

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

South Carolina Gamecocks

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Lamont Paris

B.J. Mack

Jacobi Wright

Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 86, South Carolina 55

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with South Carolina. We'll ask Coach for some general thoughts on the game, then take questions.

Coach.

LAMONT PARIS: Just was a tough day at the office for us today, that's for sure. Auburn's got a really good team. They're aggressive. They feed off of energy and momentum. They got momentum.

A couple times it was down to 12, it was about 12 points, it was back and forth a couple times. I think we got it to 10 once, had a good look at a shot that could get to it 8. From our guys' psyche, changes a lot of different things. We missed that. I think they scored.

Anyway, they played well. They competed really hard. Our guys competed. We just didn't play well. We didn't play well today. At this time of the year that means they make you go home.

Hats off to them. But I am proud of what our guys have accomplished and how they played in terms of how hard they played, as well.

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

Q. B.J., what makes them such a tough matchup, especially in the post?

B.J. MACK: They really try to pressure the ball. That's really the main thing for them. Try to rattle you by getting



all up in your face. Just pressuring the ball a lot, trying to be more physical. That's really something that they're known for and they try to do to get you out of your game.

Q. B.J., you mentioned the physicality. They were letting you play pretty early on. With a team like that, pretty tough, what was the physicality like in there? How did it affect the rest of the game?

B.J. MACK: It was pretty physical. The physicality was high. Refs were letting us play. When you first start off, going to the basket, and they allow you to play like that, that sets the tone for the game. You got to meet that.

Q. Jacobi, you guys on defense have talked so much about wanting to force other teams into those midrange jumpers, the twos. Auburn does whatever they can to take those shots. What was it like defensively?

JACOBI WRIGHT: They came out and ran their stuff. We always try to do what we try to do defensively. Force them into pull-ups and floaters. But they hit shots today. They played really well, like Coach said. Tip our hats off to them.

Q. How much is it a relief to know on Sunday you're going to hear your name called?

JACOBI WRIGHT: I mean, I've been on the other side of the boat where your season ends here. It feels good that we have some season left. We're going to keep our heads up and look forward to figuring out where we play, get ready to work towards that.

B.J. MACK: Yeah, just like Jacobi said, tips off to them. I've been on the other side, too, ending the season off right here.

Happy to be able to find out where we play Sunday, start a new season off.

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



Q. Bad matchup. What makes them such a tough matchup for you?

LAMONT PARIS: I think that's a fair assessment, I would have to say, just based on our personnel. They're suited to take away some of the things, and there aren't many teams that have been able to do that, but they're suited to take away some of the things we like, that make us comfortable.

I think it's a combination of they're very aggressive defensively, then they're athletic and long, and they're not afraid to be physical and bump.

It was a physical game. This is not an indictment on the officiating at all. I even told those guys at the end of the game. If our matchup versus them is officiated that way, that's not the way we would prefer the game to be officiated with them because they are so good laterally that they can press up and pressure you.

Most of the things that you do to alleviate that pressure are made more difficult because it's hard to rip drive them. You rip drive them, they're not afraid to body bump you. Sometimes games are called in a way where those are fouls. We played in a game where there were 64 free throws shot in one game. Other games they're not called.

Today was one of those days where they were letting that stuff go. So then to try to get your guys to say, Okay, this is how the game is being played, we're going to body bump a little bit more. Well, that's not really what our guys do that much, so it's hard for them to make that adjustment.

I think that was one of the biggest things on the offensive end for us. Oftentimes that carries over into what you're doing defensively. It just does for guys at this age.

It was hard for us to persevere.

Q. I thought you guys were getting back in the game, 35-25. It just turned into a quick 9-0 run. Is that where the game sort of got away?

LAMONT PARIS: I mean, that was the last opportunity for us in the minds of the players. That was the last opportunity. I'm sure they really said, Okay, we're really going to do this now. We're really going to make our move and win the game.

Probably in their minds, beyond that, it was hoping that you would do enough things that you could get back into the game. So I thought that was a pivotal stretch for them, particularly that they answered the move that we made to get it to 10. Again, I referenced that possession. We had a good look at a two-point basket that could have cut it to

8, then who knows after that.

Instead they went on a run there. That had an impact, a big impact, on I think where the mindset of guys were the rest of the game.

Q. You're about to have more time off than any point during the season. What does the week between tournaments look like?

LAMONT PARIS: I think, one, resting up. We'd like to play as many games in this conference tournament as possible. We'd like to win this conference tournament.

The silver lining in it is that we got a couple guys banged up, Myles Stute, as you noticed today, was not dressed up. That's more time for guys like him. Ta'Lon looked like he was banged up a little bit today. I didn't have him back in towards the end of the game.

I think what it does is give guys some time to rest up and heal up and get treatment and recover. I think that's a big part of it. So if not for winning it all, I guess this is probably -- some people would probably prefer this than play another game and still not win it all.

Some seeding things may go into that in terms of the NCAA tournament. I just think it will be a good time for us to get back and try to get off of our feet, rest, then do a lot of recovery.

Q. You've only played in seven games where you haven't done 68 offensive possessions or more. How do other teams dictate those things? Is that a big key of emphasis, We need to play at our pace?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I mean, part of it in this game was we had a hard time manufacturing stops. That's become a good thing for us. If you look at pace, it's a little bit of a misnomer if you don't know exactly all the components that go into pace, i.e., if you get an offensive rebound, that counts as a same possession. We're a pretty decent offensive rebounding team.

For us, I think our offense has generally started better on a miss, right? If we get a defensive stop, it allows us to make our first action happen with less resistance typically because some teams specifically, a lot of teams, try to make our first action difficult for us. Sometimes that's counterproductive because it makes us run even more offense on the possession.

We like to get stops for a lot of reasons, one of which is it does trigger us into our initial action happens a little bit quicker and we can get into some of the things we like

better on the offense end.

Because they were scoring so many baskets, we weren't getting stops, then they were pressing some on the end of that, it got bogged down a little bit for us on the offensive end. That was a big part of what happened.

Q. I asked you yesterday about playing that extra game. You said it only really hurts you if you lose it. Coming into the physical matchup today, do you think you were a little bit tired?

LAMONT PARIS: Nah, not at all. I hope that's not the case, that you play one game, then the next day you're so tired that you can't win, and really in a largely non-competitive way towards the end of the game. That wouldn't bode well for most teams that are in this tournament or playing in the NCAA tournament.

I think at some point, the benefits really of moving on are of securing byes, whether it's the single bye or the double bye. The likelihood of you winning five games in a row is probably significantly less statistically than winning three games in a row. Therein lies the benefit of getting a double bye.

Getting here with a single bye, seeing teams play, getting a feel for the atmosphere of the tournament, the environment, people running around watching games, knowing you had the extra day, then coming out and playing. If you play in that game and you play well, I think it's a real benefit to you. I do.

I don't think playing a game had a whole lot of impact on what the outcome of this one was.

Q. You mentioned earlier there were some mistakes offensively you thought carried over to the defensive side of the ball. What element of your defensive performance did you really see that?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, I'll tell you one, was second-chance situations. They ended up with 12 second-chance points on I don't know how many offensive rebounds it was. Typically we do a pretty good job in that area. I think that was one of 'em.

Again, they do that. They go to the boards. But we've got multiple teams in our conference that are in the top three, four, five in the country in offensive rebounds. It's not our first time going up against a team that's really effective in an offensive rebounding situation.

I think that was one.

Just overall energy and ball pressure. Just general competitiveness on the defensive side of the ball. You see it. Guys make a three, then all of a sudden they're in a stance as they're coming down. Teams like to pat the floor, tell the whole world that I'm going to try really hard on defense this possession, I made a bucket. I think that's the universal sign for that.

They're connected. For the best teams, you can separate those two and have a rough day on one of those and still find a way to get the other one done. I think for most kids, they are connected. For us, I think it affected us a little bit on the defensive end.

Those were a couple different areas, just blocking out, then ball pressure, our overall defensive competitive energy.

Q. What can a loss like this do for a team heading into the NCAA tournament? What are some of the positives that can be taken away from a loss like this?

LAMONT PARIS: I mean, to be completely honest with you, I think it's probably on to the next thing at this point. Now, if you look back at your body of work, you won 15 games in a row coming into this, maybe you feel like your team might need something like this, maybe there's something to take from losing a game like this.

Honestly, we wanted to win. We were playing as hard as we could. It wasn't our day today. By the grace of the basketball gods, they're going to call our name on Sunday, and we'll be elated about that. We'll rejoice in that moment.

We're still building here. That's been a thing for us. I think that's been the general theme. I've talked about that a whole bunch. What a tremendous accomplishment it will be for this group to be able to play a game or more in the NCAA tournament.

We'll find out where we go. We'll rejoice in that. But I think this game, it is what it is. Guys will talk about it tonight. Some of their families are here. We'll wake up tomorrow morning, fly back to Columbia, and the excitement will start about what the next adventure is for us. It will be a really special moment for us to be able to see our names called and start the preparation process for more survival and advance.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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