

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Washington, D.C., USA

Capital One Arena

Florida State Seminoles Coach Leonard Hamilton Jalen Warley

Postgame Press Conference



North Carolina 92, Florida State 67

LEONARD HAMILTON: Congratulations to Carolina. I thought they had a great defensive plan. At the beginning of the game, made it very difficult for us to initiate our offense. It's kudos to them for having a much more aggressive plan.

I thought our plan was to drive the ball and get to the free-throw line, and that's what we attempted to do, but our inability to do that at least for the first 12 minutes of the game, not being able to get to the free-throw line, was definitely out of our plans.

But our goal at the beginning was obviously minimize the effect on the boards, and that was unsuccessful.

Hopefully not giving them easy buckets in transition, and that was somewhat challenging for us.

My point is that I thought we got beat by a team that played better than us. I thought they were much more aggressive, much more physical, and when you get in a tournament like that, teams who have that level of confidence who are in sync together with their teammates and with their system I think play a game like what they played against us today.

We've been on the other side of it enough, so you have to compliment them for the effort that they put in, the togetherness, the passion that they played with representing their school, and I thought they did a great job against us at the end. We've just got to come back and regroup and develop back into the way we've always been.

Q. You would have coached against Bacot like a million times over five years. What stands out about

him as a player and his career which is kind of --

LEONARD HAMILTON: Well, today I thought he was the best version of himself. This is the best game I think he played against us, the most consistent for 40 minutes. He's a big strong youngster. He's strong, and he's savvy. He's either sealing you to open up lane for drives or he's going to the offensive boards.

A lot of times with players, they want to be what they need to improve on. He is locked into being the best version of him, being physical, strong, opening up lanes for his teammates, rebounding and shooting a high percentage. Today I thought he did a good job when he did have to switch to contain the dribble, which showed that he's made a big improvement with his ability laterally to contain dribbles, which puts him in a whole 'nother position.

He's doing those little things that sometimes people don't like to do. They call it the dirty work. But he loves the physicality, and he's always focused on rebounding and getting himself in position to do that. That just says about the growth that he's gone through since he's been at Carolina.

Q. Leonard, how crucial was it in the first half that Carolina got into the bonus so early? You talked about you trying to get there. They got there and I believe had 12 free throws the first half.

LEONARD HAMILTON: (Laughing) That's interesting. You noticed that too, huh?

I just think that it was -- the officiating the game of basketball is tremendously difficult. If you called every foul and every touch, the game won't have a flow. I said earlier, our inability to get to the free-throw line hurt us a lot, especially in the first half.

As a coach you wonder, but you know there are games where maybe the whistle might go your way sometimes. It's just hard to figure out sometimes, so I just have to give them kudos for their ability to draw fouls and our inability to draw fouls.



I thought we tried to attack. I thought there was contact. But in basketball that's just the way the game goes. Officiating is part of the game, and sometimes I'm amazed at how accurate they are, the number of opportunities they have to make calls. But I think they have a big to do with the game.

Q. You have faced five different Carolina head coaches over multiple decades. What is different about facing the Hubert Davis Tar Heels?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Really? I didn't realize that.

Q. You've got Coach Smith for a long time, probably with you at several schools. You've got Coach Guthridge, Coach Dougherty, Coach Williams, and Hubert. That would be five, right?

LEONARD HAMILTON: Hubert brings a passion to the club that is impressive. He has the ability in my opinion, what I've seen, the players feed off of his energy.

It's very difficult as a coach, especially when you're just getting started, to develop your culture. There's a lot of tradition at North Carolina. I grew up in North Carolina. I'm kind of part of it.

I remember Bones McKinney and everybody who's been in the league for many, many years. I grew up an ACC fan.

But North Carolina represents the best of college basketball and how they've conducted themselves over the years and the standard that Dean Smith set for many, many years, and I think that they play -- Hubert has them playing with that level of pride that the school and the community deserves.

In order to do that, you have to connect with your team, and you've got to have a relationship. It's not always easy to get players to do things that require a lot of effort. In other words, unfortunately, none of us want to be uncomfortable, and nobody wants to be hot, nobody wants to be cold. Nobody wants to be tired. Nobody wants to push themselves when they're a little fatigued. So you have to have a relationship with your players that they relate to you because they have to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

I think that Hubert has the ability -- the relationship with his guys where he's challenging them to be better than what they could be because they're responding to his instruction, and that's the makings of a great coach and a great program.

Q. You said that your team wasn't able to fully execute

in the first 12 minutes, but you kept it close at the start, down by just three with about five minutes left in the first half, then North Carolina went on its run. What changed in the last couple of minutes?

LEONARD HAMILTON: If I remember correctly, they came off the bench with their rotation guys, and those guys came in fresh, and I think maybe we didn't quite have as deep a bench. They had more energy, and I think for that three or four-minute period is where they got their confidence back because they had those two possessions where they got three rebounds in each possession, and we seemed to not be able to match their energy in that period, and once we got down, it was hard for us to get back.

JALEN WARLEY: I just think they played harder than us during that stretch, so I feel like it was hard for us to get back in a good position and win it.

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