

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

LSU Tigers

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Matt McMahon

Hunter Dean

Trae Hannibal

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi State 70, LSU 60

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with LSU. We'll ask Coach McMahon for some general thoughts on the game, then questions for the student-athletes, then we'll finish with Coach.

Coach.

MATT McMAHON: Thanks a lot.

Honored to be joined here by Hunter Dean and Trae Hannibal. Really enjoyed the privilege it's been to coach them this year. They've given us every single ounce of everything they have. Really made a tremendous impact on this LSU program.

With that said, congratulations to Mississippi State. I thought we put ourselves in a good position in the first half. I absolutely loved our team's defensive effort, our energy, our defensive rebounding. Unfortunately some of the turnovers there prevented us from extending the lead during that stretch.

Mississippi State, obviously an NCAA tournament team, a team that I think could play into the second weekend, showed why there in the second half, made some great plays on their offensive end and earned the victory.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for either of the student-athletes.

Q. Y'all did such a great job on Hubbard and Tolu in the first half. What were y'all trying to do especially to Hubbard after he got you for 32 a couple weeks ago?



TRAE HANNIBAL: Kudos to him. He's a tough freshman. A guy like that, once he gets rid of the ball, you can't let him get it back.

Taking him away, forcing other people to play was the game plan. After a while, starts to wind down. He got a couple open shots, I think that's what got him hot.

HUNTER DEAN: Yeah, I mean, going into the game, we knew those two were the two who fueled their offense. We knew from the start we had to show them that they're going to have to rely on somebody else to get their offense going.

Q. Trae, y'all had a seven-point halftime lead. You knew they were going to make a run. Where did it go wrong in the second half?

TRAE HANNIBAL: I feel like coming out of the half, we start off slow. That's been a thing for us this year. We get a big lead, get too complacent, too relaxed. Came out and punched us in the mouth. I think that's where it started off.

Q. Hunter, you had a 10-rebound advantage in the first half. Second half, they evened that out. What did they start doing? Did Tolu start going more to the basket or...

HUNTER DEAN: Yeah, just seemed like their intensity going to the glass the second half just raised to another level. Just didn't seem like we got the job done when they raised their level.

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

Q. The first half you probably did everything you could do other than 12 turnovers. Did you feel pretty good at that point? You knew they were going to make a run the second half.

MATT McMAHON: I think especially on the defensive side of the ball, I loved our effort there. I thought we played with great physicality. That's the strength of Mississippi State. Obviously was a huge concern for us coming in. I thought we did a good job, other than the eight times we sent

Hubbard to the free-throw line when we fouled him on jump shots. Would love to have those back, clearly. I believe he only had seven field goals in the first half.

I don't think we took advantage in that stretch on the offensive side. We had 12 turnovers. We were two for our first seven at the free-throw line. We finished 13 of 14 from there.

We weren't able to extend the lead during that time. Credit to them. We knew they'd come out ready to go to start the second half. For whatever reason, we weren't locked in to play at the level that was required for this game when that second half started.

Q. Every other coach that's been up there talks about how strong the league is. You've had a couple years now. Can you assess where the league is in your mind and what makes it so good now.

MATT McMAHON: Well, I think you look at last year, I believe Arkansas went to the Sweet 16. They were the 10 seed in this tournament last year. So I think that speaks to the depth of the league.

It's the number one offensive rebounding league in the country. It's the number one league in the country when it comes to blocking shots. I think that speaks to the athleticism and physicality around the basket.

I think the league this year, just so much better offensively. Teams shoot it much better from behind the three-point line. You have offenses that are putting up a hundred on a regular basis. It's just an elite league top to bottom.

Q. After the game in Baton Rouge when Hubbard got 32, what was the plan today? Just to throw as many guys at him and disrupt him?

MATT McMAHON: Well, we did a good job in the first half. I think he was 1 for 6 from the floor. Unfortunately had those fouls on jump shots that got him some free throws there.

We wanted to try to mix some coverages. We guarded him multiple ways on ball screens. We guarded handoffs multiple ways. I thought Coach Jans made a good adjustment, used him as a screener some. That hurt us because of the attention we were paying to him trying to take his shots away. I thought they did a good job there.

But just a really good player. We on an offensive rebound, he got a kick-out dagger three there. When they really needed a shot, he came flying off a screen and hit a huge three there in front of their bench.

He's a tough cover. Wasn't quite as efficient as he was in the first matchup. At the end of the day, he still got his 24 points.

Q. On the strength of the league, you obviously knew what you were getting into when you signed up. Was there anything at all that surprised you that you did not expect?

MATT McMAHON: I don't know if it was a surprise. When you're looking at this league, most NBA Draft picks by far in the country over the last four years. Twice as many lottery picks as any other league. You know the talent is off the charts.

You go down the roster of coaches, you have multiple Hall-of-Fame coaches, guys who are already in the Hall of Fame and still coaching, then guys that will be in the Hall of Fame one day.

I think the rim protection is just incredible. You have to be able to finish some plays at the rim. You go in there with soft layups, it's not going to work out very well for you in this league. I don't know that that was a surprise, but it certainly stands out. We saw it again tonight.

Q. At halftime, did they make defensive adjustments to take you out of your game early in the second half?

MATT McMAHON: They went to it late in the half. The 2-2-1 slowed us down a little bit. We had a couple kind of uncharacteristic turnovers against us. Just looked like we weren't quite ready to receive passes for some reason there.

But they make it really difficult on you. Their defense is terrific. Coach Jans has long been known as an excellent defensive coach. They really pressure you. They deny a lot of passes. They'll switch some things to take you out of what you want to do and put you in a position where you really need to space the floor and attack off the bounce, then make the right read when they come with their aggressive help from the weak side.

I thought at times we did a good job there. We had some really good possessions in the first half when we didn't turn it over. There in the second half we just weren't able to execute and finish plays at the level winning would have required today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

MATT McMAHON: I'll close by saying I have great admiration and respect for the effort of our players today. I

thought they came in locked in, ready to go. They competed at the highest of levels on the defensive side and on the glass. Unfortunately we just weren't able to score enough there in that run in the second half or slow them down once Hubbard got going.

Really proud of our players, for their response when adversity hit multiple times this season. Hopefully we'll have the opportunity to continue to play.

Thanks so much.

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