

Camping World Maui Invitational

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Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Nate Oats Herb Jones Postgame Press Conference

Alabama - 88, Providence 71

MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

NATE OATS: I thought our effort was a whole lot better. I think we have improved a lot over the three days we have been here. That's what we're trying to do is get better. So if it took a loss to Stanford to get our guys where they needed to be, then that's what it took.

So there is three teams left that are still 2-1, we're one of the three. I think we played really good basketball the last two nights. I think we got better every single game out.

Tonight didn't start out great, but they had some tough shots. Our guys just stayed the course after going down 8-0. I think we went on a 17-3 run, never gave up the lead from there.

So this was a strong, tough -- Coach Cooley does a great job. I've known him for awhile. He recruited my kids when I was at Romulus. His teams are always hard playing, tough teams, and I told our guys, We're going to have to out-rebound them. We can't get out-rebounded like we did the last two nights. And they answered the bell. We out-rebounded them 48-28.

I thought our guys stepped up in the areas they needed to step up in. We had five guys in double figures, pretty balanced. It's petty's birthday today. He led us in scoring with 16, but we had two other guys with 15.

I think Primo's getting more and more comfortable in the offense, more and more comfortable playing high-level basketball. His shooting 3-6, back-to-back games, 8-12 as a team in the second half, so that's going to win us a lot of



games.

So maybe it was first-game jitters. I don't know what it was against Stanford, but we didn't quite play as hard as we needed to and we didn't shoot it as well as we needed to, but we're starting to click I think now.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for either Herb Jones or Coach.

Q. Nate, can you talk about Herb as an offensive player? We've really kind of seen him add that to his game this season?

NATE OATS: Yeah, he went 1-1 at the line -- or from the three-point line -- 2-2 at the free throw line. Spent a ton of time in the gym all off-season. I've been telling you guys all fall that he's really trying to be a pro and I think that he starts hitting jumpers like he's hitting them right now and he's playing a lot of point guard. When Quinerly comes out, Herb's our point. He's 6'-8" point guard that can handle the ball. We get the turnovers cleaned up here.

But he had five assists, 11 points, 8 rebounds, five assists. He's going to get a triple double this year. I mean, he's been playing as good as anybody on our team through the first three months of practice here. So really happy to see his shots go down for him, see the hard work pay off.

Q. Herb, just talk about your performance tonight, and then what did you learn about your teammates over these three days, able it overcome what happened Monday night, and then capitalize against UNLV Tuesday night and to come out and perform like that tonight.

HERB JONES: Tonight I came out and I just let the game come to me. I didn't try to force anything. I think I tried to force a lot the first game. And I came out and just played basketball the way I know how.

And over this three day span my teammates, I just seen them respond to whatever coach needed us to do. Like, after the first game he challenged us to be tougher and play harder and that's what we all came out and did.



Q. Nate, you mentioned the 15 points there from Primo. When you go back to the summer when he first got here, just how much did you anticipate that sort of contribution or impact and the sort of minutes that he's gotten?

NATE OATS: You know what, I thought he was good. He came in and I thought he was really good earlier in the summer. He had an injury with his hip that kind of sidelined him for a month and a half and I think he's been trying to recover from that. I think he's finally getting back to full speed, because I thought he was really good in the summer.

So I'm not surprised by it at all. He's a good shooter. He's 6'6". He plays hard. He's tough. He's physical. He can rebound it. So he's giving us really good minutes off the bench.

And I've told our guys, we probably have seven or eight starters. You look at Rojas and Primo and Alex Reese. I thought Reese was great tonight. He came in, not just making shots, like, that doesn't concern me as much with him. I know he's going to make some shots and miss some shots in other games.

It was his defense. I thought he did as good a job as anybody on our team. I thought he did the best job on Nate Watson to the point where they took him out of the game and didn't put him back in. With, like, 10 minutes to go he only had four fouls, He didn't foul out. He was a load to handle. We were really worried about him. In the first half, I think he had 13 points in eight minutes. He ended the game with four points in the second half. So I thought a lot of that was due to Alex Reese's defense on him in the second half.

Q. After the first game, you mentioned effort there, in particular, and here the last two games, how would you kind of grade the effort that your team showed the last two games?

NATE OATS: Much, much better. We have always charted blue collar points. This year we started charting blue collar points for us and the opponent, to make sure we're -- and we have significantly outscored the opponent in blue collar points both of these last two games.

So really happy with, Herb got the hard hat both these last two games. He's kind of all over the place with the deflections and blocks and rebounds and steals. But the whole team, as a whole, I mean, shooting -- I think even, I loved Juwan Gary's block at the end. We have a turnover. He chases the kid down. They ended up calling it a goal tend, but the effort that he gave, like, that makes me want

to play him more. It shows, like, I think he's recovered fairly well from the knee. That's the kind of player we want out there that's going to play hard, give an effort no matter how much we're up, we're down.

Even the Stanford game, I thought we still competed at the end when we were down a lot and they hit some tough shots. So I like where our group's at right now.

Q. I did want to ask you now that you have had a couple games with no fans in the stands, this different environment, cutouts, crowd noise, all of it, has it caused you to change anything in your approach on the sideline during a game and how you manage players and with energy and so forth?

NATE OATS: You know what, I just think it's even more important that our bench is really into it to kind of create some energy during the game. We haven't changed a whole lot. It's easier to pick up play calls. We have got a few hundred, a couple hundred plays, so they can pick up some of our calls if they want. They'll have a hard time sorting through them all.

But some of the teams that run, like, a dozen sets, we're able to pick those up pretty quick and sit on them. So it's a little easier without the noise. It's easier for me to get the plays called.

But as far as playing, energy, and stuff, if you're a player you're going to play, whether there's -- we watched the NBA playoffs. Those guys that make a lot of money play hard with nobody in the stand, so if nobody's in the stand we're still going to bring it. We're just, the energy's got to be a little bit more from the bench than maybe it typically would have been.

Q. Herb, if you could speak to the communication of this team. Coach mentioned it last night that you guys were talking at halftime and really came out in the second half with a lot of steam in the win over UNLV. It felt like, again, the second half, the first five, six minutes you guys picked up some steam. So tell me about the communication that you guys do during halftime.

HERB JONES: I mean, we just talk about not like going back and doing what we used to do last year, I think we used to come out like in the second half kind of sluggish last year and we kind of preached that to the younger guys and like the new guys that's on the team that we, the first four minutes or the first six minutes of the first half are the most important and it sets the tone. So like at halftime we just tell them to come out with as much energy as we came out with in the beginning of the game.

Q. Coach, what do you think you learned most about your team in this three days, playing three days in a row about your team?

NATE OATS: How hard you have to play. How hard it is to get a win in high major basketball and the attention to detail that it takes to get a win.

You can't -- you let up for one half second on the defensive end, you give up a three. You do that three, four times you give up the threes we gave up to Stanford and you put the game out of reach.

So I think our guys, we practice hard, but games are different than practice. There's a level that you got to bring to a game to win at this level and I didn't think we had it and I think we do have it now. I think we have grown a lot in that area in the last three days and if it took a loss to Stanford to get to us where we need to be, then that's what it is. But I think we got a really good team I'm looking forward to what we do against Clemson in, what do we got, about 10 days we're against Clemson, I think.

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