

# GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Wednesday, November 26, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

**Kansas Jayhawks**

**Coach Bill Self**

**Elmarko Jackson**

**Melvin Council, Jr.**

**Jamari McDowell**

Postgame Press Conference

Kansas 81, Tennessee 76

DAVID RILEY:

**Q. Elmarko, big second half for you. Could you talk about your personal game and how do you feel about your come back victory in the third place game?**

ELMARKO JACKSON: It feels good. Coach has just been harping on us to just keep playing no matter the circumstance, and it's just what we did. I'm just happy to have a group of guys around me that believe in me and trust me to make plays for themselves and me.

**Q. Jamari, you've been around Elmarko as long as anyone. Did you get the sense he had a half in him tonight?**

JAMARI McDOWELL: Yeah, he was due. Like Coach said in the locker room we've been his two favorite players the past two weeks, so I knew he was due. It was time.

**Q. Tre obviously fouls out there midway through the second half. Were there any discussions on what to do about that?**

JAMARI McDOWELL: Honestly, with DP being out, you kind of get adjusted with getting used to playing with everybody, and also playing without some people. When Tre went out we just hung in there, we knew it was going to be a fistfight, and we had to do it for all those that couldn't on the bench, so good team win there.



**Q. Melvin, what do you think this particular win and the way you got it says about your team, and how do you think you guys grew over the course of three games in three days out here in Las Vegas?**

MELVIN COUNCIL JR: I mean, since the summertime we've been together, like I tell everybody that asks me that question, I feel like I knew these guys for like four years, just how we came together. We was telling ourselves this is going to be an AAU type of thing when you go out to travel and you got like four games. So we was prepared for it. And as Coach always says, next guy up.

**Q. You win three games here, you end up with a title of third place. Is it strange that you don't get the chance to compete for an overall championship?**

MELVIN COUNCIL JR: I'm mad that we didn't compete for the championship because I feel like, okay, like the point differential, but I feel like we had a chance to play for the title, extra money in our pockets.

But God is good so we've got a chance to play for third place, and it's free money, so I'm not mad about that, and Christmas is on the way.

The guys are happy about that.

**Q. Melvin, I know Coach was really happy. I saw him have his arm around you walking off the court. Could you share what he told you?**

MELVIN COUNCIL JR: He told me that -- I think he said I'm a bad man, something like that, around those lines. But I was built for these moments. My life has been consistent. I try to do it in practice every day and practice like we play, so that's what I do.

**Q. Elmarko, how important was it to go 3-0, and did you guys believe you could do it?**

ELMARKO JACKSON: It was very important. I feel like having these games without some key players that we have is good for our team development, and I feel like as a team this is really no surprise. I feel like as basketball players, especially as a team, you're supposed to be delusional about how you guys are, and it feels good to know that we're good about the delusion that we have



about this team. I feel like we fight hard, and I feel like we can go toe to toe with any team in the NCAA.

**Q. What do you think changed for your guys midway through the second half to be able to pull off that comeback?**

BILL SELF: I'd have to watch the tape. I don't know that a lot changed. I actually thought we guarded them 40 minutes. I actually thought they made shots in the first half or shots we wanted them to take and they were just good players and made them.

What did we go down, 12? Then it was about to get away from us, and then who would have thought we got better when Tre was out of the game actually. And Marko played great and 'Mari made some big plays and Mel kind of got into a rhythm and roll.

But we just kept defending and rebounding. It's a big deal for us to out-rebound that team even though it was only by one. I thought we did a great job with the physicality-type plays.

**Q. Who do you look to when Tre did foul out to step up, if anyone?**

BILL SELF: Well, it was a group effort. I didn't say, it's your job now. I thought Flory did some good things, obviously, and Bryson rebounded the ball. Didn't score the ball today, but he played well.

But the biggest thing is you look at it, hey, Melvin and Elmarko the last 10 minutes of the game were both pretty damned good. They got downhill and they got fouled, and that's something we should be able to play to that we haven't done a good job of late, or up until this point, bit hopefully that will give us some confidence playing that way later.

**Q. How was Elmarko kind of able to string those points together, and what does it take for him to continue that going forward and develop more consistency?**

BILL SELF: Well, he had about as bad a three-minute stretch the end of the first half a guy could have and he flipped it, which to me showed some toughness and everything because we went to end down 7 and we could have easily -- he missed the lay-up and then threw it to them for a basket and then had another bad play.

To me it just says that maybe that was the icebreaker that takes the lid off the cover, so to speak, and maybe he can start playing a little bit freer. Because he played free the

second half, and he hadn't done that all year long.

**Q. Bill, you told the crowd that sometimes you call them soft, but today how would you describe their play?**

BILL SELF: I told the crowd that?

**Q. Then you said but today they were tough.**

BILL SELF: Was that on speaker? I didn't know that.

I don't think that we played near as tough as what we need to play to be shorthanded now. I think you've got to figure out a way to win where it's not very pretty, when you don't score the ball easily.

Today we scored the ball better and we actually executed better. But the biggest thing is when the game got in question and we went down, the guys just played one possession at a time as opposed to Duke and Carolina, I think we felt like there were some eight- or ten-point plays out there for us to go make, and today was just one after another, and I thought that's maybe a sign of growing up.

**Q. To be shorthanded, what does it mean to come here and go 3-0?**

BILL SELF: It's nice. It's been a good tournament for us. The matchups have been good for us, different styles. It's a first-class event, and obviously the national media has treated it like it's the premier basketball event so far this year, which I think is true.

I'm not going to -- the format to me is fine, but the format can be tweaked, I think. You can still go by point differential, but you can't penalize teams for going 2-0. Everybody should get a piece of it, even if only four played the last day, in my opinion.

But it's first class. This thing is going to continue to grow and get better.

**Q. Just to expand a little bit off of what Gary asked you, you have such long experience in having big wins in November. To do this three games, three days, two of them double digit without your best player, what do you think it will do for the collective psyche of your group?**

BILL SELF: I think we came here doubting how good we could be, so if anything -- we didn't play bad against Duke. It was a three-point game with four minutes left, but it wasn't good enough and too many mental mistakes. I even thought yesterday and the day before against Notre

Dame, I thought we had too many mental mistakes.

Today I thought we actually played sound. I actually thought we followed what we're trying to do. I actually thought the ball got to the third side quicker. I actually thought we screened somebody. I actually thought the shots we gave up were the shots we were supposed to give up.

So that's encouraging. And you guys have seen him play. He's really good. We're not offensively fluid enough to win games like we did there and expect guys to just come off the bench and get 17 or whatever.

But what it should do is give us confidence that when we are whole, if we can learn to play together, that we can defend and rebound well enough to actually be pretty good.

**Q. What is it like seeing all the players rally their energy around you postgame, putting towels on your head, and what is it like seeing them have all this energy?**

BILL SELF: Well, you should have been in the locker room. They gave me the Gatorade shower because obviously that's their way of getting back at me for being pissed at them, which I totally get and I love.

But it's better than the alternative. I think we're growing up as a team. We seem to like each other. I couldn't be -- I'm going into Thanksgiving very optimistic.

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