

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Miami Hurricanes

Jim Larrañaga

Postgame Press Conference



Miami 79, Pittsburgh 73

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, I'm a great believer in numbers, and the numbers today were very indicative of the terrific win we had. After our Boston College win, I could see the energy in our team and the excitement of just getting a win after struggling for almost the entire regular season.

And then you see today where we go 22 for 28 from the foul line, terrific job there. We battled them just about even on the boards, 37-36. They won by one.

We had 17 assists and only 6 turnovers. That was a huge statistic.

And then the job that Anthony Walker did on Justin Champagnie, the first-team all-conference performer, he ended the game 5 for 20, 1 for 8 from 3. So you've got to give Anthony and his teammates a lot of credit.

And then points in the paint, we had 38-28 in points off turnovers, 22-6. So we're very, very happy with those numbers.

We're excited with the victory and looking forward to playing in the next round tomorrow.

Q. Why do you think it is -- you brought up all those numbers. I've written down all those numbers, too. Is it just the energy and excitement that they got to a new tournament and have a clean slate, a fresh start? Why do you think your team wasn't doing this earlier? It was still the same guys, but all five guys end up with double figures and you have like barely any turnovers, all these assists. Where was this a few weeks ago?

JIM LARRAÑAGA: You're asking the wrong person. You've got to ask the players.

You know, one of the things that happens is you try to keep your players upbeat and try to remind them one game you lose it, move on to the next one and get ready.

I think our players almost felt like it didn't matter what we did. We played close so many times and came out on the short end.

The perfect example was the Virginia Tech game at home, down 11, make a comeback, up three with two seconds to go. And then all of a sudden, they make a three to put it into overtime. We got so deflated by that that it was very hard for the players to just bounce back immediately.

Yet that's what you really have to do. You have to live constantly in the present. You've got to figure out what the game plan is. The coaches are going to figure out what the game plan is for the next game, and then the players got to bring the energy and effort and execution to that game plan to make it work.

Today, like against Boston College, we scored 80 points against Boston College and 79 today. We haven't seen even 75 in a month.

Kam McGusty, I've got to give him a lot of credit because Kam's has been playing a lot of the point, so he's like the fourth point guard for this season. We started without with Chris Lykes, then he got hurt; then Harlond Beverly, then he got hurt, then Isaiah Wong. And then we thought Isaiah is just doing too much. We move Kam McGusty over there, and he ends up with 14 points, 4 assists, and only one turnover with two steals. He has a terrific floor game.

Q. Can I ask a follow-up about Elijah Olaniyi? Can you talk about what he has meant to this team and this game today, some of the assists he had and what a big factor he is? No one talks about him quite as much as some of the other guys.

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, we nominated him for all-defense because I think of all the guys on our team, he's our best defender. He can guard the ball. He can guard guys off the ball. He's been asked to guard guys like a Matthew Hurt at Duke or he's even guarded Aamir Simms at



Clemson for part of the time.

When you have a player who plays hard and he's pretty physical, he's got good athletic ability, I think he's been instrumental in these last two victories.

Today he ends up 5 for 11 from the field, he has 6 rebounds, 14 points, 3 assists, and again, just one turnover. When you play within yourself, you don't try to do too much, and that's really what we want him focusing on. He made some threes today. He was two for six from three, but what helps is he did that early, made a couple of threes, and now all of a sudden he's feeling good about himself. The opponent is thinking, wait a minute, we've got to guard him better. That opens things up for somebody else.

One of the biggest baskets of the game was Isaiah Wong throwing the ball to Nysier Brooks and then cutting to the basket and getting a dunk on the return pass. This team has battled so hard to get a win like this in the ACC Tournament, again, I hope will energize us for tomorrow.

Q. How would you describe your players' reaction to getting this win after everything you've been through this season?

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Very, very excited, very emotional. One of the things we asked our bench to do because we've got so many guys not in uniform -- we've got Rodney Miller who was cheering like crazy, Earl Timberlake cheering like crazy, Harlond Beverly. That emotion that they bring, that team spirit that they bring to the bench is very important for the players when they come out of the game to know they're not in this by themselves; that their teammates are there for them. They might not be in uniform, they might not be able to contribute on the court, but they're not sitting there on their hands, they're not distracted watching the whatever. They're into the game.

Q. What you can say about if you feel like the team is catching their stride at the right time after having that six-game losing streak and just how COVID has affected you and what you've seen from the team in such an interesting year where it could be hard to find that comfort zone, especially with injuries and whatnot.

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Well, COVID has changed coaching. You know, you have teams that have pauses, teams that games get canceled. It disrupts everything. Those kind of distractions put a team and a coach in an entirely different mental state of mind. You're trying to figure out what do we do.

In our case, we've had so many injuries that we haven't had time to truly practice correctly. The nice thing about where we are right now with just six scholarship players is those guys know they're going to play. They know we have basically a walk-on to sub, play some minutes, and Deng Gak, who did a nice job today on the boards. But when guys know they're going to play and they're getting to handle the ball a lot, even without a lot of practices, they've developed kind of a sixth sense of, hey, we're going to play multiple positions.

Isaiah Wong starts at the point, then Kam McGusty plays at the point, then Elijah will play at the point. We've got different guys playing different roles, and it takes a while for them to learn every position. And that's why you lose a lot of close games because, hey, you're really not in sync because you don't really have a point guard anymore.

When we lost Harlond Beverly, that changed everything for our team.

Q. With Nysier contributing the way he did with the points from last game, how much does that help you guys to get that inside presence from him, scoring the ball? And he had rebounds, blocked steals, and then also the challenges of playing Clemson? You've been high on what Aamir brings to their team.

JIM LARRAÑAGA: Yeah, Aamir Simms is in I'd say a class all his own. I think he's the one guy that can play incredible defense on multiple positions. He offensively can score inside, from outside. He can drive the ball to the basket, and he's a good free-throw shooter. He's a major handful for anybody in our league. He will be the topic of conversation tonight with the coaching staff, and then the message to the players because he's certainly not a one-man team. He's got a lot of help, a lot of guys who are playing very, very well.

Dawes in particular is someone that you have to concern yourself with because he handles the ball and he shoots the three very, very well.

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