

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

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Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

Josh Pastner

Postgame Press Conference



Georgia Tech 70, Miami 66

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, just first of all, want to give Miami a lot of credit. Coach Larrañaga and his team is really good. They've been playing so well. They've got guys that can flat out put the ball in the basket. I knew we were going to struggle early, and it wasn't that we struggled. We only had two turnovers. I thought we played the right way. We just didn't have good energy.

I thought we were a little tight in a sense just we hadn't been on the arena. It looked like we were off a week from playing. But we responded in the second half. We got stops. I thought some of our guys made huge plays. I jumped Jordan Usher at halftime. He took it like an elite player and came out the second half and was really good, really good.

Jose was just tough as nails. Michael DeVoe has just continued to hit big shot after big shot for us at key times. I thought Bubba Parham hit big shots for us both the first half and second half. Kyle Sturdivant gave us great minutes and hit a big three first half and then did a good job against the press the second half there when we needed that. Khalid Moore just really good defensively, really good, and hit some big shots late.

I thought Rodney Howard was just -- gave us great minutes. Moses Wright did not play well, and I told him you've got to flush that down the toilet and be better tomorrow. But Moses didn't have a good game, but it shows the type of team we have that we're still able to win even when a guy like Moses is not able to have one of his better games.

But it's a great thing for Georgia Tech. You're playing in the semifinals of the ACC Tournament. A couple years ago -- I've been coming to these a couple years previously to see the other things, and I've always said getting to the

semifinals of the ACC Tournament is like playing in a mini Final Four. It's really special. We've got a great opportunity against a great team in Virginia, and excited to have an opportunity tomorrow to play them.

Q. Sorry for asking you a non-game question first off, but when you got the word on Duke being out of this and out of the rest of March, did that just give credence to all the fears that you've had while sitting around your hotel?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah. I can't speak on Duke because I don't know the situation on what happened there and what all the specifics were, but I know for us, I have tried to the best of my ability, to the point of exhaustion -- I repeat myself as it is, but think about repeating myself times 50. So think of me, who as much as I repeat myself, times that by 50 on COVID protocols, and that's what we've done. I have just been on it like you wouldn't believe.

Because I just said, guys, we're in the field. We're going to the NCAA Tournament, so we've got to do everything in our power to protect. We can't see people on the outside. You can't see a family member. If you do, it's at the bus, distanced, masked, on the outside.

You've got to stay -- it's just keeping in our bubble, and that's why we did the bubble that we've done, because we've got to -- the objective is just to get to Indianapolis. Obviously we want to win the ACC Tournament, but we want to get to Indianapolis. I have been on it like you wouldn't believe, and these things are precious. To get to the NCAA Tournament, it is almost impossible to get there. I know people think it's an easy -- no, no, let me be clear. Winning is so hard. To get to the NCAA Tournament, you know how hard that is in this day and age?

We're in the tournament, so we've just got to get to Indianapolis, and we've got to continue to protect, wearing a mask, avoiding people in the elevators. We can't be around our family members. Just got to stay in our bubble so we can get to Indianapolis.

Q. I was curious about some plays at the end of the



game there. Obviously not really the sequences you wanted, but I was curious there were a couple times you broke the press and Khalid dribbled the ball back out instead of maybe going up for what could have been a lay-up. Is that something you coach in that situation where you're trying to value time over scoring or just a personal decision there?

JOSH PASTNER: I thought that was okay when he dribbled it out because they were -- on that situation, we were fine because they were trying to foul, and I didn't have an issue with that. And there was a defender back there, so it wasn't just a wide-open lay-up.

But the one Jordan Usher had, that was wide open. But the previous one with Khalid, he made the right decision. But we didn't do a good job of handling our press break. We've got to clean that up. We just got on our heels. We'll be better about that.

When Wake Forest pressed us, we were fine, but we had a couple issues against Duke and Syracuse obviously. And we were fine versus Wake Forest, but weren't fine today late. But fortunately, we ended up pulling it out towards the end there.

Q. What changes did Miami make from the first game to the second game in attacking your zone, especially in that first half?

JOSH PASTNER: Well, I thought that the big kid Brooks was just a stud tonight, this afternoon. He was really good, and he just -- I thought he was the aggressor. Last time he played, Moses was the aggressor, and I thought this afternoon Brooks was the aggressor. And I thought Moses was on his heels today a lot.

But I thought Rodney Howard gave us good minutes guarding him. He's a good player, but he's all seven feet and strong and an athlete. I mean, the guy is a good player.

Q. Can you replay the out-of-bounds play that Jose saved there, just what you saw, how it unfolded? And also a follow-up on Jose in terms of him physically with standing all he's gone through.

JOSH PASTNER: Fortunately Jose saved us. It was a bobble, but he caught it with two hands. The other kid got it with one. Two always beats one. That's just a sheer will and determination. It's a players' game. Sometimes the players are either going to make the coach look good or not look good, and I've had a situation where Jose saved us by catching that ball. Fortunately, we caught it and we were able to get the win. Jose is just tough. He's

hard-nosed. He's a winner. He just competes.

He's got elite competitive excellence and elite competitive fire, and at his size, in order to be successful, you have to be elite as a competitor.

Q. When you saw the ball flying to the other side of the court and you saw Jose chasing it, did you think it was going out of bounds or did you --

JOSH PASTNER: No, I knew Jose was getting it. Anyone else, it might have gone out of bounds, but not Jose Alvarado. He's made so many winning plays that don't show up in the box score, I can't even put a number on it. The amount of winning plays that guy has made, I can't even put a number on it. It's unbelievable. He's as good of a guard that Georgia Tech has ever had, again, in terms of 50/50 balls and winning plays. He's as good as -- in Georgia Tech's -- I mean, obviously Georgia Tech has had so many elite guards, but I'm just saying in that area of 50/50 balls and winning plays and just stuff, giving his body up, he's as good a guard as Georgia Tech has ever had in the history of Georgia Tech in that area.

Q. Josh, you said yesterday you just want to win one game and now you've got a chance to get to The Finals. Can you kind of describe the challenge ahead of you and what you guys will be doing for the next 24 hours?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, look, we played Virginia, we played them twice. It would be really nice to -- the only team that we haven't beaten in the league since I've been in the league is Virginia. Obviously they're really, really good. They're just -- they've got great players, great coach. But you're in the semifinals on a neutral court, and let's see what happens.

We'll be ready to play, but obviously we know how good Virginia is, and we know we're going to have to play just at the best that we can play to have a chance to beat them and then get to Saturday.

Q. You mentioned the first half, the struggles. Was it sluggish? Were they just kind of -- nervous is maybe a strong word for the moment. Were they soft? What did you see of them in that first half?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, I just think we weren't in real rhythm. Maybe that was just being in a hotel for a whole week and not playing in a week. And not having seen the court for -- we didn't practice on the court. I thought we actually were okay offensively, we got some shots. We just didn't have good energy. I don't think it was nerves. I just think it was a little bit of -- I thought we were a little

slow on some things. Miami was the aggressor. Miami was playing on their -- they were proactive, we were reactive.

Q. So did you say anything, jump on them to get them going?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, at halftime I jumped on the guys hard. That's what I was saying. I jumped Jordan Usher and he responded at a high level. I'm so proud of him. Our guys responded on me getting on them at halftime, and they just kind of needed a wake-up call, and they responded the right way and we were able to come out the second half. We got stops, which allowed us to get the win.

Q. You mentioned about Jose being one of the best in probably Georgia Tech history when it comes to 50/50 balls and just winning plays. You've coached your share of elite guards in your time coaching college basketball. Have you coached anybody or any guard with the defensive mindset IQ or skill set of Jose at any time?

JOSH PASTNER: No, I have not. And again, I've been around at Arizona -- think about this. Arizona was called Guard U. Memphis with Lute Olson, John Calipari. We were called Guard U. And then Georgia Tech was known as Guard U with Coach Bobby Cremins. I've been at three schools -- obviously I didn't work for Coach Cremins, but I've been around three schools that were all about guard play. And, again, there's different guys who are incredible talents and the guards at those schools including at Georgia Tech.

I don't know anyone that I've been around at all three schools I mentioned that is as good as Jose Alvarado at what he's done with winning plays, 50/50 balls, defensive IQ, defensive toughness, especially at his size. I just don't think there's been another guard that I've been around. And I don't think there's been a guard at Georgia Tech even -- there's been guys obviously who were elite NBA players and have been on the Olympic team and stuff like that, but just with his hands and his winning the 50/50 balls, in that category, he's as good as I've been around and as good maybe as a Georgia Tech guard in those categories.

And I'm really proud of him. We wouldn't be in the position we're in today going to the NCAA Tournament playing for the semi-final in the ACC Tournament, building this program back to where it is now through the grind of it without Jose's toughness.

Q. You referenced Virginia tomorrow and not any

trade secrets to disclose, but are you going to approach that any differently than you did the last time you played them?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, it's good to get that win, that way guys like Ken and Kelly and Zach -- and Zach can put on TV and Kelly and Ken can write -- and Rod can write that -- Jeff, Mark, you guys can all write that we finally won our first game and can't say I'm an 0-for in the ACC Tournament. So we can check that box now, know what I mean. So that's always good to do.

But no, we'll watch the film. We'll figure it out. There's not that much you can -- you're not going to make wholesale changes from now to tomorrow. You're just going to have to go out and maybe make some adjustments based on some things. But in the end, you're just going to have to go out and probably make some shots and guard them. We'll figure out what we need to do tomorrow and maybe make minor adjustment, but in the end you've just got to go out and play.

Q. What does it say about Bubba to be able to take that ball down the lane in the closing minutes in a critical situation? Amongst all the big guys here, he is the shortest guy on the court.

JOSH PASTNER: You know, we talk about a lot of guys, about player development. How about Bubba Parham? How about his toughness? How much better has he gotten? Listen, he signed with VMI -- all due respect, VMI is a great basketball program, Coach Earl over there does a great job. In fact he won the Coach of the Year this year in their conference. He's a really good coach. They've got a good program.

But let's call it like it is: This is the best league in all of college basketball with the biggest guards, the best guards, and here's Bubba, maybe the smallest player in the league but might have the biggest heart, the toughest young man, just competes. It's unbelievable. He probably doesn't get enough credit for what he does and what he brings to this team. He's tough as nails. We're just so darned proud of him. When he plays with that chip and that edge on his shoulder, that's what we're about, playing that way, and he embodies what we're about. I'm so proud of him.

Q. We talked several months ago when the season started and things didn't go the way you wanted to, now you're two games away, possibly, from an ACC Tournament championship. You're also on the edge of going to the NCAA Tournament for the first time. Can you kind of just talk about how difficult this season has been and how much pride you have in your team and the way they've responded to adversity in each

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

moment that you've had this year?

JOSH PASTNER: Well, I said this last time, too. I remember in Houston on Saturday in 2016 of April, on that Saturday of the Final Four, I was meeting with Mike Bobinski, two other people from Georgia Tech, and the person from the search firm in the hotel room down in Houston, Texas, interviewing for the Georgia Tech job. And they told me, Coach, listen, we have got to have somebody here -- we're going to totally rebuild and start over. There's going to be a lot of losing, it's going to take time. Do you have the energy and the vision to do this?

And I looked at all four people in their eye, I put my fist down and said, I believe in what we can do here. I want this job. Five years. Five years we'll be back in the NCAA Tournament. I said, not three, not four. I said, I don't need six or seven. Give me five years and we will be back in the NCAA Tournament.

And I texted Mike Bobinski and everyone else in that room to let them know it was very important to me personally that I fulfilled my word to those four people. It was very important because that has always stuck in my mind, what I told those four people in that room, that we've got to get five years.

So to follow through on that, I say all that to say, it has been a grind. I can't explain -- there's been things that I didn't expect was going to happen, and that's where when you think life doesn't throw you punches, holy Toledo, we got some punches. I got some punches. But the credit to these young men, the credit to the staff, to everyone that's been here, to get Georgia Tech basketball back to where it's at is incredible.

I can't express -- maybe when we get in May and I'm able to take a little vacation and just relax and look back. But I know how hard this is to get to this point and from where we started and what we had to go through, and I can't say enough gratitude and thanks to the young men, the staff and obviously my current bosses. How about Todd Stansbury and President Peterson and Marvin Louis and Dr. Cabrera -- President Cabrera? How about those guys sticking by me when it wasn't easy to stick by me? I recognize that. God bless everyone.

And I'll tell you what, Jeff Schultz, Mark Bradley, Kelly, Ken, Rod, Zach, you know, you guys have covered us the most. You never wrote anything calling for my head, and Patrick, you were there, as well, too. You let it play out for five years, so I appreciate that, too.

I know it wasn't easy. I know it wasn't easy at times. You probably could have wrote something that says get him

out, but I appreciate you having fair coverage on the course of it all, too. I know that's not always easy, but I recognize that, as well, too. So I appreciate everybody. It's a community effort, and that includes everybody on this screen. It's a community effort.

I want to give a great shout out -- because I've leaned on him a lot -- to Mike Stamos, a lot. So he's been able to take a lot of my calls, as well, too. Able to bounce things off of. I appreciate everybody. Georgia Tech is in the semifinals of the ACC Tournament and going to the NCAA Tournament. We have the Player of the Year and the Defensive Player of the Year and we're in the ACC. Think of what we've done over these five years, these last two years, the first year. There's things that we've done, it's been an incredible journey and it's been a total community effort to make it all happen.

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