

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Wake Forest Demon Deacons

Steve Forbes

Postgame Press Conference



Notre Dame 80, Wake Forest 77

STEVE FORBES: Well, credit to Trey Wertz for making a big-time shot at the buzzer. Sometimes the game can be cruel. It doesn't always reward the team that probably maybe deserved to win. We led for, I think, 35 minutes of the game, but we just couldn't finish it.

We had a great week of practice. We were excited to play. A month ago we went there and it didn't go very well, and I was pretty upset about the locker room afterwards. And I think it just goes to show you how much character these kids have, to continue to battle. That was a tough month in February, but we continued to fight, and we got better and better. And this is a team that comes off a win beating Florida State, and we've got a really good chance to beat them.

A lot of teams could have folded when we were down in the month of February, but we didn't, and we just continued to battle.

You know, the last play, that's not on Daivien. You look at that thing two ways. You can call time-out and run a play, which I've done before. But I didn't really want them to set their defense because they were switching everything. We ran a play out of the time-out, they switched it all, and we turned it over. I felt like with the court being unorganized, we'd have a better chance.

The problem was Daivien shot it too quick and he shot a jump shot, when in reality he needed to try to get to the basket or get there, try to stop and find somebody else. But it's not on him. He played an outstanding game. He made 5 -- he had 21 points.

You know, it was a darned good game, had 14 assists, 7 turnovers. That's pretty good for us. I told them afterwards that I was proud of them. I'm disappointed for them. It's a

hard way to lose, but we'll learn from it and we'll grow from it.

I think this is a season that we've learned a lot about ourselves and about our team and what we want to do moving forward. There's going to be a lot of guys coming back, guys coming back that understand the expectations and what we need to do. I thought it was a positive moment even though it is a loss.

I'll open it up to questions.

Q. Coach, what does this team have to do to flip some of either the close results or hold on to a lead like you had tonight for next season?

STEVE FORBES: Yeah, I think grow up and get a little bit older, a lot stronger. We got tired. In the last, what, seven-minute mark maybe to, what, three, we probably didn't score. We didn't get enough stops. We had enough points to win the game. It wasn't that long ago we scored 39 points against Clemson in an entire game. We had 77 tonight. We had 40 at half.

I think it's just going through those experiences and being in the locker room afterwards and crying and feeling bad about it and understanding what you've got to do to fix it and then getting bigger and stronger and older. And when we do that -- and then expecting to win.

But these guys expect to win. I think we've conquered that, where sometimes you're in a situation where you're just kind of happy to keep it close, make it look good. These guys never felt that. They never played that way. They played to win. I'm proud of them for that.

Q. I think you kind of hit on this a little bit, but just the sheer energy difference in the start of this game and maybe the games that they played in the past. You guys were cutting a lot, being really aggressive. What ended up making that change and making you guys start off that way?

STEVE FORBES: I don't know. I just think you've got to



keep doing it every day, and it becomes a habit. I think it's just something that's got to be engrained in you, that in life and in games, you're going to take some punches and you've got to get back up and keep punching. This league is a grind. I mean, it's a monster.

So you can't lay down and feel sorry for yourself. I think that's what happens sometimes. It probably happens a lot, I guess. I haven't been around losing a whole lot, but you start kind of feeling sorry for yourself and then you just kind of want it to go away. We never did that. We kept battling.

I think what happened in some of those games that we lost in February is I think we just got -- there came a point in the game where we just got a little overwhelmed and we couldn't really fight out of the hole, but we just kept fighting.

I think what happened too with us, thinking about it, we didn't play non-conference. You'd say, well, that hurt us. It did, but in January you've got to remember now we didn't play non-conference, so what did the opposing team really know about us? Not a lot. So we went through the second half of the season, and what happened? The book is out, they know how to play us, and it gets a little bit tougher.

We went through that moment, but we battled back out of it, showing that against Georgia Tech and tonight against Notre Dame.

Q. There's the old saying that coaches have that you want to play your best game your last game. In Carter's case, was this the best game you've seen him play this year?

STEVE FORBES: Without question. I said that after the game, what a good way for him in a loss to end the season. He probably should be playing your high school tonight, wherever that was, or I don't know if you graduated from high school. But if you did, then it would be -- I'm just kidding. You know that.

Yeah, what did he have, 12 and 7 and one turnover? How about that? Hey, man, that guy named Hubb is an all-league player. Now, he had 14, but he didn't have any at halftime. We did a good job. I knew he was going to get aggressive. Really proud of Carter. He made some really nice passes.

You know, the other side of it, too, guys, sometimes it's deflating to your team when you do get a good shot at the basket and you can't finish it. I think we've seen that over and over this year, that we just haven't -- we've gotten to the basket a lot, and we just can't finish, and we've got to get past that, too.

Q. Would you say from a physicality standpoint this was one of your better games because you led on the boards throughout the game?

STEVE FORBES: Yeah, I thought we just played -- Isaiah Mucius, he got 12 rebounds, he battled, battled, battled, battled all night long. He was so exhausted after the game, you couldn't hardly get him off the court. But that's what you want to do. You want to play your guts out and leave it out there.

Yeah, we played pretty physical against a team whose size really bothered us. The first time we played them, Laszewski and Durham, those are big dudes and they're good players, not just out there, man. That Durham kid is really good. He was 16 and 10. Laszewski, we did a good job on him, but Wertz made some big shots, Djogo showed up. They've got a nice team. They run really good offense. I thought we did a pretty darned good job on them defensively.

Q. You guys obviously work on end of game situations all the time, I'm sure. There at the end tonight, are you trying to offer any sort of instructions or anything as Daivien is starting to make his way?

STEVE FORBES: Well, we're trying to run flat ball screen there, which we've run with him all year long. And it's been really effective where he can get downhill, get a running start, and get to the basket. Or he's really good at stride stop, shot fake, defense helps, kick out, wide-open shot. It just didn't -- you know, it was a little unorganized. He didn't get going downhill, and the guy did a good job. I don't know who was guarding him, 5, I think, Ryan maybe? I can't remember.

Q. Ryan had the block on him.

STEVE FORBES: That's what I thought. Ryan did a good job of getting in front of him. And Daivien just -- he needed one or two more dribbles to get to the basket to either try to get a foul on a lay-up or a kick-out. And he just picked up his dribble and tried to shoot it over him, and he's a smaller guy. But I could have called time-out. Hindsight being 40/40 -- 20/20, whatever, I should have. And I could have. I've gone both ways on that, fellas.

I trust Daivien. He's a good little ball handler, he's a good little play maker. And I was worried if I called time-out, they'd maybe come out in zone, they'd maybe come out and they'd switch everything. And it's just hard to run plays. With that less of time when they're doing that, you kind of just want to go make a play. And he was the right guy to do, it just didn't happen.

Q. What's going through your mind during that long drought? You guys only hit one shot of your last 12, they went on a 17-2 run. Is there anything you can do to mix things up offensively to kind of get them going at that point?

STEVE FORBES: I'd have to go back and look. I thought we got a little tired. And I think, too, we didn't -- sometimes you get a lead, you don't stay aggressive. You know, we just -- I think we just kind of playing to let the clock run out sometimes, and that doesn't work. We were imploring them to go. I think we'll go back and probably look and I think some of those we didn't have good possessions. But some of them, I think we did, and we didn't finish plays.

And then when we had some guys that went in for offensive rebounds and then we didn't get back and they got transition. I was more concerned in that time frame really about our defense more than our offense because I felt like we pretty much had scored enough. We had to keep scoring some, but we had to get stops. That's where you have to change your mindset because you can win the game getting stops, and we didn't.

So then it becomes a bad combination. I tried to call a time-out once. I was going to call a time-out and the kid got hurt, so they saved one for me. And called a time-out when it was tied, I think, we got a basket. I could have called that last one, and I'm sure I'll beat myself up for a while on that one, but if he makes it, he's a hero and we're talking about something different.

Q. What do you think is the biggest area of growth for your team this season, and how much optimism does it bring you for the season ahead? I know the season just ended, but where do you think the biggest area of growth has been?

STEVE FORBES: I think probably just understanding the expectations and the identity and the standards that we have moving forward of what it's going to take to win. I kept telling them -- they were exhausted, but I kept telling them if it was easy, everybody would be doing it, and I firmly believe that. To win, it's hard. It's really hard. You have to be tough and special and execute and can't make mistakes down the stretch, especially in the best league in America.

I think I like that part about my team. They've grown and grown. They got punched in the mouth a few times, but they came back, and I like that. I like that about them.

They're all young. They're all got to get bigger and stronger. We missed all that. We missed 33 days, all that. One of these days I hopefully won't have to talk about that

anymore.

I just think the mentality and the growth of our team throughout the season through adversity and not laying down, but coming back and getting back up off the mat and fighting, I guess that would probably be what I would say.

Q. Given how your guys have kind of played their way out of that four-game stretch against Duke and State and Clemson, how gutting is it that they weren't able to get a positive result based on the way they played last week and the way they played for the most part tonight?

STEVE FORBES: Yeah, I feel bad for them. I really do. That was a tough locker room. Yeah, and it's a cruel game sometimes. You just don't always get rewarded. These kids deserve to be rewarded for that, but they made a great play, man. They made two great plays. They made a defensive play, and they had the presence of mind to kick it up the floor and get a three. He shot it too quick.

It's something that we do work on, but when you've got a new team and we've got so many things we've got to work on, there's some things that just don't get worked on probably enough. And I can look in the mirror on that. I always do it on game day in the shootaround. But these kids tried hard, man.

So yeah, I feel really bad for them because I wanted them to see that, feel that victory. I want our fans to win in the ACC Tournament. I want people to come down here and pack a bag and stay. I don't want to go home on the first night. I'm not used to that. I'm used to playing in the championship game, and that's where we're headed. And that's the mindset that we have to have when we come to these things is we're here to stay. We're here to pack three, four suits, or this year three or four pullovers. And actually this is the lightest I've ever packed. Not that I didn't plan on staying, I just didn't have to pack a bunch of suits, which was kind of nice, actually.

Q. You did mention the locker room the last Notre Dame game and the one you're describing now sounds very different. Is that something you say tonight? Is that something that they can really hear and comprehend tonight, just that you're seeing that change in them and it's getting the right way?

STEVE FORBES: I brought it up. I don't like to call people out, but I'll use Isaiah Mucius as an example. I mean, it hurt him. You could tell. He was physically tired, and he was upset in the right way. So I said to him, now I know it means something to you. This does hurt.

So we grow from it and we learn from it, and we don't do it again, and we do it -- and we make somebody else feel that way. So yeah, it's a total turnaround. I don't know the number of days. I remember it was the last game before an eight-game -- had a little off stretch. We beat Boston College. Same deal at Florida State. Man, you know, but we'll get better from it. I'll get better from it. I mean, I'm not perfect, either. But I know one thing. I know how to keep competing and fighting, and I think that is going to rub off on these kids for this year.

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