

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Temple Owls

Coach Aaron McKie

Hysier Miller

Zach Hicks

Postgame Press Conference

Tulane - 69, Temple - 60

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Temple.

Q. Aaron, one of the numbers that jumps off, they blocked nine shots. In terms of the offense not getting it done at all, what was that indicative of?

COACH MCKIE: Just not going and attacking the basket with force. Just kind of laid the balls out there a lot. And they did a good job of blocking the shots. So when you go in there, we talk to our guys about playing off two, going in there, seeking contact, and we wasn't doing that. We were just going in there flipping the ball up and they were blocking some of our shots.

Q. Personnel questions, you took Nick out with maybe 17, 18 minutes. Never put him back in. Was there a reason for that?

COACH MCKIE: Just wanted to make an adjustment. I was going with the guys I felt had the juice and was out there competing and playing.

Q. Colin in there late.

COACH MCKIE: We were limited. Dame Dunn had got hurt. We were limited with guards, guys we can put out on the perimeter. And I'm comfortable with putting Colin out on the floor and the basket had a lid on it. And he's capable of making the open shot.

Was just trying to find a creative way to maybe open that defense up a little bit and maybe get some creases where



we could go in there and get some easy baskets or easy kick-outs to our shooters.

Q. I didn't see Quincy. Did Quincy not make the trip. If not, why not?

COACH MCKIE: No. He's suspended for about a week and a half two weeks now.

Q. He made the previous trips, road trips?

COACH MCKIE: Yeah, he just didn't come on this one.

Q. Can you talk about your team's resiliency this year? You've been through so much, so many injuries, up and down. And today, even though it didn't go your way, could you talk about your resiliency as a club this year?

COACH MCKIE: I thought the team had great fight and resolve. And we were able to keep our blinders on and continue to work and push in spite of injuries and COVID and everything else. The guys just got in the gym every day and we worked and we practiced.

And each day we wanted to just try to get better. We still had to play the games. No matter what was going on within our program, we still had to play the games. And it's about wins and losses. And we positioned ourselves well. We didn't get the outcome today that we wanted.

But I was incredibly proud of our guys throughout the year being able to pivot and adjust, make adjustments throughout the course of the year. So we certainly knew that we had some flaws, but we managed to get this far with it and I wanted it to go further and it just didn't happen.

But through it all I'm still proud of these guys, especially these two guys. I thought they competed their tails off today. This is a different environment. You're playing for keeps now. You lose you go home. You win, you keep playing, and this is all new to them, and they'll be here again. And hopefully when they're here again they'll be on the other side of it.

Q. Hysier, you shot 5-for-11 from the field to get a game high of 21 points. What was working for you tonight and what were you able to see from the Tulane defense?

HYSIER MILLER: Got some good looks. My teammates got me some good looks. I was able to make some shots early on, get comfortable, get a good feel. So I just feel early on I was comfortable; I made some shots and just played.

Q. Coach, what was your message to the team following the game? And what do you want to say to the fans about everything you guys went through this season?

COACH MCKIE: My message to the players was just kind of reflected on family and team, the concept of team, the concept of family and how it's important. And I didn't think for stretches that we played like a team. And I was disappointed from that part of it.

But I also told those guys I was proud of them for getting us to this point of getting the 4 seed and going through all the things that we went through during the year.

What I always try to explain to them is nobody cares; nobody cares if you have injuries. Nobody cares if you have a few guys sitting out for COVID. Nobody cares.

You have to continue to play the games and you have to compete at a high level. And it's life. You get knocked down, you gotta find a way to get back up and dust yourself off and get back up and go out and try to make your way in life. And I thought we did a lot of during the year. I didn't particularly think we did that today. We fought for moments, but we didn't fight for 40 minutes.

So it's painful for me. I like to win. Hopefully it's painful for these guys. And these are those moments that I told them, I said, you have moments in life that you go through and it can be life-changing. It can be life-altering. Adversity reveals character.

So this is an adverse time for us, and hopefully this drives these guys throughout the summer to just get better and learn how to play as a team for 40 minutes and throughout the season and learn from these moments and be able to reflect and grow from it.

Q. What is your message to the fans about everything you guys went through this season?

COACH MCKIE: I appreciate the fans' support. They've hung in there with us all year long. And it's been a tough

stretch. Three years -- my first year we got here, we didn't get a chance to play. It was just COVID and second year was riddled with COVID and we played 16 games.

And this year we missed a few games, but we were able to play and they've been supportive. We've had our ups and downs. And we're making progress.

And just be patient with us, we continue to make progress. And we're going to grow these guys and they'll be the face of the program, and we want to continue to grow them and surround them with the right pieces and get to where I think I could take this program.

Q. On Wednesday, you and Dave also talked about sticking to the game plan being the key to win this game. What was the game plan coming into today, and how would you evaluate how you guys stuck to it?

COACH MCKIE: We didn't stick to it at all from the beginning of the game. Again, we had our moments in the game where we followed the game plan. But for me it was playing inside/out, inside/out meaning attacking the paint, driving, trying to get layups, attacking the paint, driving, looking to kick it out for quality looks, quality shots.

Attacking the paint, getting to the free-throw line. And we just didn't do it. We got ourselves in trouble. We talked about, we had 30 turnovers against these guys in two games. It's way too many. Versus a team that don't even pressure you.

So we just got off to a slow start. And it's hard for us as a team, who struggles on the offensive end, to kind of -- you get behind and you've got to play catch-up. That's difficult for us. So we didn't follow the game plan to start the game and we got ourselves in trouble.

We dug a hole and we fought and we got back in it, and we had some opportunities. But our defense failed us at that point. And we were scrambling. I thought we did some good things. We were scrambling, but we dug a hole for ourselves that we couldn't get out of.

Q. You said this is your third year now. You're heading into your fourth year next year. Had such a tough season this year, so battle tested. Do you think you'll set yourself up for a major comeback next year, getting back Caleb, and it's going to be your fourth year, putting your stamp on this program? And you talked about last week, you really tried to have the guys build confidence. Do you think they're buying in with the summer coming up and the next season, do you think you're putting yourself in a good position to succeed next year?

COACH MCKIE: I think we positioned ourselves in terms of pieces. We feel good about the guys we've got, with college, as I like to call it free agency, you add some guys that you think that can help you.

But it's more about maturity and growth. It's one thing that you can think that you have an opportunity to be good. But guess what, everybody else is thinking the same thing that's in the conference and throughout the country.

So we've got a long road ahead of us. We've got to continue to work and get these guys better each day. They've got to get stronger. They've got to get conditioned, get better as basketball players, and we all have to do that collectively.

They've got to get better as basketball players. I've got to continue to get better as a coach. And if we put the work in throughout the summer, I think we've got a chance to be a really good team.

Q. Zach, were they just a little closer on you? Was it a little tougher to get looks, as compared to the first two times you played these guys?

ZACH HICKS: Obviously, yeah, but that's like something that I have to work on, being able to make contested shots or just being more conditioned, like Coach always tells me, and just running around more to get more open looks.

Q. When you're watching at the point, you're distributing the ball and nobody's hitting shots. Nobody. Like, what's running through your head as you're running the team the whole game?

HYSIER MILLER: Keep giving them, they going to make shots. They're my brothers I believe in them. Sometimes they don't go. Game plan, keep giving them the ball, they'll make shots when it counts.

Q. By the same token, was it frustrating? You forced 17 turnovers but you just couldn't convert them; every fast break you didn't finish.

HYSIER MILLER: If you can't convert, of course it's going to be frustrating. But it doesn't mean I'm upset with my guys. When I make a mistake they pick me up. Same for them; if they don't have a great game or they don't perform well, I'm still going to be there for them, pick them up. It's nothing different.

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