

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Cincinnati Bearcats

Coach Wes Miller

Dan Skillings

Landers Nolley, III

Postgame Press Conference



Cincinnati 84, Temple 54

WES MILLER: Pleased with the win. We played Temple three times, and that's the fifth time I've coached against one of Aaron's teams here the last two years, and they're always absolute battles because they're so defensively sound. They're tough. They're physical. They rebound, and they don't turn it over.

So to win with that margin, you're obviously really pleased and proud of the guys.

I thought early in the game, they came out with an incredible amount of energy, and they're getting out and blitzing the ball screen, and I thought we just needed to settle down and keep it moving a little bit.

We were a little flustered early, and they made a couple tough shots over the top. I thought after we kind of got through that first seven, eight minutes, I thought we settled in, made the simple play with the ball.

I mean, you look down, you only have seven turnovers. 18-7, you like that. We started making the simple play and some good things happened.

Vik's rim presence was really something.

Ody on the -- I haven't looked at the numbers, but he has 12 rebounds.

M on the offensive boards with 5. That was something. It was good to see Landers get it going there. I knew if he kept playing the ball would find him and the ball would go in. I thought he did a terrific job on Damian Dunn, who's a

terrific player in our league.

Then obviously Mike Adams-Woods really anchored us and defended well. I kind of keep going down the line.

But Dan Skillings gave us a lift tonight. I know he is sitting up here with us now, but maybe probably -- not probably, it was the best game he's had as a Bearcat, and I think anybody that is around our team every knows he ain't even every scratching the surface of what he's capable yet.

But timely, and it's happened for him because he's worked at it every day here consistently with a different focus, especially the last five or six weeks.

That was timely, and those were big minutes for us and we're pleased with that.

The last thing, for David to have the kind of shooting night that he had, you look down, he's 2 for 10, 0 for 3, and for us to win by 30, that's a good sign for our team, because you know he's not going to do that multiple nights in a row.

Anyway, pleased with the win. Now it's time to get ready for a big-time game tomorrow.

Q. Wes, is that the best game you guys have played this season?

WES MILLER: You know me, I'm not going to sit here and reflect right now. We played well. That's a good basketball team. We're proud of that. It's about tomorrow now. We can reflect after the year.

We've played well throughout points of the season. We keep improving and getting better. We'll figure that out at the end of the year. I hope we have a best game still left in us.

Q. Dan, obviously Roman Catholic. How did it feel to put up a career high game against Temple?

DAN SKILLINGS: It's always fun to play against friends and people I know in my hometown, of course. Got a lot of family watching. But it felt good. The coaches and players

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give me a lot of confidence in myself. They believe in me, and I appreciate that and that's what gets me going.

Q. As best as you can say with the timeout it was 16-6 Temple, what do you say at that point that we're allowed to hear?

WES MILLER: It wasn't a contentious timeout at all, it was just, let's settle down, let's continue to move the ball and do our job. Let's not get flustered because it's not going our way.

Honestly there wasn't a whole lot to it. Settled ourselves down and kind of kept playing. They made some really tough shots early. You hope that you guard and force them to take tough shots all night. You kind of feel like most nights if you can keep defending like that, it's going to work out, and I thought it worked out by the end.

Q. Dan, you had those two put-backs early. Did you feel like that got you going, just getting some boards and seeing the ball go through.

DAN SKILLINGS: Yeah, man, it's a good rebounding team, and I know getting to the boards is going to get us going, get me going, and that's the best for our team. I'm going to do whatever it takes.

Q. Did you know you were feeling it when you gave the two small hand gesture to Reynolds?

DAN SKILLINGS: Just in the game. Getting the game confidence and momentum, so that's it.

WES MILLER: The coach would prefer he just sprints back on D.

DAN SKILLINGS: Very true.

Q. Damian Dunn, 2 of 14 shooting the rest of the game. What was the difference in the defensive game plan?

WES MILLER: Well, that's probably a better question for Landers, but I can tell you from where I'm sitting, you guard as a team. You do.

But the matchup is important, and I thought Landers was prepared. I thought he did a great job of staying down and staying in front.

One thing about Damian Dunn, it's almost like he's going to make sure you don't foul him before he shoots the ball. Like it's almost like he'd rather get fouled than shoot it sometimes, and you see that his free throw rate -- I thought

Landers did a great job of staying in front, giving him no angles, not allowing him to draw a foul.

I know they got that one late on the elbow, but I thought Landers was phenomenal on him, and I thought our guys did a nice job of giving him some support. He is a terrific player. The credit goes to our team and then Landers Nolley, because he was terrific defensively.

Let them just say, like the guy is sitting beside me here. He's a complete player. Everybody knows he can shoot it. Been in this league for a while now. But he guards. He makes plays off the bounce. He rebounds, and he knows I want those things even more from him, but he has turned into a complete player, and you saw tonight with his matchup.

Q. You mentioned Viktor Lakhin's presence there on the rim. He tied an AAC tournament record seven blocks overall. What did you think of his performance tonight, six, five and seven blocks? Talk about his performance tonight.

WES MILLER: You guys heard it in my opening remarks. His presence at the rim, I thought there were some stretches this year in the league where we were really defending, and some of the analytical stuff said that that was true, and Vik's rim presence has a lot to do with that. He was moving tonight like Vik back in January before his ankle -- December and January before his ankle injury.

When he moves like that and he doesn't reach in and commit silly fouls, he's got as good of a rim presence as we have in our league.

Q. Wes, what was it like the second time around not having a game plan for Khalif Battle. First game he played, and then the last two against Temple he didn't. What was it like having a game plan for Temple without him?

WES MILLER: What was it like having a game plan without Battle?

Q. Yeah.

WES MILLER: Well, you know, listen, he's a guy that can get 20, 30 every night. I think he was leading our league in scoring. That's certainly somebody that makes them much more dynamic offensively.

I hate that for Aaron, but shoot, Rob Phinisee, John Newman, Viktor Lakhin, that's college basketball, too. But it certainly is a different prep to defend them without Battle on the floor.

Q. How good was it to see Mike Adams-Woods hitting? When he hits it's another dimension for you guys.

WES MILLER: I thought he defended his tail off. We'll go watch the tape briefly because we've got to prepare for the next one, but I thought he really, really defended.

That's where he sets the tone for us when he's that locked in, and then obviously they were going under him and they were kind of closing out short to him, and I believe in shoe I as a shooter. He works at it every day, and he made some big ones.

Q. Landers, what does Dan having a game like that, does that elevate the ceiling on this team, whether for the rest of this tournament or whatever comes next?

LANDERS NOLLEY: For sure. When Dan checks in the game, he immediately brings us energy, no matter if it's on the defensive end or the offensive end.

Him playing like that, I hope we get used to seeing that so we can have fun out here.

Q. Landers, you mentioned on Dan's play there, what were you guys thinking, 7-0 run by Dan right there to really set the momentum going for this afternoon? Obviously the final 33 minutes started with that run. Overall talk about how that momentum changed after that 7-0 run and what were you able to do to propel to that next level.

LANDERS NOLLEY: That's the way we played off him, honestly. He was rolling, so we're just trying to find the hot guy any time no matter who it is. He had it going, so he lifted us up and we were able to take off after that.

Q. Landers, you mentioned after the last game the back-and-forth you and Dunn had going at each other as competitors. How much if any did that impact your play today?

LANDERS NOLLEY: I've been watching film since that day. I looked up, I saw 30 on the scoreboard. I felt tremendously disrespected.

I just went in, prepared better, listened to coaches on staying down, not letting him draw fouls and get easy attempts at the free-throw line and giving him easy opportunities. I just tried to make it as hard as I could today.

Q. Were you able to watch any of the Houston game,

and do you take anything from that with what East Carolina did against them for a little bit?

WES MILLER: No, Andre Morgan had the scout. He was at the game live scouting along with some assistance from Drew Adams on our staff. So they watched it.

Guys, it's tournament play. I don't ever think about what's next until we win the first one.

I have not thought about Houston until the last 10 minutes, but that'll be the center of my focus from now until we play tomorrow.

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