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Kentucky - 64
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AN INTERVIEW WITH:

FLORIDA

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH DONOVAN: Well, I thought we had some moments. I thought we played very, very well. Certainly we got off to a good start which was positive.

Came into the locker room down four. Then we got down 11, kind of fought our way back. I think statistically if you look at the game, everything was pretty even. Both teams I thought defended pretty well.

They out-rebounded us a little bit, but the difference in the game was the free-throw line. 23 attempts to our five was a huge factor in the game. Our, at times, inability to rebound a couple lose balls, fouls. But the game, I think if you take away the free-throw line, it's pretty consistent all the way through. Just about every stat's pretty even.

But the one huge drastic difference was the free-throw line and that was really ultimately the margin in the game.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Can you talk about how Kentucky wears you out during a game. I know you played well, but with the rebounding and all the physicality and the number of big guys they keep bringing into the game.

JON HORFORD: When you're playing against guys who are that athletic, that long, have that kind of strength, if you don't stay disciplined and stick to the game plan, it's kind of tough. They really struggled scoring against when we walked

up. They really, really struggled scoring against that, but then kept offensive rebounding on the weak side and finishing it.

So we didn't do both parts to the best of our abilities and it hurt us a lot tonight.

Q. Can you talk too about the way you played. I know that in both Lexington and Gainesville you guys drove it to the basket and tried to not be intimidated by those big guys.

JON HORFORD: It's something you have to do, especially with their coverage how they will play off a little bit. There's great opportunity if you can attack the basket.

But obviously it's tough sometimes to score over guys with such great length. At times we did it well and then at other times we didn't, it just comes down to execution.

Q. Talk about playing against this team and playing with them really for 40 minutes once, 30 minutes once, 35 minutes once, whatever it was and knowing that you can play with them, but just they end up being too much in the end.

ELI CARTER: We stuck to our game plan. I think we hung in there pretty well. Two times we played half a game, tonight we didn't play a full 40-minute game. In order to beat them, you got to play a full 40-minute game.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. Do you feel like that the defense clamped down pretty strongly in the latter minutes of the ball game, like the last eight minutes of the ball game which caused it to possibly get out of hand?

COACH DONOVAN: Yeah, not really, I didn't think. So I think the one thing for us, where we struggled this year at times is really been, what I would say, our basketball IQ.

I thought in the first half we had some great plays. We drove the basketball. We got it down the lane. We made dump-down passes. We were getting layups to start the game. They were still there.

We did the same exact thing. We had a couple times where we threw the ball back out. I thought Alex was open. He should have shot the ball, never shot it. Jon did knock down a couple jump shots. Dorian had one that kind of went in and out.

But Jon Horford got the ball around the basket. I think with the way Kentucky plays defense, they're just going to try to protect the basket with shot blocking. But you can get in the paint, space them out, and I didn't feel like we had trouble running our offense.

I thought at times, certain situations, when we struggled, we didn't make good smart decisions when we got in the paint and/or at times didn't have a good enough angle to finish over their length.

Q. I'm sure you guys get tired of answering questions about how great is Kentucky. I don't know whether you do or not. But you're in a unique position of having pretty good perspective on this program and everything. Can you put it in perspective a little bit of what we're witnessing right now?

COACH DONOVAN: Well, I think the winning is really truly remarkable because it's hard. It's really, really hard to do. I would say that if you're asking me the positive and negatives or maybe where they're lacking or not lacking, playing them three times, I think the first thing is Trey Lyles is a major problem at the small forward spot because there's no one in college basketball that can matchup with him. That's a problem.

But they also have a great ability to be able to go smaller if they need to and play Booker or Ulis and the Harrison twins together, three of those guys.

They got two really good low post scorers in Dakari and Towns. They're great. And Cauley-Stein and Lee are kind of more finishers and dunkers around the basket.

I think Jon said this after we played them, that you can score against them. They can get spaced out. They can get spread out. Because they have such great length, Cauley-Stein and Lee and some of those guys really can do an unbelievable job covering.

Where they have a little bit of trouble sometimes is when you start to bring Towns and Dakari Johnson away from the basket, they have challenges of really, really guarding the ball.

Our issues were I think that we did some of that, now you got to finish and make plays. The thing that's most impressive to me about their team is with all the parity in college basketball, that they have maintained such a high level of play. I think that's a great compliment to John and his staff and those kids.

Q. That may have been the last game for the season for this team. Can you just talk about the last five games. There did seem to be some improvement. And just what this whole season has been like for you with to end up with a losing record?

COACH DONOVAN: Yeah, well, it's been an incredibly, an incredible learning experience for me. From the standpoint of as a coach, it was a real challenge this year to get them to be a team. I referred to this, they never really wanted to deal with the truth. I'm not so sure even today that they are willing to deal with the truth.

I think it was a team that was maybe a little bit more wrapped up in themselves. Didn't quite understand the level of sacrifice needed to beat a really good team.

As a head coach, I think I really fell short in getting them to see how important it is for us to play as a team. And I think it was still a very, very humbling learning experience. It was a great experience, that I think and, I use the word maybe delusional or not in reality. These guys have never been in reality the entire year.

Now we have gotten better. We have made some strides. But they have not totally given of themselves to the team. That's one of the greatest questions I always have as a coach is, how do you get someone to be like that, and this group really wasn't like that.

They got better. I'm not saying they didn't get better. They got better. And it wasn't so much points or that kind of selfishness and focus. It's why should I run the floor every single time? I only get it every once in a while. Why do I need to roll to the basket? Why do I need to do this, why do I have to do that.

I don't think that they really understand perseverance, the constant repetitiveness of doing your job over and over and over and over at a very,

very high level.

So from that standpoint, I think we have gotten better in some of those challenges, but I still feel like we're way, way off from where we need to be.

Q. When you talked about the free-throw shooting, all year you guys have fouled too much. You've said that over and over. Was that what it was and was there some concern there was a lot of bumping and that?

COACH DONOVAN: Yeah, my thing in the game, I don't think that Kentucky going to the free-throw line 23 times was unwarranted. I think we probably did foul them.

But I know we should have been to the free-throw line more than five times.

Q. Given what you've talked about with this team and how they struggled to see past themselves, how difficult was this for you and do you ever ponder your future when you're going through something like this?

COACH DONOVAN: No, not at all. I think that's part of coaching, it's part of growing and learning. I've had the last four or five years just an incredible group that was totally team bought-in and you saw the level of success. I think one of the things that is interesting for these guys is, I think, I don't think a lot of them ever really played up to their potential or their ability. Because in order for them to be able to do that, they needed the guy standing next to them to help.

When the guy standing next to them is more wrapped up in himself than helping somebody else, what happens is you have a lot of guys that appear to have underachieved. And that's really what happened.

So, what I look at is how were there different ways that I can see our team to get them to understand how important it is to be a team. A team like Kentucky can end up being a little bit more selfish because their talent level can get so much done, but we don't have that luxury.

We have got to really do it by being a team with this group. That was, I think, one of our challenges all year long.

So for me personally, it's a great learning experience of finding guys, how to get them -- you know, why did Scottie Wilbekin, Patric Young, Will Yeguete, why were they so selfless? Why can't this group be? How do you get them to see why it's important? Why it's good? Why it's healthy? Those things I enjoy trying to do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

COACH DONOVAN: Thank you.
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