

Allstate Maui Invitational

Monday, November 20, 2023

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

SimpliFi Arena

Tennessee Volunteers

Rick Barnes

Jonas Aidoo

Josiah-Jordan James

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee - 73, Syracuse - 56

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. We're joined by head coach, Rick Barnes, Jonas Aidoo, and Josiah-Jordan James.

Some opening comments from Coach.

RICK BARNES: Really tough, hard-fought game. Really proud of our older group at the end when we had some different situations, turned it over in ways that we normally don't and shouldn't. I thought our older guys, guys that had been in a lot of big games, Josiah was terrific today, his rebounding, Jonas came back big on the glass.

But our older guys defensively were locked in, did a lot of good things for us, and I think we know we can be better on offense, but it's the way we -- I thought we kept our composure through some tough situations for us, but we did some things that are out of character. But they had a lot to do with that too. They really are very aggressive with getting in the passing lanes, tipping the ball, back-tipping, all that, but really nice win for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. We'll open it up for questions for the players.

Q. For either of the players, could you talk about the way you guarded, you wanted to guard Judah Mintz today, and how you guarded him particularly in the second half when he was out with foul trouble in the first half?

JONAS AIDOO: Well, first of all, it was getting up to the ball screens for me, and we knew he pump fake a lot to get to the free-throw line, so we were staying disciplined on that part.



Q. Josiah, with the physical nature of that game early and then as it wore on, it looked like you guys actually started to settle in a little bit. You had adjusted significantly once Dalton left the court and you guys ended up really battling inside. Were you ready for that kind of game, given it's a morning game, it's on the road, it's a half-full arena?

JOSIAH-JORDAN JAMES: I would definitely say we were ready and it starts with the way we prepare in practice. A lot of people don't know, but if you come and watch us practice, you know that we were more than prepared for that type of game, that type of physicality, and I was really proud of our guys and the way we handled it.

Q. What would you say the Syracuse defense presented as the toughest challenge today?

JOSIAH-JORDAN JAMES: I would say just their aggressiveness, being in the passing lanes on the ball. We knew that they would probably have to go zone a little bit and their zone is a little bit unorthodox. They like to pressure the ball. They kind of want you to force the ball to the high post and then try to make you make quick decisions out of that. But just their aggressiveness on the ball.

Q. In most of the categories, it was almost the same the first and second half, but you guys out-rebounded them in the first and second half. How do you feel that you folks accomplished that?

JONAS AIDOO: I would say Coach preaches rebounding the ball, that's the main thing. If we rebound the ball, we're pretty much going to win the game, so we just to be aggressive at all times, offensive and defensive, when we're crashing the glass.

JOSIAH-JORDAN JAMES: I would just say doing what we practice. We do that on a daily basis and we pride ourselves on offensive rebounding and defensive rebounding.

Q. Syracuse had some scoring droughts towards the end of those halves. What did you guys do



defensively towards the end of those halves to force Syracuse to have those droughts?

JONAS AIDOO: The main thing was the scouting report. We got great coaches to scout the other team, so it was basically playing the scouting report. We just played by that, we played hard. We knew it was going to be a tough, gritty game, and we just played by that.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thanks, Josiah-Jordan and Jonas. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. In that first half, Dalton was pretty much their guys's sole source of offense and then when he went down in the second half, you guys looked more familiar of your Tennessee defense and cut down a lot of the opportunities for Syracuse. Did that just happen how it had to be or did you have a message to the guys that this was one of the things you were going to have to focus on?

RICK BARNES: Well, the older guys have been through it a lot and we have won a lot of games through the years with our defense, not always makes it look pretty, but we have done it. I think our guys have -- we've got some guys individually that we think have great pride in trying to guard one-on-one when you're guarding players like Mintz who can really go get buckets for you, and just we rely on each other.

We're not asking one guy to stop one guy, even though we've got a couple guys that we think can really create, create situations for guys to score, but if we play together, we think we can make it tough for people to score. But the older group out there, when Dalton went out and Jordan -- they went at Jordan Gainey early there. They were going at him. I don't think he's ever been in that situation. But once you go back with the guys that were there, they have been in a lot of games like that where we strictly had to rely on our defense to get things done.

Then I thought they did a great job offensively when they went zone, when we actually had five guards out there, and because of Josiah, we can do that because he will take on the challenge and he's so strong that he can guard pretty much anyone out there. We're not afraid to switch 1 through 5 because we do think that those guys especially they have been around, they're going to really have each other's back and make what we call fix-it plays.

I thought as good a job as we thought they would have to do for us defensively they were going to have to do it on the offensive end and they did a pretty good job there.

Q. You've gone up against Coach Boeheim before, but

this was your first matchup against Adrian Autry. What challenges did he present, whether it was throwing different looks on defense or what he had the offense doing, what kind of made it difficult?

RICK BARNES: Well, again, I've said to people through the years, you know, that Jim Boeheim got a lot of credit for his defense. I don't think he ever got the credit he deserved for his offense. I would say the same thing as we prepared for them. I think that when you were a player as great a player as Adrian, those guys, I mean, he puts them in position to where they can really -- they're hard to guard, and he wants them to be aggressive, he wants them to attack. He just keeps it somewhat simple, which I think is great coaching.

But he does what coaches should do. He gives his players a chance to win because he puts 'em where they can do what they do best. Defensively, we knew they were going to play some zone. We knew they would do that at some point in time. And then, you know what? He, I thought, picked a good spot there when Dalton went out and he was going to see what we could do with that older lineup who in the past, people would question their scoring ability.

So I thought that was a -- we felt it coming. We knew that would happen when we made that decision to go with five guards. We trust our older guys to make plays, Jahmai Mashack. Offensive rebounds are a big play. That's a huge play at that point in time in terms of momentum.

But he's going to be a great coach. He's a great player. Just getting ready for 'em, watching 'em, they're sound every way, and he is going to be around the game a long time. He's going to win a lot of basketball games. Syracuse certainly made the right decision because he's the right guy to hand it off to.

Q. Can you talk about the Syracuse guards? They are the driving force of their offense and they were 8-27 today and how you tried to guard them. Did you try to body them? Did you try to be physical? What did you want to do to those guys?

RICK BARNES: We wanted to pick up early and we wanted to really try to not let 'em get going downhill because they really do, they get going hard to the basket -- they're not going to stop themselves. If you don't get in the gaps early and get early gap support, they're going to get there because, again, well-coached, they play angles great, they can finish. It's tough too when they have the ability to jump up and kind of throw their body forward. It's tough to guard that. It really is. It is within the rules, it's just tough to guard.

But early, we actually doubled the ball screen a few times, but we felt like we got stretched out. He made a great pass. I know they hit a big three in the corner where we -- he just made a terrific play. We let him out of the trap and he hook-passed it to the corner right where it needed to be and the guy nailed it. So we started trying to kind of fake double it a little bit just to slow him down and keep it contained on the perimeter back and forth.

And then he made a really great play. We put Santi on him because Santi is a really good defender. We knew Santi would work hard to try to keep him from catching the ball, and he went over and set, like, a little pick screen, and that layup they made. Just well-coached and know what they're doing there. But the biggest thing was early gap, early gap and trying to keep them from getting downhill with it and really wanted to work hard at trying to keep 'em off the foul line.

Q. You guys play the winner of this next game. Just wanted to get your thoughts on both Gonzaga and Purdue and what problems they present for you guys.

RICK BARNES: I haven't thought a lot about 'em. I've kind of always been able to just think about this one. The coaching staff's obviously had all these teams here scouted before we got here, and they will get to see 'em live here. But I've seen 'em enough to know. I've known Mark forever. We used to scrimmage every year. I was at Providence. Mark and I would meet in Denver or somewhere, Arizona, we would meet and scrimmage, for probably 15 years. So we have known each other for a long time, great friend, great basketball coach. He's done one of the great jobs in all of college sports in what he's done and built at Gonzaga.

Then Matt Painter, I mean, he's a big-time coach. Obviously, he's got a great basketball player. Edey's development is really impressive. I go back and watch him and where he started and where he is, and I think, like all of us, we've tried to add through the portal that we hope will help us, and I said it coming in, these games are going to help us all some way, some somehow.

Like today, we did some uncharacteristic things. I don't think I've ever coached a team where guys stepped out of bounds four times. One player three times. I can't explain it because we haven't done it before. But the fact is both of those programs are great programs and great tradition, and we know that whoever we have to play we're going to have to be ready.

Q. Obviously, 48 total rebounds. What needed to be improved? 40 percent from the field, 36 percent from three, and 74 percent from the free throw line. Just

what needs to be improved?

RICK BARNES: Shooting-wise, we're a good shooting team. Some nights they go, some nights they don't, but I told the guys from the very beginning when we knew this year we were going to probably shoot more threes than we would, what would happen on nights when we weren't making threes or we weren't getting the quality looks that we want, how can we play the game.

Obviously, rebound something a big part of it. I still want guys to take shots when they get it. I thought we were -- maybe the word's careless, I don't know, I mean, some of the turnovers that we had.

But really proud of the fact that we rebounded the ball, and I would say it coming in, we've always prided ourselves -- you can't be a great defensive team if you can't finish it with a rebound. If you're going to give teams multiple shots at it, you're not going to be a great defensive team.

On the other end, you need to rebound about 40 percent of your misses if you want to be a high-level offensive team. So we've talked about it, and in our games leading into this, I thought we had done okay, and last game we made a better effort at home going to the glass, but it was with no purpose. I thought today was more of a little purpose-driven approach to it where we knew we had to rebound the ball and the fact that we count on our guards to do it too. We want our guards to get in there and mix it up, and all five guys pursue the ball.

But there's a lot of things we're going to have to get better with, obviously, this time of year. The main thing would be the turnovers. We got to clean that up. The unforced ones we can't have.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thanks, Coach.

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