

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

Clemson Tigers

Brad Brownell

Ian Schieffelin

Jaeden Zackery

Postgame Press Conference



Clemson 57, SMU 54

BRAD BROWNELL: Hard-fought win. Didn't think we played real well, especially on the offensive end. I do think our defense was pretty good. Give SMU kids and staff credit. I thought they were well prepared and competed hard, as well. It was just hard for both teams to score.

But our guys just kind of hung in there, was kind of what we talked about at halftime. I felt like we just were playing with a piano on our back, like we were stressed and just not enjoying the moment as much as we need to. Hopefully, we can -- this win will help us do that so we can play a little bit better tomorrow.

Happy to advance.

Q. In the final moments when Chase Hunter is taking over the game and scoring those baskets late, what is it like from your perspective when he gets in that zone and is able to score buckets like that?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Full trust of him. There's a reason he's first team all ACC. We've gone to him all year. He's delivered all year. And when he has the ball, we have full trust in him. We know he's going to make the right play.

JAEDEN ZACKERY: Yeah, honestly, with the trust thing, that's exactly what it is. Everybody has full trust in him, from players to staff, and we know if the ball is in his and, we can trust whatever he's about to do, and that's what did at the end, and he finished the game out for us.

Q. Jaeden, you held them without a field goal for the

final six-plus minutes. Did you and the staff change anything defensively, or was it just a matter of locking down even more?

JAEDEN ZACKERY: Yeah, it was just a matter of focusing on the game. There wasn't anything specifically, just kind of be more aggressive, pick up full court and try to bother their offense, because we know they're a good transition team. They want to get out and run quickly. So if we're able to slow them down and have them go against our half court defense, we felt like we had an advantage.

Q. Ian, you didn't have your highest scoring output tonight, but you made a couple plays that gave your team momentum. Did you think in that moment, I need to make a play to give my team a boost to finish SMU off?

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: Yeah, at the end of the day honestly, I'm just trying to win. Whether I've got to score or dive on a loose ball, I'm going to do what it takes to win.

Today, Chase was just on fire, so I didn't really pick up in that area, and just rebounding was something I needed to pick up. I just try to do what it takes to win.

Q. Just to grind one out here, what can that do confidence-wise, winning by three here and moving on instead of going home early?

JAEDEN ZACKERY: I would say that's huge for us because sometimes playing games like that where you have to grind and get through it and going on through this tournament against good teams, you're going to have to do that. So our first game being like that and showing that we're able to power through and finish out the game with a victory, that's strong for us moving on the rest of the season.

IAN SCHIEFFELIN: I agree.

Q. Jaeden, you guys tied a season high for turnovers today. What was SMU's defense doing to stifle you guys offensively?



JAEDEN ZACKERY: Yeah, I feel like they were speeding us up a little bit and I take blame for that a good amount. I had four turnovers, so I was trying to get to the rim and create stuff for the team. This is one of those teams on defense where you've got to grind them and get to the end of the shot clock, and go through offense how the coach has been teaching us to. So that's definitely something we've got to improve for this next game and play how we know how, and not speed up and not try to do too much.

Q. Brad, what is Dillon's status, or do you know yet? And how did that change things for you with him out of the rotation?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I don't think it's good. I think he probably broke his hand. Yeah, it wasn't good, and obviously, it's a little bit of an emotional letdown for your team when the guy's been playing so hard, you get to this time of year, the time of year you want to play and it goes sideways.

Dillon is like the ultimate glue guy for us. He's got an unbelievable assist-to-turnover ratio, he's an unbelievable defender, ball on and off the field, facilitator, and he doesn't need to score. He'll shoot an open shot. So he just kind of -- and he's experienced. I should say that, too.

Yeah, it's a little harder. Obviously, Dale Jones is a freshman. He's going to get a few more minutes, and he's kind of a jitter bug guard that's learning how to play. He gives you great energy. And then Jake Heidbreder, who's a little bit more of a three-point shooter, but they don't play like Dillon. So it's different.

It's something we're going to have to adjust going forward, but certainly, it'll be a great opportunity for those other guys on our team.

Q. Looking ahead to tomorrow, you guys play Louisville, and last time you guys played them, J'Vonne Hadley had a career high. How much of a focus is he going to be tomorrow?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I don't know that you can just focus on one player. That's why Louisville is really good. They've got several guys that can have big nights. He wasn't even the all-conference guy. He's a great player, but we've got to guard as a team, develop a plan to try to make it hard for them. And then offensively, we've got to relax and just play better. We've got to relax, enjoy this moment a little bit more, and not play so stressed and trust in our offense a little bit better.

Q. Brad, I believe that was a season-high minutes for Christian tonight. I think he was plus 6 on the

plus/minus. What kind of spark did he give you with Viktor in foul trouble?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, he did a great job. Obviously, this is a good matchup for him with their big fella. You need a guy like that for big players. We didn't have to double the post. Christian could guard him one-on-one. He brought physicality. Christian is really improving as a rebounder and finisher. Yeah, it's good. I do think he's making a lot of progress, and we anticipated that he could have some games like this in the last month of the season.

Q. Four three-pointers for you guys tonight, kind of a three-point trend. What do you credit that to?

BRAD BROWNELL: Some of it, SMU guarded us well. Some of it, we've just got to make more shots. We had some good open shots in certain situations. Both teams probably did. It's a little bit the moment. It's a little bit of just pressing. We need to relax. We need to see the ball go in a couple times.

But these are hard games. It's hard to wait around until 9:30 and play. I mean, it was awful today. Watching all the other games -- we're doing our meetings and all that kind of stuff, but you just want to play. We haven't had many games like this year. Is tomorrow at 9:30, as well? Fantastic. Everybody tune in on ESPN2 or wherever we're at.

Q. You mentioned before that this team has a lot of ways to win, whether it's a game like today, defense, shooting-wise. Would you say in a game like this that makes your team more poised, more prepared --

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I don't know that we were poised today on offense. We were not poised. But I do think our guys, even though it looks like we're rattled at times and we're not playing as well, I think we're probably more confident than some teams would be, and that's part of how we've won some of these games. We do know that we can stop you to win.

The last time we played these guys, we made 14 threes and had 24 assists and looked like the Lakers on offense, and today we did not look -- we looked like my high school team. We struggled. Again, some of that's SMU.

We need to meet this in the middle tomorrow at a minimum, or it'll be a hard day.

Q. Coach, as said previously, you play the Louisville Cardinals. What's got to be the key mentality for you and the rest of the team to kind of avoid the jitters?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, we need to enjoy this. This is what we work for all year. All the stuff you do in June and July, strong man and conditioning and morning shooting and individual skill and practice, I mean, this is the icing on the cake. You're in tournament time. We need to relax and enjoy that.

I've been trying to talk to my guys about that here for the last day or two. Don't get so worked up about a play that you're going to make a mistake. Basketball is a game of mistakes. You're going to make a mistake. You're going to turn the ball over. You're going to make a defensive error. You're going to miss a shot. Mental toughness is getting on to the next play.

We need to do a better job of that tomorrow.

Q. You mentioned the phrase "pianos on our backs." What changed that eventually? When did guys start to play loosely?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I don't know that we really did, to be honest with you. Chase made some big time plays for us. He's a big time player. That's what your guys do. But the turnovers and the poor decision making and a few poor shots, that's pressing.

It's guys wanting to win. They're wanting to do something good for our team, but you're driving it in there and three guys are there. We need to stop and pass and look behind us and not play in front of us. Sometimes we need to look behind us. We didn't do a good job of that today.

I just don't think we were as relaxed. Obviously, it's hard to be relaxed when you're losing in the second half of a game in the tournament that you want to win. But to give our guys credit now, we guarded. That's a hard team to hold down. They only made one three maybe. Pretty good defense for that. They're second in the league in rebounding, and we did a good job on the glass.

So there's a lot of effort things that we did that were really good. Our guys were playing hard. We just didn't play very smart.

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