

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Vanderbilt Commodores

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Jerry Stackhouse

Ven-Allen Lubin

Ezra Manjon

Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas 90, Vanderbilt 85, OT

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Vanderbilt. We'll ask Coach Stackhouse for his thoughts on the game, then take questions for the student-athletes, then finish up with Coach.

Coach, would you begin.

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Well, I thought it was a great game. Our guys really competed. I mean, no more than these two right here. Ezra played this game like it was his last game ever. I love the way he competed. All of our guys, young guys, thought they really did a great job.

We knew we got a lead in the first half, knew this was a very dangerous team. They showed it in the second half. I thought we played the percentages in some situations and they stepped up and made 'em. Brazile made some big shots for them. Devo Davis, not known as an outside shooter, he made two threes when we went to the zone to try to keep them on the perimeter a little bit more. They just stepped up and made plays.

They got a little separation. We kept battling. In overtime they made a few more plays than we did.

Very proud of our group. Other than Ezra, probably we played freshmen and sophomores almost a hundred minutes tonight. We feel good about those guys, their potential. I'm really thankful for what this kid has given us over these last couple seasons. He's got a bright future ahead of him going forward.

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

Q. Ezra, with that being your last college basketball game, how do you reflect on your time playing basketball and your team here as a whole?

EZRA MANJON: It's been a blessing. I thank God I've had the opportunity to be able to play basketball. I was able to play healthy. Little injuries here and there. But I played five seasons pretty healthy.

I'm just blessed to be able to play basketball with these guys. I think that's been the most important thing for me, is these relationships. I've had the time of my life in these last five years, especially these last two. Thankful for Coach Stack bringing here and allowing me to showcase my talents on a big stage, so...

Q. Ezra, you were down eight with two minutes to go. What did it take to claw back into the game, and how personally did you take that comeback effort?

EZRA MANJON: Yeah, I knew my teammates were going to fight. We've been down in games before. We were just down in Florida. We came back and won. I knew the guys was going to fight. We were going to put ourselves in position to win that game.

For me personally, like Coach Stack said, I was playing like it was my last basketball game ever. So just trying to leave it all out there.

These guys deserve it. All the seniors deserve it to go out with a bang. I just kind of took it a little personal and was like, Let's go get this win. That's basically it.

These guys were a huge part. Ven, he's been a beast this last stretch, getting healthy and everything. He has a bright future. So does all the other young guys, like Coach Stack said. We have a young group out there. Their future is bright. I'm pretty excited for them.

Q. Can you walk us through the emotions where you did sink the shot to send it into overtime, the ebbs and flows of the emotions following that?

EZRA MANJON: I mean, the shot was big. Obviously I hit a big floater to send us into overtime. Malik Presley and Tyrin Lawrence with the good press, being handsy, being able to get that steal was the biggest thing. Malik had a big steal at the end of the game.

As much as that shot was huge, everything that led up to that was even bigger. Credit to those guys.

Q. Ven-Allen, having transferred in here, how do you view your first season with Vanderbilt? How do you working with Stackhouse? Do you think he should remain the coach here?

VEN-ALLEN LUBIN: Yeah, I definitely believe he should remain the coach here. The way he been coaching, he's been incredible. He got skills. He got knowledge of the game to disperse among us.

It's been a pleasure playing for him. I'm always grateful for this opportunity that God brought me here because it was a journey from last year to this year. I really appreciate him for trusting me. I really appreciate him for putting his all into me and into these guys and that team.

I definitely believe if he come back next year, we'll definitely be better.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes. Thank you. We'll continue on with Coach Stackhouse.

Q. Have you been given any assurances by your athletic director that you will return next season?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: No, we're going to sit down and talk after the season, like we always do. I think obviously it's been a long season, not the season that we hoped for. Again, I'm so proud of my guys, so proud of how they competed and how they've grown.

But we understand it's a results business. The results haven't been there. Obviously there's some context behind those results. At the end of the day, I understand that. I mean, we have to take accountability for that. We'll sit down and we'll discuss that, we'll figure out the best way going forward.

Q. Obviously you mentioned the season hasn't gone the way you would have hoped. Do you feel there's anywhere you went wrong or would have changed if you could go back?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I'm able to play Malik Presley and JQ Roberts a little bit more or earlier. But, no, they weren't ready then. But they've gotten better, they've developed.

They turned into starters at the end of the season.

Again, there's a lot of context. We lose a player who was a starter for us last year with an Achilles, Lee Dort, our biggest player, forced a bunch of guys to play out of position.

Again, that's context. All that matters is results. The results weren't what they were supposed to be, so you have to dissect that and figure out what's next.

Q. If you are to remain the coach here, what steps do you think you would need to take to make sure that these results like what happened this year don't happen again?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Well, I think there's a lot of things that could happen. There's a lot that goes into college basketball. Changing landscape. The approach to college basketball has changed a lot from the time that we started.

When we first started here, we thought that just getting on par with the other schools, having the facilities and things like that, would help. Now that's not enough.

Used to be where you could go, you make all the calls, you go show kids as much interest as you can, do all those type things. Now you got to reach out to their agents. You know what I'm saying? That's where it is in order to really get in the door.

NIL, that's a big part of it. You have to be a player in that. Quite frankly, we hadn't been a big player in that yet. So those are the things that have to become a part of it.

I love the way we built it, though. I feel like we're going to be ahead of the game. Vanderbilt is going to be ahead of the game because we're doing it with the right kids. We built it with freshmen. We built the with development. That's how we'll continue to do it.

Whether I'm here or not, I think that's the thing. These kids came here. If I'm not here, I would hope that they would be because it's about this university, it's about getting a first-class, world-class education. I would never hope that anybody had what I had coming in here with a pretty bare cupboard, having to try to go out and find this, that and the other.

I just think this is a great nucleus of young guys that has a really bright future. When things kind of balance out, when the dust settles from the COVID years, the NIL, it's going to come back to high school kids. Nobody's talking about high school kids right now. Everybody wants to get older.

Again, once the dust settles on that, the teams that decided to still invest in younger guys, invest in development, will be the ones that win out.

Q. Khalif Battle kind of took over in overtime. Wondering what you thought of his play?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Yeah, I mean, he's a tough cover, man. I think he had, hell, probably 35 on us a few weeks ago. You know what I'm saying? We had no answer for him. Luckily he had a slow start in the first half; that's why we were able to get some separation. He showed in the second half exactly what he's capable of. He made plays, made jump shots.

Again, I really don't think he was the key. The key that beat us tonight was I think Brazile, those guys, guys that we wanted to bait into taking some shots. He stepped up and made 'em. He was three of six. Davis was two for three. That's where the game was right there.

Definitely in that overtime, Khalif got downhill. He's a tough cover getting downhill.

Q. Stack, have you enjoyed this job the last five years?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: I love my job. I love coaching. I love teaching kids. I love the basketball part of it. I think early on, we all have some mess-ups. I probably messed up a little bit early on. I guess one of the things going back to the beginning with the streak, which was a huge part of the fans... Maybe I said something after that game that rubbed some people the wrong way.

Them people didn't get to know me. It was all from a few clips. They didn't get a chance to see who I am, see Jerry Stackhouse. All they saw is the big black guy that came from the NBA, right, that wears the suits.

They don't really know the context of why I wear these suits. I wear these suits because going to church on Easter Sunday. If you done that, you know that.

My mama used to try to put suits on layaway for us to go to church. One time she didn't have the money to get that suit off of layaway. I saw that disappointment in her. So that's why I wear these suits, because of my mama.

For the time she couldn't see me in that suit she had on layaway, she going to see me in a suit every day. She turned 95 yesterday. She can barely see. But when she look up at the TV, she going to see me in a suit. Things like that.

The people, again, I think it was just some type of bias from guys that come from the NBA. That's always been a little bit of noise there. I just think if you really get to know me, you understand who I am... I cut my own grass. I'm probably a lot more like you than you would think.

Again, just from the stature of where I come from, because I had a career before I got to Vanderbilt, a lot of people, that's all that they saw. They didn't really take a chance to get to know me. Maybe that's where the disconnect was with some fans.

But for me the basketball has always been the solace, what I love to do, what I love to teach.

Q. In your five years here, do you feel the city and this community has given you enough time, the chance to get to know you, why you wear the suits that you do? Do you think you've been given a good enough chance?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Well, I mean, again, I think there's always context in that. When you look at everything that's happened, if you want to take a deep dive in just the games missed from key people that we were counting on over these last five years, it's a nightmare. We still found a way to continue to battle.

I know the NCAA tournament is the ultimate goal, right? We haven't done that. I haven't done that. No matter what, those results are those results. We got close last year. Probably the same people that sit here and say that we never made the tournament in five years, those are the same people that were raising hell because they thought we were snubbed last year. That's part of the battle you deal with. That's part of being with coaching.

But no, I just think being here, it's been a great experience. I'm so thankful for this opportunity. I came in here with an opportunity to grow. I never been a head coach other than in the G League. I've never been a college coach before. I had an opportunity to come in here and grow with some people.

Obviously Malcolm Turner brought me here. Obviously when he left, Candice just picked up. Our relationship just grew because she was growing in her role and I was growing in our role. Man, we were built for this. No matter what was thrown at us, we're going to keep battling and we're going to keep going at it.

At the end of the day, the results aren't there. Again, we'll sit down and we'll make those decisions and see where we go from here.

But nothing going to change with me. Again, just getting to know me. I've had a job since I was nine years old. You know what I'm saying? I used to go to work with my daddy cutting trees, bricklaying. I'm a worker. I had a work permit when I was 14 so I could work early. A job ain't never been my problem.

I'm thankful for this one. If I'm here and able to continue on with it, I'm going to give it 100%. If not, I'm going to be thankful for every moment that I've been here and use all of the experiences that I've had, all the great people I've worked with, to try to help me in whatever situation I am going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Thank you.

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