

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Temple Owls Coach Aaron McKie Jahlil White Zach Hicks

Postgame Press Conference

Cincinnati 84, Temple 54

AARON MCKIE: We can get right to the lineup of questions.

Q. Aaron, what did you think of the shot selection and the way the offense was running after those first five minutes?

AARON MCKIE: I don't know. We tried -- everybody tried to win it on their own, a little too much one-on-one, and we didn't get the ball moving the way that I wanted it to move.

I thought for the last couple weeks we've been doing a really good job of moving the ball, moving bodies and screening and all of those things, and we made some shots early. We got comfortable and we got away from it.

Q. Jahlil, did you feel that way as that first half -- your coaches were telling you that at time-outs. What did you try to change and not get done?

JAHLIL WHITE: Yeah, I feel like we went away from the game plan a little bit. The ball started to stick, and it showed.

Q. Coach, Dan Skillings had a career-high back at Cincinnati versus you guys earlier in the season. Tonight he finishes with a new career 20 points. What does he do so dynamically that makes it hard to defend a guy like Dan?

AARON MCKIE: He got himself going. He was crashing the offensive glass, doing a lot of little things, getting lay-ups and put-backs. And when you can get those early



in the game or your first couple shots, the basket starts to get big and you get excited.

I thought we did a pretty good job against those guys early on defensively. He came in and got an offensive rebound and a put-back, and it gave them some life because they really couldn't score the ball.

He just did a lot of the little things for those guys early on, and it just carried over throughout the game.

Q. Coach, points in the paint were definitely an issue. They doubled your total; it was 40 to 20. What could you have done better to work around that and work more points in the paint for you guys and limit Cincinnati's in there?

AARON MCKIE: Yeah, I think a lot of them, especially early on, came from offensive rebounds. We just didn't do a good job of, once again, the little things of getting by people and boxing them out. We didn't do a good enough job of sitting down and keeping guys in front of us.

So there's a number of things that you could point to when you start to talk about points in the paint, and for me a lot of it starts with being able to keep a guy in front and finishing your defense off, defensive possession off with a rebound.

Q. Aaron, I know Dan, he's a Roman guy and he was on you guys' radar. Is that one of those things when he has a game like today, wish I would have got that kid, or is it just part of the job, you miss out on guys every year type of thing?

AARON MCKIE: No, he's a basketball player. He made some shots, made some plays, and it worked out. I don't look at it as a lot of kids that you can look at and say, I wish I would have had him. I don't think like that. I move on. I turn the page and move on and focus on the guys that we have here.

Q. Looking at the season as a whole, what were the positive takeaways and the negative takeaways that you go into the summer with?

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AARON McKIE: Positive takeaways, I think just watching these young guys get a chance to grow. They play a full season and significant minutes. It's a lot to ask of them. Zach, Ja here, Hysier, all of those guys are young guys, and they just continue to gain experience.

In terms of the negative, I want to continue to play. I want to play, play in March and all of those different things. We had every opportunity during the course of the year to do so, and we didn't take advantage of it. I've been saying it to the guys throughout the season; don't squander opportunities. It's just not with basketball, it's with life.

We had another opportunity today to extend the season, and we didn't do so.

Q. Viktor Lakhin just played 20 minutes or so the last time you guys faced a couple weeks ago. Tonight he tied the AAC conference record with seven blocks. Was there something he was able to do tonight that made it so tough and difficult for you guys to get going?

AARON McKIE: I would just say it's just part of the game. He's a big guy. He's long, skilled, can score inside, and looked to me like they wanted to try to go inside to him a little bit more today.

He had some advantages down there. We got caught. Some of our smaller guys on him, and he took advantage of that.

He's a good player. He can do some things around the basket, and he helps those guys go.

Q. Zach, kind of what was lacking at the start of the second half? It was still a 10-point game. You guys didn't score for a while to start the second half.

ZACH HICKS: Like Ja said earlier, the ball was sticking. We wasn't doing what we did coming out to start the game, which was moving. And we've got to help each other out on the ball, because people on the other side were not moving around, and we've got to start doing stuff like that to help the ball handler out.

Q. Aaron, I want to ask more generally. The portal comes in, and since that time I think with the exception of Kur, you've brought in transfers who are young guys versus so many teams in this league and elsewhere pulling in fifth and sixth-year guys. Was that by design and how do you work that?

AARON McKIE: It was. I think you get caught with just

trying to get guys in and develop them and have them get accustomed to your culture, but since I've been head coach, the college landscape is changing every year, you obviously want to get older and stay older.

In some ways you want to build from the ground up and have guys in your program and build it out with them so they take ownership in that.

You know, you're constantly evaluating and reevaluating and just trying to figure out what makes the most sense. Some teams or some programs can have some success when they go out and grab a few guys that can help them right away, and some teams don't. So I guess it's like shooting dice or just having luck on your side in order for that to work out for you.

Q. What went wrong in the second half? You guys had some quality shot attempts, but what was going on in the second half that some of your shots weren't falling?

AARON McKIE: We just didn't make shots. We started to hang our heads. A huge part of basketball is putting the ball in the hole, and we wasn't making shots, and it looked like we started to get a step slower, and we just kept telling the guys, just hang in there, hang in there, let's ride our defense, let's try to get stops, but we wasn't making shots, we wasn't getting stops.

That could be a recipe for disaster, especially for a young team.

We fought. We just dug a hole that was too deep for ourselves.

Q. Are you concerned about your future as head coach at Temple?

AARON McKIE: No. I don't work off of that. I coach and I try to grow these kids. It's part of the game. One of my coaches would say to me all the time about coaches, you get hired, and at some point you know you're going to get fired or whatever the case may be.

But I don't lose sleep over that. I want to continue to grow these kids and help this program as best as I can.

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