

Asheville Championship

Sunday, November 14, 2021

Asheville, North Carolina, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks

Harrah's Cherokee Center

Frank Martin

James Reese V

Wildens Leveque

Press Conference

South Carolina - 75, Western Kentucky - 64

THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. We will start with opening comments from Coach followed by questions for players. Players will then be dismissed, and then we will end the press conference with players from Coach.

Coach, we'll turn it over to you for opening comments.

FRANK MARTIN: Obviously, 24 turnovers, and you can figure out a way to win. You got to feel good about winning, because anyone that's ever coached or played, winning is so much better than the alternative. The alternative absolutely stinks.

We've got a ways to go in who we're going to become as a team. I thought we battled really hard today. I thought we were really active defensively. Turnovers hurt us. Turnovers hurt us. It eliminated possessions where we wouldn't get shots and gave them open court opportunities.

But really proud to come back with a team that's got so many first-year guys. I know Western is the same way. To battle, battle, battle and figure out a way to win the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Questions for players?

Q. James, just how did it feel out there today just offensively for you guys in terms of building chemistry, a rhythm, and how much does it help when more have the deep shots are going in?

JAMES REESE V: It felt real good for shots to actually go in. The past couple of games -- well, last game, you know, we had a rough shooting night, but that's all a part of basketball. We just stuck with it, kept shooting, and Coach



Frank drew up some good plays for us to get us moving the ball a little bit more, and we got wide-open shots. We was able to throw some in tonight.

Q. For both of you, just what have you seen from Devin through the start of this season, and when he is on the court, what does he bring you in terms of physicality and just a presence at the rim from a guard?

JAMES REESE V: Devin loves physicality. He is one of our best downhill players, in my opinion. You know, he is not scared of the moment. He wants to be in that position, and I think that's why he thrives. It just showed tonight how fierce he is.

WILDENS LEVEQUE: Piggybacking off what Reese said, I'm just excited for him. He is really good. His first step is really good, so we're just really excited for him.

Q. What have the last 48 hours been like for you guys coming off the disappointing loss against Princeton, and then the quick turnaround to come right back and play again?

WILDENS LEVEQUE: Just being consistent, locking in, and believing in what we do.

Q. James, Dayvion McKnight has been the guy for Western Kentucky. He had 34 the first night out. You limited him to two points in the first half, I believe 11 in the game, seven turnovers in the game. What was the biggest key on him tonight, and did any of your familiarity with him last year in the USA championship game help with that?

JAMES REESE V: I played him last year at North Texas. He is a great player. You know, you just want to -- you just got to be aggressive with him. Don't really let him get downhill because he is a great finisher in the paint.

We just throw a lot of bodies at him and just kept -- not letting him get to the left hand was the main thing with us. He is a great player. You know, we just made it real tough on him all night, threw a lot of bodies at him.

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THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Wildens and James. Appreciate your time.

Questions for Coach?

Q. Frank, how big was -- Erik struggled to start the game on Friday night. He steps up and has that 5-0 run by himself to put you at eight points. How big was that for you guys, and I think you closed with James, Wildens, Jermaine, Erik, and Devin on the court at the end of the game. What did that line-up give you, and what did you see from them?

FRANK MARTIN: Once -- I was unhappy with our bigs. I've been unhappy with them. I just don't tell you for a little bit. Got to win the game. The way we played against Princeton was unacceptable from that -- the big guys' standpoint. Now, I'm not throwing them under the bus. They're all freshmen. They're all first-year players, with the exception of Wildens.

We have to figure out a way to win today, so at practice yesterday you're trying to get better as a team, but it's more -- it's three games in six days, or whatever it's been. It's about let's prepare to win today, and I made an adjustment at practice yesterday because I know Western plays small just like Princeton. When I mean small, I mean four man that shoots threes and plays off the bounce. Western plays like Princeton from that standpoint, just like Upstate. If you remember the Upstate game, they gave us problems there too.

And I had to make an adjustment, and that's what we did yesterday, and I thought the players were great on how -- because we haven't worked on that until yesterday, and I thought they were great the way that they handled that whole adjustment we made.

Q. (Off microphone)?

FRANK MARTIN: It's just four guards. When you play those four guys together, you're going to end up switching handoffs and ball screens. Then offensively we tried to do some different things because of the line-up rather than the stuff we usually do.

Q. Devin, I got to ask you about him. 16-8-4. I felt like he was everywhere tonight. Got in the passing lane some. I want to hear about, I know he is a highly touted kid, and it's always an adjustment for a freshman, but it seems like he has had moments, but tonight he came alive.

FRANK MARTIN: He is going to be special. He is an

unbelievable competitor. When we signed him, again, he is not -- wasn't a popular name. There goes South Carolina, again, signing some guy that can't play, but he is good.

He's got unbelievable mind for the game. He has the long arms, and he is unbelievably competitive, and he knows how to get that ball in the paint. Because of the way Western was playing that wide zone, I knew we couldn't play around that zone.

By the way, for anyone that thinks that because of what I said about the bigs is bad, I haven't prepared against a 1-3-1 yet. We tried to do it yesterday. Part of the fact that we looked so bad against a 1-3-1 was because I had not done anything until yesterday to attack a 1-3-1.

Devin is going to be real good. He is really good on the ball defensively. He has great anticipation off the ball. What he has to continue to learn is structure. I don't know if you saw it a couple of times. I mean, he was like, All right, let me just hold this ball, and let me take my man. You really can't do that in college because everyone sits and waits for you when the scouting report gets out on him. He has to keep learning the structure. Understand when that thing opens up, then go.

That's his challenge, but when he made the decision that he was going to go to prep school rather than sign with another university because he wanted to play for us, I was like, holy cow, I can't believe he is doing this, but he did, and that's how bad he wanted to be a part of our program.

THE MODERATOR: Last question for Coach.

Q. Two quick ones for you. You've talked about Brandon going to help your team this year. What did you see from him off the bench, and then just the last 48 hours for your team bouncing back after the loss, what did they show you over these last 48 hours?

FRANK MARTIN: Brandon has been great. Coaching your son is not an easy thing, and, obviously, he hadn't played much in our first two games, and when I made the decision yesterday -- I made the decision at 1:30 in the morning on the night of the Princeton game on Friday, whatever night that was, that I was going to -- for today I needed to make an adjustment and go small, and he was a prime candidate for that small line-up. I'm really proud. I thought defensively he was phenomenal. They tried to post him one time, and he has always played the four and the five, and he is comfortable defending out there. Off the ball he was pretty good. Really, really proud of him. Played with confidence offensively. He had that one turnover that was disappointing, but we don't win without

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his effort today. What was the other question?

Q. Just the last 48 hours, responding from the loss.

FRANK MARTIN: Yeah, you learn a lot about the people on your team every day, but you learn a lot more of them when you suffer your first loss.

I think you've heard me say this a lot. I don't care what happens in the summer. Everyone is always in a good mood in the summer. Everyone works hard in the summer. There's no emotions tied to winning and losing. No one is selfish in the summer. Everyone is just trying to fit in. Then the season starts, and people's selfishness gets in the way sometimes, and that's what the season teaches your team, to win or teaches your team to lose.

I was really, really happy with how we rebounded in practice yesterday, and I don't mean rebound the ball. I mean we had some guys that were really competitive, really locked in, really excited, and we're not there yet as a team. We're just not.

That Princeton game was a really hard game for us. The matchup was just really hard. Then the game itself was hard. We're going to keep doing it, and I got a lot of faith on this team. It's a really good group of guys. We just got to grow up a little bit, and we will.

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