

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Coach Josh Pastner

Kyle Sturdivant

Ja'von Franklin

Postgame Press Conference



Pittsburgh 89, Georgia Tech 81.

JOSH PASTNER: First off, I want to give congratulations to Pittsburgh. They're a really good basketball team. They hit some big shots late. As I mentioned the last time we played them, they're an older team who made big plays, even when we played them the last time, and they did the same thing today. So a real credit to Pittsburgh and Coach Capel and their staff.

Secondly, want to give a thank you to I think the City of Greensboro and the sports council. You guys do such a great job putting on a tournament and just first-class all the way around, with just people and hospitality and how you treat people. Obviously the ACC deserves a lot of credit, as well, because they're obviously part of that. Tremendous thank you to the ACC and to the City of Greensboro and the sports council of Greensboro.

I want to give an incredible thank you to these two guys to my left and the other guys in the locker room and my staff. These guys have been just -- how hard they've played and how they've battled and competed. And just, man, we were down I think 13 at half, and we made some adjustments, and we found our way to fight back, and we had some chances. We really had some opportunities there. We missed a couple free throws, had some good looks.

We scored 81, so that's enough to win. We just probably didn't get enough stops. You've got to give Pittsburgh credit. Elliott hit a huge three late in the clock, hit one in the corner too, he helped off of ball side, and then Hinson hit a late one, as well, too, and Burton got a couple in there late.

We had chances to take the lead there late, and credit to Pittsburgh.

I can't say enough about these gentlemen to my left. Ja'von Franklin. In Georgia Tech history Malcolm Mackey had seven 15-rebound games over his four-year career; Ja'von Franklin has had five 15-rebound games in his last nine games. It's absolutely amazing, absolutely outstanding. We tied the Georgia Tech for points per possession over a point per possession, so we did that today, so 10 straight games of over a point per possession.

We set the Georgia Tech record of least turnovers in Georgia Tech history for a season, which as a head coach you're so proud of that because it's a clean game, playing the right way.

I was just so proud of Kyle Sturdivant. He's our team captain. Just like everybody else in the locker room, those guys -- he just left it all on the floor. I can't say enough words about these guys.

You look back and reflect, and look, nobody is -- we wanted to have a better record overall and we want to be in the NCAA Tournament and playing for an ACC championship. But I do know during that stretch where it was not good, we had two options, and you either -- as I said yesterday, you're either getting into the fetal position and laying down or you're going to fight. And the character of these two guys to my left and the kids in the locker room, the young men in the locker room and the staff, I can't say enough of how they've fought and found a way to get off the ropes.

Just beyond proud of everybody.

Q. Josh, obviously you guys dug yourselves a hole in the first half again and then fought back. Was it some dead legs in the first half? Anything particularly you can put your finger on why you guys struggled particularly on defense in the first half?

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, but I told our guys -- I talked to our guys, I said look, guys, it's all between the ears. You



guys are young, you're healthy, you get -- midnight to midnight, you get 86,400 seconds in a day. I told these guys that, and it's not a bank account where you can save the time. Everything is precious, every second. You've got to exhaust and you've got to lay it on the floor, and your motor -- you can't save anything because it's not a bank account, where you're going to be able to save it. That's all you get, midnight to midnight is 86,400 seconds, so in that time, in that 40-minute game, every second you've got to exhaust.

I didn't think they were -- maybe they were tired, but I didn't see it. I just think Pitt is a good team, and we just -- but we found a way to fight back.

We missed some open shots in that first half. We didn't score well in the first half. We shot 25 percent from the field and 36 percent from -- 25 from three, 36 percent from three, and we had six turnovers the first half. So we were playing a little bit not our way in the first half, but I'm not going to let fatigue be a deal because these guys had great positivity and great energy.

In the second half, we had chances, and that's all you can ask for. We had chances. Just credit to Pittsburgh.

Q. Kyle, it was like you wouldn't let your guys lose. Can you talk about the determination it looked like you had in the last five, six, seven minutes?

KYLE STURDIVANT: Yeah, I think we just didn't want our season to end. Like Coach was saying, I think we had -- I don't think another team has had a better February than us, so we just wanted to carry it over, and I'm proud of the guys for the fight we had throughout the whole 40 minutes.

Q. Ja'von, has the reality of this being your last game set in, and what was it like in those final moments knowing that you guys weren't going to come out on top and you had played your last college game?

JA'VON FRANKLIN: It was just a fun season. We started off slow this season. We just decided not to put our head down and just stayed together. I really enjoyed this team. We could have easily gave up, but we all stayed together and we just fought to the end. We were playing as well as anyone in the ACC. I really enjoyed this. I wouldn't have chose to do anything else with my season. I'm really proud of this team.

Q. Kyle, I'm curious about the first half it's kind of like yesterday, what do you think was going into guys not scoring as you have been?

KYLE STURDIVANT: I don't think it's anything we can put

our finger on. I think we were getting some good looks. They just didn't fall. But I think in the second half, we let our defense turn into our offense, and I think that's when we had our best -- created some easy opportunities.

JOSH PASTNER: Kyle Sturdivant had 15 assists and three turnovers in these two games. I'm just -- I could give him a bear hug right now because of that stat. 5-1 assist-to-turnover ratio, I'm so proud of Kyle on that. Again, I can't say enough about Ja'von and his effort and his quickness off the floor to rebound. These guys have gotten better. Guys have really improved and gotten better. That's been a good staple of our program is guys have improved, and it's a direct reflection on these two young men here on their continuation of improving and getting better.

Q. You've been nothing but a professional in your seven years at Tech toward the media, so I hope you'll receive this as a respectful question because that's the way it's intended. You're both an ACC champion two years ago, but you've only been to one NCAA Tournament in seven years. How would you advocate for more time at Georgia Tech, and how do you paint that picture for the Tech fan base?

JOSH PASTNER: Look, I would tell you that when I got the job, they told me when I came in, and I met with everybody, that it's going to be -- you're starting from ground zero. And they said you're going to lose so much your first three or four years that you're going to -- we've got to have someone that's going to be ultra positive because you're going to lose so much.

Initially they told me they didn't know if I could handle it because at Memphis, we had won a lot of games. We had won quite a bit at Memphis. I said, no, I'm excited about the rebuild. I'm excited about that.

It took us some time, but I told everyone there that it was going to be five years. We were really good in year four. Obviously the COVID thing happened, and then we were really good in year five.

Look, last year we didn't have as great of a year. We've really finished really well this year, and I wish we started better -- we started fine, it was probably more that middle run. But I would tell you, I hope to be at Georgia Tech. I love Georgia Tech. I love my job. I have a real passion for it, and I believe in it.

Obviously my boss is President Cabrera and Mr. Batt, they're in charge, so whatever they say, they're in charge. I hope I can continue to be at Georgia Tech.

Q. Just looking at how the team played down the stretch and all of that, is there anything that you kind of regret looking back at the season and would have done differently. Maybe had you had a chance to go back in January when you beat Miami, it looked like you were about to turn the corner and then hit the skids.

JOSH PASTNER: Yeah, obviously if I knew what I knew now, I would have just gone with five guys, six guys. But that's part of -- just took us a little bit of a time to evolve as a team.

We started out, like I told you, we were shooting so well in the preseason, the summer, and in the two exhibition games we shot it at such a high level, and then we just didn't shoot it as well as I thought.

Then I thought we really -- we had a great win. We forget, we had a great win at Georgia State, and I know you might say -- still, on the road in a tough environment, we had a great win there, we had a great win against Georgia at home, and we had a great win against Miami at home.

It was like, okay, we can turn the corner. It was just after the Miami game, we just never got going. We lost -- had a tough loss in overtime versus Notre Dame at Notre Dame in January, had a chance to win against NC State at home in January, had a couple others that slipped through our cracks. And just right there we had the chance, and it just slipped right through us.

Yeah, I mean, if I knew what I knew now. But I think that's just part of the evolution of our team and our growth. I think the job in a leadership position in my position, I've got to continue to find solutions during the course of a season, be solution focused and solution oriented to try to help us get better. And my staff did such a great job on that and these players. Yeah, I don't know.

I wish we won every -- I promise you, I want to win every possession that I coach. Anybody that knows me, these guys that know me, I want to win not just every game but literally every possession, and literally every possession eats at me inside. And as positive as I am, because I believe in positivity internally, I mean, I want to -- I'm so competitive of winning every single possession. Because I recognize every possession is so precious to win a game.

We understood that, we just maybe understood it a little bit later than normal.

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