Again, we still got a plan on something more. I honestly feel that we can win it all. If we get an opportunity to get in, this team deserves, the country deserves to see.

I played in the NCAA tournament. I know what it's about. You hear all the stories that come out when you advance and get to know these -- they need to know Quentin Millora-Brown. They need to know Ezra Majon. They need to know Jordan Wright. They need to know these kids because they're special kids, not just good basketball players, they're special kids. They're part of a special environment here at Vanderbilt. I think the world and the country needs to see that.

Q. I asked you about Ezra. Can you speak to how crucial he has been to your success?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Again, I mean, he's been unbelievable, how he runs the team. Probably had his worst game as far as turnovers tonight. He's been really taking care of the ball. He's still a calming presence with the guys. You can feel it. When the seconds was ticking off there, it's not a show. It was true emotion of those guys, understanding the work they put in.

Again, the point guard, he can never have a bad day, and he doesn't. He doesn't have a bad day at practice. He comes in with the same energy. The other guys can fluctuate a little bit. But your point guard and your best player, they can't have days off. I think he represents that every day he comes in with his hardhat on, come to work with that smile, that infectious smile. He's a joy to coach.

Q. What do you think has clicked for this team finally?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Again, I think defensively is where it's really been for us. We hadn't always shot it well on the offensive end. Again, I think we give ourselves a chance because we really play really good initial defense. We got to get better at not look those second-chance points.

I think if we can rebound the ball a little bit better, we ever get a double figure rebounding, man, it might be over, especially for one of our bigs. Jordan was able to get 15 rebounds last night. He was unbelievable, man. I recall that one play where Hannibal ran into him, he took one in the chest, got up and still had a deflection.

Man, that's what it's all about. Those are winning championship plays. If our guys throughout our roster

continue to do those type of things, we're going to give ourself as chance to win every night.

It's important now to get our rest. The games are coming faster and faster. We're playing a tough team tomorrow, Texas A&M. We know them well. Guys that get after it on both sides of the ball. We have to be ready and prepared to play at a high level again.

Q. Down 14-4, a lot of teams will tend to wilt. What have you seen that allowed them to put it together?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I don't think those guys get rattled. We understand they're making shots. Plays are part of the game. You're not really going to lose the game in the first half in this modern era with the three-point shot. You have an opportunity to get back in the game. We feel like we have a -- our shooters haven't shot the ball well yet. Frankly, that's it.

Those guys keep going along with the way they're capable of, Miles and Trey, Paul was unbelievable tonight for a young guy. He was a big, big spurt for us. Again, those valuable minutes that those guys got early in the season when everybody was thought that we should just try to play a certain group, you don't build a team that way, you don't build a program that way. You have to have continuity.

I think by playing those guys, them getting that confidence and those reps, we encourage them. We want you to be aggressive. We want you to play with poise, but at the same time be aggressive.

They bring that to the table. It's other guys. We kind of shorten the rotation, but if somebody was to go down, I'm not afraid to throw a Noah Shelby out there, not afraid to throw Emmanuel Ansong out there. Those guys have gotten reps and can contribute if we need them.

That's our message to them. Stay ready. You never know when something can happen. I believe if something happened, those guys could step in and have an impact.

Q. Jordan was one of your first recruits at Vanderbilt. What was it like walking up with him to the SEC Network set?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: It was a lot of fun. More fun was just to see our fans and our excitement. Wasn't so excited to sit up there and talk to those guys; ain't none of them picked us. You know what I'm saying? That's part of the deal, it is what it is.

Again, it was a great feeling for him because we hadn't had this experience of playing on a Saturday, possibly a

Sunday. We made it to this game last year. A lot of things happened in that game, and we weren't able to get over the hump.

We finally were able to get over the hump, excited about the possibility of tomorrow and even more excited about the possibility of getting through tomorrow and getting to Sunday.

We believe in us. You know what I'm saying? We're going to be us, and we believe in us. That's all that matters. All the other noise doesn't matter. We're not worried about bracketology or anything else but the next game. That's what we're looking forward to.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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