

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Tennessee Volunteers Coach Rick Barnes Bishop Boswell Ja'Kobi Gillespie

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 76, Houston 73.

Q. Bishop, it seemed like there was an adjustment to settle up on Kingston where you kind of put more pressure on him and changed the way Houston played. What did you do that was so effective in the second half?

BISHOP BOSWELL: Yeah, obviously he's a really good player, had a really good game, but I think just playing hard. It was really an adjustment. We knew he was attacking hard right but just send out a guard.

Q. Rick, we talked about Bishop yesterday, but more can you say today about his performance and how much do you believe he set the tone there in the first half for you?

RICK BARNES: Well, like I said yesterday, I think he's becoming one of the best defensive guards in the country and there's no doubt that it's a hard role to put a player to want to buy into, to want to do it, but he's all about team. He wants to win more than anything else, and we knew during the whole recruiting process he was a winner and he would do whatever it would take.

We're asking him to fill a major role and he's embraced it, and obviously proud of him. I'm glad -- those free throws were huge, and while he was shooting them, I said, if anybody deserves to make these it's him because of how hard he's worked even through his rehab.

But he's starting to -- he's got so much more growth for it. Offensively he's going to just continue to get better and better, but we need him to keep that focus, and he was



terrific, as he was last night.

Q. Bishop, what has the process looked like in the last year of buying into what you can be for this team defensively?

BISHOP BOSWELL: Yeah, obviously last year we had a bunch of senior guards, really good players, so I think my mindset last year was if the roles were reversed I don't want them to cheer me on and not have a bad attitude.

So last year I supported the team any way I could and coming into this year he talked about that role I needed to fill was be a defensive stopper because we lost some really good defenders last year. So just having that mindset.

Q. Rick, what would you say you're most proud of after that kind of effort, that kind of win from your team?

RICK BARNES: Well, everybody had heard the chatter that we hadn't played anybody, but we had. We had a great scrimmage against Ohio State and then we had a great exhibition game against Duke. We knew after both of those that if we could continue to grow that we had a chance.

We've got a group of guys that really like each other. They work hard. They work hard every day. More and more guys are starting to understand their roles.

Everyone we played tonight, whether -- you think about Mo's steal, you think about Jalen coming off the bench and doing what he had to do, and obviously these two guys in the backcourt with Nate getting three fouls that were questionable at best and working through that.

It's just we -- this team we knew that if we'd be talking about what we had done up until this point with this group of guys, want to make this their team and their season, and they've worked at it now for six, seven months.

And just a great team -- it was truly a great team effort by so many different guys.

Q. Rick, that seven-minute scoring drought started with a Bishop block and then he had offensive rebounds on your next two possessions. He scored

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one; assisted JP on the next. How important was his rebounding and everything else he was doing in addition to his defense?

RICK BARNES: Well, you need a guy. Obviously we feel like we've got some scorers in Nate and Ja'Kobi and our post guys. That the difference in our team from a year ago. We had no inside game. We got something there, but you need a connector too, and that's what he's done. He's willing to sacrifice some things offensively to know who he's playing with, knowing what he has to do.

I think he's really starting to understand the game more and more. But you have to have a guy that plays that role. In some ways it might be the most important role on the team. I know one thing, it's definitely the hardest in terms of just having to go out and grind it out. And not only is he doing that, he's trying to get down the court, doing what he needs to do offensively.

Tonight I thought he impacted the game in more ways than just his defense.

Q. The game kind of flipped on a seven-minute stretch midway through the second half. You guys went on a 10-0 run; held them without a basket for seven minutes straight. What did you specifically like from your defense and how they walled up during that period?

RICK BARNES: I thought the biggest thing throughout the game, we started the game and we missed some shots that we feel like we need to make, but at no point in time did these guys stop believing.

They know it's a 40-minute game. I think as the game goes on guys start feeling each other out. I think these guys definitely do that. We talk about how we like to pressure as much as we can.

But I thought these guys figured it out themselves, and they were very talkative, very active in the time-outs, and got some good play with our post guys. A little bit better with our ball screen coverage. Still got to get better.

Just being with them and hearing them talk, coach each other, hearing them talk about adjustments that need to be made is a step in the right direction.

Q. Ja'Kobi and Bishop, the last few years there's been a lot of talk around the NCAA about how athletes are being harassed on campus, on social media because of gambling. Their peers are putting money on games and here we are in the gambling capital of the world. In the times that you guys have been walking around the hotel, warming up, have you had fans shout things

at you, I need you to go for this many points tonight, anything like that?

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: No, we haven't. I haven't myself. I know we look at that really if they're texting us or something, we won't pay attention to that.

BISHOP BOSWELL: I know one of our teammates shot a three at the end of the game the other day and he had people DMing him saying you're going to get investigated and stuff like that, thinking all that. But no, nothing serious.

Q. You guys are 2-0 and now you'll see how the other results play out to determine who your opponent will be tomorrow. How aware were you of just the point differential factor, this isn't bracket play, and they were intense competitive games. I know you want to win, but were you aware of the fact if we want to win but we want to play for the championship we might have to beat Houston by five points or ten points? How much was that in your consciousness as the game played out?

RICK BARNES: We're just trying to win.

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: We were definitely aware, but we just wanted to get the win.

BISHOP BOSWELL: We're too good of a team to worry about points. We're just trying to play as hard as we can and get a win.

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