

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Monday, November 24, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Auburn Tigers

Coach Steven Pearl

Keyshawn Hall

Tahaad Pettiford

Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 84, Oregon 73

STEVEN PEARL: Good win. That's going to be a team, Oregon, that will just progressively get better as the season goes on. Shelstad having been hurt with his hand think really set them back going into the season, and I think once they get a little more comfortable with him being back, that's a team that has the size and the athletes and the players and the shooters to be able to beat really good teams on their schedule.

I thought our guys did a good job. I thought in the first half offensively we were very sloppy. We didn't do a very good job of sharing the basketball. It was way too much my turn and not enough of -- our execution was just really poor. We've got to do a better job of cleaning that up, I think.

It was great to see Tahaad though, get going. He really kept us in the game in the first half. It was nice to see him back to his old self, getting to the rim, finishing through contact and just being effective out there.

He kept us in the game in the first half and then in the second half we started off really sluggish defensively and let them do whatever they wanted.

So made a good adjustment defensively to just start switching everything in ball screen and keeping a body on a body, and I think that ultimately led to us going on a 10-0 run and finding ways to get more active defensively.

I thought when we started switching our guys really sat down and guarded their yard as opposed to just relying on impact and ball screens and stuff.



It was great to see Key out there. 35 minutes was probably way too much but we were in foul trouble at 5. Coming off an injury that's too many minutes right now, but he came out there, played his tail off against a really physical team and really helped us finish the game.

Proud of our guys. A lot to improve on. But really good win.

Q. Coach, how did you feel like your team did in terms of defending late? I know you talked about the ball screen switches and switching out but like big steal by Kevin Overton; Freeman had a couple good steals down the stretch. How do you feel like they performed in that aspect?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, they had 18 turnovers. They had 10 in the first half and they probably had eight in the first, like, 10 minutes of the second half.

I thought our guys did a better job of being more intentional defensively, being more aggressive defensively. Yeah, we made plays late, which was really important. We made them take tough one-on-one shots, so I thought the guys did a good job. We just didn't rebound. They had 20 offensive rebounds. We'd get a stop, force them into a tough shot, and then they would get the offensive rebound.

They had 22 second-chance points off 22 offensive rebounds, and that's going to get you beat in big games.

Especially against a really big Michigan team tomorrow that is going to be a strength of theirs, so all five guys got to do a good job of checking out.

But I thought we responded really well. Defensively they shot 32 percent in the second half, 44 in the first half. Did a better job defensively in the second half of keeping a body on a body and forcing tough contested shots.

We've just got to do a better job of rebounding and finishing possessions.

Q. Going off of that, Bittle didn't score at all in the second half. How big was that for your bigs to defend him without getting into more foul trouble with what they had early on?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, Murph had two quick ones; Filip



had three quick ones, but Filip played so well. It sucks that he was only out there for 13 minutes because he probably did as good be of a job on Bittle as anybody just because he used his speed and athleticism to really work and front the post and not let him get anything easy.

But I thought all of big, you know, Mek gave us some really nice minutes in that first half, six minutes, plus two on the plus minus. And then Murph obviously did a great job.

Our bigs I thought did a really good job of working around the post and using their speed and quickness to do a good job of fronting the post, and then our backside guards were loaded into the ball to protect us. And we had pretty good ball pressure on the perimeter.

So bigs did a good job. Answered the ball on Bittle, obviously a really talented player, and I thought when he did get those touches inside we did a good job of contesting them without fouling, and we were fortunate that he missed of them. But I thought our bigs had great activity in there tonight.

Q. Tahaad, how did you get going tonight and help your team?

TAHAAD PETTIFORD: Just playing a game. We obviously had play calls that we wanting to run, so just playing throughout the offense and just finding the rhythm early. And then my teammates had my back and just told me to keep going, so finding that rhythm early just helped me a lot.

Q. Key, what was it like to get out there and how much work did it take for you to be able to get out there and play tonight knowing what you went through with that injury just a little over a week ago?

KEYSHAWN HALL: Yeah, I just stayed in there, shout-out to CP, Clark Pearson, I stayed in there working out with him even before practice after practices just staying in there and just grinding it, doing anything I can to get back out there.

They was telling me rest and make sure I'm 100 percent, but I just wanted to get back out there, so Clark just had me grinding every day, so yeah.

Q. Coach, you talked a little bit about the bigs. You guys are going to have a challenge against Michigan and you already spoke about that. What do you need to see from a guy like Emeka to be able to contribute a little bit more against teams that have that kind of size?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, it's going to require all three of them, really all five of them when you talk about Key and Sebastian, but we have really good depth up front and when somebody gets in foul trouble we're able to rotate guys.

You saw Oregon's lineup at the end of the game where they had Evans, Bittle, Shelstad, Stewart and Pryor; that lineup as far as the size goes is what Michigan is going to roll out there every possession. We're going to have to do a really good job of keeping our bigs fresh because they are going to have their hands full not only keeping the ball out of the post, but doing a great job of rebounding.

Mek, Filip, and Murph they're all going to have to really step up tomorrow physically because it's going to be a tall task, because like you said, Michigan has got a lot of bigs.

But I think it was great to be able to play a team like Oregon who has comparable size. I think it's going to help us get ready for tomorrow.

But Michigan is the No. 1 transfer portal class in the country, some pretty highly touted players. Going to be a challenge, but I know our guys are excited about it.

Q. What did you think of Kaden coming in there for you when you got in foul trouble and KO?

KEYSHAWN HALL: That just shows we can go to our bench at any time and the trust that we have in our guys. Kaden just being a freshman, him coming out there and showing he's ready, being poised, having seven assists just shows that he's ready for the moment. And if he needs to come in there and be a leader and be poised, then he showed that he can do that today.

Q. Just SWA and Elijah leading the team in plus minus, they didn't score a ton but they did so much of everything else. You talk about those guys' impact and winning at a high level. Was this a good showcase of that tonight?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, Sebastian just does so many things that don't show up on a stat sheet every single night. Made two huge free throws late after he had just missed two, so stayed composed. Physically he's just a specimen, but then defensively, man, anytime we got a switch on Shelstad and Sebastian was on him he wasn't getting anything. Sebastian does such a good job of moving his feet.

Elijah, I give him crap all the time. When Elijah is in a stance, he makes plays. He had four steals again tonight and there was too many possessions where he got caught

standing up and just, you know -- but when Elijah wants to make plays defensively, he does so at a very high level. Six rebounds, though, four steals, plus 15 in the plus minus is really good to not having really scored a ton of points. But I thought he played under control. He played with good tempo, with good poise offensively.

Defensively I just have such high expectations for him and Sebastian that I need those guys to deliver night in and night out for us to have a chance to beat the best teams on our schedule.

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