

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Drake vs Missouri

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Wichita, Kansas, USA

Intrust Bank Arena

Missouri Tigers

Dennis Gates

Caleb Grill

Tamar Bates

Media Conference



simply because we had plays where we weren't just getting off of it quick enough. I mean, we knew we would be able to get certain shots and run certain plays that we always have. We just a lot of the times took one or too many dribbles than we probably should have.

CALEB GRILL: Just going off that, I feel like we were one dribble late or one second late on what our plan was to attack them. They took full advantage of it. Looking back on it, throughout the season, this reminds us -- reminds me at least of the Texas game. They played a similar style of basketball to them. It frustrated us.

Credit to them for executing their game plan.

DENNIS GATES: I'm extremely proud of our guys. I'll keep saying that. When you look at the points off turnovers, they did a great job of turning our turnovers into baskets. We forced them to 15 turnovers, but we had less points than the actual turnovers we forced them into. That's a category that I think they did a great job in.

The other thing is points in the paint, and that comes, again, from the turnovers. They ended up shooting 20 for 36 from the two-point field goal from two-point land. When you have that, that's more field goals than we even made. We won the free-throw battle, which is a category that I wanted to win. When you look at the three-pointers, we took the number that I thought was sufficient, but we didn't finish in the paint well enough.

Those three-point baskets, which is a part of our offense, I would not trade the majority of them because Caleb shot seven of the 16. Some of them was wide open. Ultimately, he knows he'll knock them down next time. I still want him to shoot them, but the big picture is Drake played better than us today.

Q. When you guys went on that run and cut it to just one point, what changed to be able to go on that run, and why do you think you guys were just short?

DENNIS GATES: That was an awesome run. There was a lot of energy in the building. Again, I'm proud of my guys. What you saw in that was the relationships that we have with each other. I thought we made winning plays because we had winning relationships.

Drake 67, Missouri 57

THE MODERATOR: The Missouri Tigers are with us. Head coach Dennis Gates along with Tamar Bates and Caleb Grill. We'll have an opening statement from Coach.

DENNIS GATES: It's a memorable season for our guys. A great accomplishment, to say the least, but it was cut short. There's no doubt about it. This game does not speak for our success. It's win or losers go home. It's always losers go home in these situations, and we didn't do enough to come away with the win.

The enough part I would speak of is the 50/50 loose balls. We forced them to turnovers. We just couldn't corral the basketball, and sometimes it's the bounce.

I credit our opponent. They did a great job, made some tough shots, and best of luck to them moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. For Dennis and if the players want to address it, what were you hoping to be able to get done offensively against them coming in, and what did they do to take it away, especially in the first half?

TAMAR BATES: We knew coming into the game that they were a heavy, pack line type of defense. We knew we needed to try to distort their shell with some of the things that we do, punching the gaps and getting off of the ball quicker. We weren't able to -- well, we had some moments of doing that, but I mean, we had how many turnovers? 17 for the game, which is extremely uncharacteristic of us just



That moment if we could have spread it over the course of a 40-minute game, again, I credit our opponent, but we didn't impose what we should have imposed, and it was basically at the end of the day we were able to draw more fouls, but ultimately, we were able to set our defense in a way that bothered them, and that was pressing.

We forced them to some turnovers, even a ten-second count, which was great, but ultimately, the points in the paint we couldn't overcome. The second-chance points was even. We beat them on the free-throw attempts, but it was just the percentages in two-point land that they were able to execute.

Q. Coach, about midway through that first half they went to a four-guard line-up. They're smaller anyway, but that seemed to be more effective against your pressure. What did you see from kind of them going small, and how did that kind of change the game in your opinion?

DENNIS GATES: Well, they went small simply because I thought at that point in time we were forcing some turnovers. Again, I credit our opponent. They were able to get to those loose basketballs a little bit quicker than us, whether it was on the ground or a loose ball on the floor. They were able to be first to the floor, and we were second.

Again, they made some tough and difficult shots. We just didn't have enough stops in that first half. They made even tough threes. I believe it was, you know, Stirtz. He made I think I want to say two threes in that first half that were below that shot clock or close to it, but we just got to come away with the baskets that I knew we could and we shot a low two-point percentage there in the paint.

Q. I know this is probably a bad question 20 minutes after the end of your season, can you put into perspective this year? Are you able to kind of look back at the big picture, or does that take a little while?

CALEB GRILL: Yeah, I would say we accomplished a lot of things this year, and it didn't finish how we wanted to. We played in the best league that's ever been assembled in college basketball, and we were able to finish tied for sixth in that league. When you look back on the wins that we had at Florida, home versus Alabama, other top-25 wins like Mississippi State, Ole Miss, when you look back on it, like how much a dogfight it was every single night going into those games, your mentality and you're physically just drained after every single game, and how we were able to accomplish all that and still make it to the postseason, still make it to the NCAA Tournament.

I think it's just a huge credit for our coaching staff of getting us ready and us players of getting each other ready every day in practice and still showing up.

Yeah, it was just a grueling season, and the fact that we were able to make it to where we're at, I just couldn't be more appreciative when looking back at it.

TAMAR BATES: I mean, yeah, we did a lot of really good things this year, and I'm extremely proud of the group mainly for the reason being that nobody cared for the University of Missouri basketball before the season, and obviously a lot of people started to talk about us and maybe showed a little bit more appreciation and national recognition as the year went on. Because of the guys in that locker room, the 18 guys that we have, the coaches in that locker room and what this guy preached to us all year and the belief that he instilled in our group, I'm extremely proud of that locker room.

Today what happened, obviously we came up short. Nothing -- not any time this year where we came up short, didn't win a game, nothing anybody could say or no loss could demean how proud I am of this team and how great of a year that we had.

Obviously we wanted to advance today. Came up short. Drake played a hell of a game, but at the end of the day I'll always remember this team, I'll remember this season, and I can't be anything but proud of what we were able to do just given the fact that nobody believed in us but us.

Q. Coach, kind of to that same question, what can you say about the two guys sitting next to you sticking with you after last season and kind of bringing Missouri to where it is today?

DENNIS GATES: I'm going to have to keep it short because I'll come to tears if I really told you everything and spilled my heart out, right?

First of all, I thank them for wanting to play for me and allowing me to be in their life. It's bigger than basketball, and that's what sometimes what you have to understand. I'm proud of their growth. I'm proud of what they've poured into themselves, what they've poured into the strangers that come into the locker rooms that now they call brothers, what they pour into the staff.

I get to see front row a part of them that you guys will never see, and I'm thankful for that seat at that table, but also, that seat in their life.

You know, being called someone's coach is a life-long title. They'll tell their children, their future spouses. I'll always



be Coach. "Hey, Coach Gates." In some way, shape or form I'll always be Coach. It's not just with these two, it's with everybody.

What I share with them is full transparency. I share my love with them, and I'm proud to share the love I have and full transparency with these dudes. I tell them every day how I feel about them. I hug them. Sometimes they hug me back. Sometimes they be, like, Coach, you hugging me too much.

That affection is what you have seen these two guys break through. When you love somebody so much, they adhere to game plans. They adhere to the connectivity that you are asking for. It's blind. It does not show up in stat sheets.

So my love and rendition is beyond this game tonight, and the time that I've spent with them speaks for that. It will never be cut short because it hasn't just been about basketball. It hasn't.

While our season ends, our relationship with these two guys who are moving forward is just beginning because they get another lease and perspective in the real world, and I'll be right there for them, just like I was now.

Q. Dennis, how hard is it to replicate what you just went through in practice in prep?

DENNIS GATES: Well, first, I want to say congratulations to you, Dennis, and your retirement. I don't know what you are going to do now. I have no clue. You're going to do a whole -- I still want to invite you to do some media training with my guys. I want to invite you to campus. You've had a great career. I'm thankful of what you have narrated with our story, and I mean it. I mean it. I really mean that.

So I celebrate you. I really do.

As it relates to the game plan, we had a real good look. We had some great practices. Again, the look that Drake gave us was not foreign. It wasn't foreign to us. We've practiced elongated defensive possessions when these guys first got here in June with our implementation of our system, but also, throughout the season.

The other part of that is this, their ball went in more than ours at a different rate. That impacts the game too. They were 20 for 36 from two-point field goals, 5 for 10, I believe from three. They shot over 50%; we shot less than 40. That changes the perspective of a game, and I credit them because they really made tough shots. They made tough shots.

It's not that our guys were doing something wrong. They made tough shots. Ultimately, that's what March is about, who is going to make the tougher shots to pull their team ahead? Unfortunately, we were on the other side of it, and I'm proud of our guys, but we had great looks. Our scout team did a great job, and also, we had great preparation.

So I'm proud of that. I'm just not proud of the outcome, but I'm proud of the relationships that we've established, and I'm proud of this team because ultimately, when we said in June we wanted to put banners up, we wanted to go to San Antonio. We don't have a trip to San Antonio now. For us we did something historically that has never been done from one year to the next.

I'm proud of our staff. I'm proud of our players. We've done something with our fan base, and I'm thankful for our fan base supporting us the way that they did. Without them last year, there's no this year. We had 10,000 fans in our last three home games. 10,000, 10,000, 10,000 plus. Last season, and that spilled over to this season.

So our credit the leadership on our campus, President Mun Choi, our Athletic Director, Laird Veatch, our Board of Curators for believing in these guys because these dudes right here have a new home, and that's in Columbia, Missouri.

Q. Dennis, when you cut it to 52-51, other than the shots not going in, is there anything you would have changed or liked to have seen done differently in the last three minutes?

DENNIS GATES: Well, I'll say this. We went on a 10-0 run. Out of that 10-0 run, it was seven free-throws, seven made free-throws. Again, that lid was still tight on the rim, but our guys executed from the free-throw line.

The other part of that run is that Drake answered it with a 6-0 run. I credit them because they settled back in. We just didn't execute, meaning we got the shots. We had an opportunity to tie the game. That's why we were only down one. You know, we missed a free-throw. I know Mark wants that free-throw back.

We just didn't make enough shots or have enough stops. We had too many points off turnovers given to our opponent, and they capitalized on our mistakes.

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