

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Thursday, November 27, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Coach Steve Pikiell

Postgame Press Conference

Rutgers 80, UNLV 65

STEVE PIKIELL: First, this is an unbelievable tournament with some terrific teams. Appreciate Seth inviting us and being here. I think we learned a lot, too, about our team. But playing UNLV in Vegas, always a hard thing to do. They're an elite scoring team. We took a step tonight.

I thought in a lot of ways, our defense in the second half was, like, old school, and we got back to rebounding the ball, and it helps when your center has a career high in points and rebounds and pretty much was dominant throughout the game.

Got to keep getting those consistent. Now we've got to turn consistent with those efforts and good things can happen. But happy Thanksgiving, everybody.

Q. What did UNLV do well?

STEVE PIKIELL: You know, nothing really caught me off guard. A big thing is when you turn the ball over, they do a terrific job of converting off turnovers. I was very concerned with the free-throw line, too.

They get to the free-throw line, their guards are dynamic. They've got two guards that can get in the lane and do some things.

I thought we were a little bit impatient. We didn't move the ball the way we needed to move it, and when we did turn it over, I think they got all five of our turnovers were 11 points. We were and-1ing them, too.

We had to settle in. I thought we got off to a good start, and Chris Nwuli gave us some great energy. In the second half I put him in the lineup, too, and we got off to a really good start.



It was a good energy game for some of those guys that for me played with great energy.

Q. What did Buchanan do well tonight to turn the corner?

STEVE PIKIELL: Well, he has the potential to do a lot of those things. He had a terrific second half, 15 points. He got downhill. He made life easy for his teammates. He's got a knack for getting to the rim, and quite honestly, he can get assists, he can rebound, he can get steals, he can sit down and guard bigger guys or small guys, so he's kind of unique.

But again, just need him to be more consistent. He looked really good today, so we're really thankful for his efforts.

Q. What's this tournament done for you the last two years?

STEVE PIKIELL: Well, it's done a lot, actually. Not just the money, too.

You learn a lot about your team. The first night we opened with Tennessee, and I think as good as any team in the country, period. You get an opportunity to play that kind of size and the style that they play, and then we turned around the next night and played a Notre Dame team which plays a completely different style.

So you challenge a team. I have 10 newcomers with the different styles, and then you play a UNLV today that's completely different from those two teams.

Moving forward, our league has a lot of different styles in our league, and you hope that this tournament prepares you for some of those games. We have Purdue and Michigan coming up back to back, our first two league games, so the league scheduler really likes me a lot.

By coming here and watching and seeing the level, we know what we're going to face in our league. You hope your team keeps growing. You hope your young guys get their feet wet against ranked teams and really good teams, and you hope you can grow from that.

Q. What do you think about Las Vegas as a market and its growth as a sports market?



STEVE PIKIELL: You know, I just love coming out here. There's a great energy here when you play. They keep growing this tournament in a lot of different ways. It's going to be expanded next year, too. You've got the football when we came out. We had the race car. Just so many different events going on.

You've got the great hotels. You've got the really good food. It's a good place to spend a few days, and it's getting great for sports. It really is.

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