

Atlantic Coast Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Spectrum Center

Cal Bears

Coach Mark Madsen

Dai Dai Ames

Justin Pippin

Postgame Press Conference

Florida State 95, California 89

MARK MADSEN: Obviously a tough loss for us today. We battled back. We were right there. A chance to make it a one or two-possession game late. We had a little swell in the early part where we faltered.

But I'm so incredibly proud of this team. They picked this group of guys in the media preseason poll right at the bottom of the conference, and here they were as the ninth seed, battling, fighting. And I'm incredibly proud of our entire team, and obviously incredibly proud of Dai Dai Ames and Justin Pippin.

Q. Talk about the offensive flow in the first half. Seems like the zone was giving you some problems, eight first half turnovers on some of the drive attempts there. Talk a little bit about that zone and the problems it gave you in the first half?

JUSTIN PIPPEN: I would just say we needed to make adjustments. They're long, they're athletic, so whenever they collapse, they're in the gap, they've got quick hands, and like I said, they're athletic. So it was causing us a lot of turnovers and a lot of missed shots.

DAI DAI AMES: I agree with what Justin said. Being in the gaps in their zone kind of froze us a little bit, but eventually we got through it.

Q. Mark, talk about the last stretch of games here, 3-2 down the stretch. What are the challenges that you faced coming down the last couple weeks? Obviously a disappointing end coming down with the 3-2 final



record over the five games.

MARK MADSEN: Yeah, I think obviously we finished out the regular season on the road in a Quad 1 opportunity against Wake Forest. We battled, fought. They got the better of us in that game. Again, a close game.

I thought we battled and fought tonight, as well. So when it's all said and done, we have to be better. I have to be better as the head coach.

But the fight and how hard our guys play and the way that our guys never gave up is something that I'm incredibly proud of in terms of our group.

Q. Coach, the play of Dai Dai, not just in this game but overall this season, how you've seen him evolve and his leadership. And he took over today, had almost 30, but all throughout the year what he's done.

MARK MADSEN: Dai Dai Ames is the ultimate leader. Everyone in the locker room respects him immensely. He has a level of talent that he's honed for years by himself, through his family, through every coach that has been part of his life, and he showed that again tonight.

I apologized to the team because when it's all said and done, I did not get this done in terms of the game tonight. I feel like our team has done special things this year. This is a team that has strong Quad 1 wins at home, on the road, at a neutral site. We've swept teams in our conference. And so our resume is strong, and the will and the fight is all there.

Q. Between the U 16 and the U 8 media time-outs in the first half, it seemed like that was where Florida State really pulled away. Was it the zone he alluded to or was it more so something else?

MARK MADSEN: I think we just got back on our heels too much. I need to go back and look at the film, but they actually did three different things. They stayed in the zone, they started in the zone and then went to man, and then they played some straight man throughout the course of



the game.

So I think that it broke our rhythm a little bit. And towards the end of the game, we were more comfortable attacking it, and we were much more aggressive.

Q. The offense actually at the end of the game, while it was solid overall, the defense was maybe where it was lacking for the whole game. Talk about the defensive effort and maybe what they threw at you that you weren't quite ready for?

MARK MADSEN: Well, we had a stretch in the first half where they ran something that we had worked on, we had prepared for, and we did not execute our game plan. It had to do with the pinning screens down on the baseline. I think they made probably three, maybe four open three-point shots because we did not execute that correctly. That's on me. That's on me. We repped it, we showed it, we walked it, but I didn't do obviously a good enough job because the result was not there. That was a big part of it.

You look at how many threes they hit, just looking at the box score, they hit 13 threes, and had we been able to stem the tide during that stretch, we would have been in a better position.

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