

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

USF Bulls

Brian Gregory

Tyler Harris

Postgame Press Conference



East Carolina - 73, South Florida - 58

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

BRIAN GREGORY: Yeah, obviously, I thought the first 12 minutes we were playing very well, defensively was good, rebounding the ball, sharing the ball very well. Then in the last eight minutes they got it going a little bit. We weren't able to get the stops that we were early. They got a big boost off the bench by number 15. He hadn't played all that much, but did a great job in the first half, 10 points in the first half, kind of sparked 'em.

And then we just, you know, very similar to the second half the other night, we just didn't move the ball as well as we had been moving it all year long, and then didn't shoot the ball when we got some good looks around the basket and so forth.

Give them a lot of credit. They did a good job of kind of going to the guys that had it going a little bit. Give Felton credit. I've always liked him as a player. I thought he played very well. We had talked about Jaden Walker playing very well over the last couple weeks, and those two guys did a great job for 'em.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll go to questions.

Q. Tyler, you finished with 26 points there tonight. You did everything you could out there to get this team back there. What did they do so well that really made it a little bit uncomfortable for you to get shots going? Obviously, you went 9-26 from the field. What made that a little bit uncomfortable for you there?

TYLER HARRIS: Just way they were picking me up. When I was getting in the lane, I was kind of get smothered. Just beating me up on offense and not letting me get any easy looks, people driving, guys face-guarding. So it just made it tough for me out there.

BRIAN GREGORY: He was 9-22, not 26.

Q. Obviously you used your extra year of eligibility left. What's next for you heading into, obviously it probably hasn't hit you yet since the game just ended, but what's the next step for you heading into after this season?

TYLER HARRIS: I feel like right now my next step is in God's hands. I just want to keep playing the game I love and right now it's like it's in God's hands right now. So just want to keep playing. I love the game. I'm a competitor and just want to keep playing basketball, the game I love.

BRIAN GREGORY: I think obviously he's put himself in good position for the next step in terms of the type of year that he had where he demonstrated his ability to play with the ball in his hands quite a bit, distribute as well. He led us in assists this year.

He's got a unique trait. There's not a guy in the country who wouldn't take 6-14 from the three, and then on those eight misses, you think everyone's still going in. You know what I mean? So he did a great job of utilizing that extra year, finding the right fit, and then -- you know, a lot of guys do that, but a lot of guys then don't make the changes necessary that you need to make to take a big jump. They just think sometimes changing schools is going to make the difference.

It puts you in a position, but then you got to do your job, and Tyler did that this year. That's why he had his best overall season of his career. He gets all the credit for that with the work that he's put in. He is ready for the next step, whatever that holds.

Q. Walk us through what this last season was like with a guy like Tyler Harris?

BRIAN GREGORY: It's hard because you do wish you had him. But as I just told the guys, I said, Nothing's ever wasted. So part of his path was to come here and play that last year. As he said, it's in God's hands. So was the first four years. But it put him in a position where he knew he had to do some things differently to expand his game, and some guys after four years aren't willing to do that.

So as I said, do I wish I had him all five years? Yeah, no doubt about it. But I'll cherish this year, and I think he will as well in terms of the opportunity that he was given. And again, he gets the credit because he made the most of that. I think there was aspects of his game outside of the scoring that dramatically improved and now it's his challenge to continue that, to take that another step and to tighten up some of the things that he's capable of doing with a little more work.

Q. Getting into kind of that first half and where things happened, you take a 10-point lead, 24-14, and then they go on a 27 to, I think it was 27-9 was the final eight minutes, and a huge four-point swing at the very end of that, that buzzer beater, and the foul. Just what did you see change from what ECU did?

BRIAN GREGORY: First, on the defensive end we weren't as active and alerted as we needed to be. They got a couple transition baskets with our lack of rotation back on the shot. That hurt us. They got to the free throw line during that stretch as well.

We had a couple quality defensive stops where we fouled 'em in the last five or six seconds. And then the last play was just a lapse of concentration. It was kind of that, Uh-oh, he's got the ball, and we foul him and he makes the shot. But I thought we got a little bit out of our game plan on the defensive end.

Then on the other end of the court we had some good looks and didn't make 'em, but then kind of got out of, as I always say, out of sorts there, where we weren't moving the ball as well and getting that ball reversed. We got the ball into the paint the first 12 minutes quite a bit, ball reversals and drives, got some good shots, got some offensive rebounds, wanted to get the ball in the post. They did a good job playing bigger and then helping in the post on Russel.

We had really good execution on a high-low and we just turned it over. There was a couple of those plays and when you add that to the defense, it was kind of a perfect storm those last eight minutes.

Q. Tyler, you and Keyshawn were in an interesting, maybe even tough situation this year coming in as

one-year guys. You have one year to make an impact. Now that that season's finished for you and Key, as one-year transfers, what impact do you think that you've left on this program and that you hope to see left on this program after you guys are gone?

TYLER HARRIS: I feel like the impact I left -- I'm a guard and a small guard, I'm a scoring guard, a facilitator. I know for sure I left an impact on Coach Brian Gregory that if you're a good guard, he's going to let you play your game. Check my Instagram. Every day is top guards from around the country, they already DM'ing me, like, they got the season, coach don't want me, like, I see the position you in.

So I just feel like the impact I just left, like, I helped USF as far as guards and guys who want to come off and buy in and play the right way, they're going to want to come to USF because they see me come in and do it and I had a very good season. So that's for sure the impact. It is way better than it was. Now with USF being all over social media this year, it was just the first year I wish we had more time together, but I guess our time has run out, but that's the impact for sure.

Q. Your six is finished. You graduate seven. What direction do you feel that this program is heading in right now with you at the helm?

BRIAN GREGORY: Well, I mean if you look at it we had, right now we have six out of our top eight players coming back. Obviously it's a different world when it comes to the transfer portal and all those different things that are involved now in college basketball. I think one of the things you learn is the adjustments that you're going to have to make and maybe start some of the stuff earlier than you used to start when you get guys on campus in the summer with some more team stuff. Because you're basically starting over with a new team year-in and year-out. It's just the way it's going to be. And the ability now for us to have an attractive situation for guys like Tyler and Keeshawn and Selt Miguel. It was attractive when Russell came in, it was attractive when Corey came in, but I think it's much more attractive now. And still you got to keep building with the younger guys. Ryan suffered from some concussion-type situations today and just couldn't go. But obviously I thought he had a tremendous freshman year. Doc obviously showed some flashes as well. He's just 20 pounds away from being really, really good.

But if you go through the starting lineup today you got four out of those five guys coming back. I mean, obviously, some guys will have some decisions to be made, but from all indication it's going to be to stick it out. We'll see. But we'll also have some opportunities to bring in some other

guys in the spring.

It's not -- when you lose those seven games on the last possessions, it puts you in a tough spot. It really does. So you got to figure out a way. Now I think with the top-5 teams in the league this year I think we were 0-8. Then with everybody else we were 7-3. So some of those teams are leaving. Some of those teams are leaving. But at the same time it's time we got to take that next step and bringing in some guys this spring and developing the guys that are coming back is going to be critical. I think we were put in a position where there was some things we wanted to drastically improve in this year. Unfortunately, last two games didn't show the progress, especially on the offensive end. But if we get to the point where you're averaging 73, 74, 75 points a game with the way that we usually defend and rebound, you're going to be in a position to be very successful.

So that's our next step and it's the next step is to be able to take a step where you're not just competing with those teams, you're beating 'em. That doesn't mean you're beating 'em all the time, but if you're able to go .500 against those guys, now you got a 12-win conference season, 13-win conference season and that puts you in a much different spot. At the same time, as I said, you got to take care of the early stuff as well. So you're going to have to make some adjustments to make sure that things are a little more defined early with the way college basketball is now. I think that's one of the biggest conversations among coaches out there is how do you get them -- during that month of November we played 10 games sometimes -- how do you get everybody on the same page that early and that fast. I think there's some things that we've talked about with the players in particular, what their feelings are on that and how we can do it better with everybody still never sacrificing the individual development, which is a key as well.

Q. I know it's fresh and you had a heck of a journey. Three different stops. What are your first reflective thoughts about your college career?

TYLER HARRIS: Man, just coming here and getting a chance to express my game and show everything that I can do, instead of just not being just put in a box, you know, just being a player that just coming in and be a whipping, come in make a spark. I just got to play the game, I got to get comfortable throughout the game all season. Feel like my coaches and my teammates they live and die with me. So I'll just never forget that and my extra year is going to be my most memorable year of college.

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