

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with LSU.

COACH JONES: We knew it would be a hard-fought battle today. We played Tennessee early in the year at their place, had a setback. We watched them over the last two days, the way that they were able to play and perform at a high level, and we knew we needed to get off to a great start. That, we were able to do today. I thought our guys did a great job of focusing in.

Unfortunately, Ben gets in foul trouble the first five minutes of the game, but his teammates did a great job there in the first half holding on. And then the second half, I thought all of our guys did a great job of staying connected, being focused, and was able to finish the game the right way. Knocking down free throws, executing on the offensive end, and then getting the necessary stops on the defensive end of the floor.

Q. For Ben and Tim, how comforting was it to have Antonio there to be able to hit those shots throughout the entire game?

BEN SIMMONS: It's been big having him come in and hit shots. He's another threat on the team. So it's not only me and Tim and Craig you have to worry about, and obviously, Antonio's been playing really well the past few games, and he's been one of the main players.

TIM QUARTERMAN: It's big when he comes in, just makes shots. He's consistent throughout the game. The last couple games we've been having, he's been having big games. So we've been believing in him the whole season. So it's just big for our team when he just hits shots for us.

Q. Ben, when you got the two quick fouls and you only had five minutes in the first half, what was it like just waiting around? That's probably the longest you've had to sit this year.

BEN SIMMONS: Yeah, it's frustrating, but obviously, it was for the best for the team for Coach to do that. It made sense to come in in the second half, and I didn't have to worry about getting that third foul because I was going to stay in.

Obviously, the guys did a great job -- Antonio, Tim, and Jalyn. And Craig did well, too. So they did a good job playing without me.

Q. Tim, what was the difference toward the end of the game when you all broke up a close game and took the big lead? What do you think was the difference for you guys?

TIM QUARTERMAN: I think we didn't get stagnant this game. We just continued to believe in our offense. We shared the ball. We made big plays for each other. Tone got fouled for a three, and he knocked down all his free throws. I just think we just executed big as a team, and then we went back on the other end to try to get stops.

Q. For Antonio, what was Coach Jones' message to you all at halftime, down one, kind of struggling offensively going into the half?

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: Just execute and get back to doing what we do. We jumped out on them offensively, and we started getting away from that at the end of the first half. So coming out in the second half, we decided to get back to it.

Q. Antonio, Craig just said in the locker room that you all played a lot more aggressive today in the second half, where you all didn't play that against Tennessee at Tennessee. Was that the big difference in the game, the aggressiveness?

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: I just think how hard we played defensively was the difference in the game. Josh came in -- Josh started the game, and he really got it going for us defensively.

Q. Tim, could you just illustrate how important you are to this team? Does this game kind of bring home, when you're on, how good this team can be?

TIM QUARTERMAN: Yeah, when I come out focused and ready to play, like I do every game, I just think the ball wasn't bouncing my way a couple games. But I'm a confident basketball player, and my teammates believe in me, and that's good for my confidence, just knowing that they have belief in me. And I had it going today, and they kept trusting and believing in me to make plays. I just hope I can make it for them tomorrow.

Q. Antonio and Ben, now that you got this win out of the way, what do you think about playing A&M tomorrow?

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: It's going to be our third time playing them. So, you know, we know what they do, and they know what we do. So I think it's going to come down to whoever plays the hardest.

BEN SIMMONS: Yeah, it's the same with me. I believe it's going to come down to who wants it more and who's willing to put in for that type of win. It's going to be a hard game, but I know my guys are going to step up.

Q. Johnny, what went into the decision to start Josh? And when did you come to that decision?

COACH JONES: I think yesterday, watching him play. I don't think they play with a traditional point guard right now, and we wanted to try to extend our defense. Armani Moore is bringing the ball up. Josh is our best on-ball defender with his quickness. We thought we could maybe do a good job of maybe trying to wear them down a bit. Armani Moore, as effective as he was in Knoxville when we played against them, wasn't as effective tonight, and I thought Josh would do a good job. So we wanted to extend our defense, and he was the best person for that.

Q. And he had a big impact on the offensive end as well?

COACH JONES: He did. Josh did a great job of making gaps, making plays, but he focuses his time on his defense. I think he may have been 4 of 8 from the field. He got in the gaps in their defense and made some huge plays for us and hit a big three, I think, as well. So I thought his aggressiveness on the offensive end of the floor was really good for us. I thought he had a really good, balanced game today.

Q. Johnny, I don't know if there's a path to get an at large bid for you guys, but maybe a win over A&M could do it, could push you into that. How aware do you think your players are of that? Just what are your thoughts of the chance of an at large the deeper you go?

COACH JONES: I think it's really good for players to focus on their next opponent, and at the end of the day, we're hopeful that those things take care of themselves. I thought we played a really good basketball team in Tennessee today, and that's where their focus had to be. They knocked off a very good Vanderbilt basketball team yesterday, and I thought our guys had to stay engaged. And tomorrow, more of the same.

We're playing a very tough, talented basketball team tomorrow, and we have to play well. If we do that, we'll be at 20 wins. As well, we finished in the top three in our league. We feel that we're in a very powerful league. We hope that that stands for something, and it will certainly carry some weight. That's what we look forward to.

We've had a very challenging schedule at the top, playing the top teams in our league, a few of them twice. And others we played on the road and had success as well. So we just trust that we have to keep playing well and everything else will take care of itself.

Q. Coach, building off that, what do you say to the national criticism of you that, given the talent on your team, probably you should already be a lock for the big tournament and not have to win the next two games to be there?

COACH JONES: I didn't hear that. Who said that? Somebody said something negative about us?

Q. About your coaching specifically, quite honestly.

COACH JONES: Yeah, well, I don't get caught up in that. I know I coach against a bunch of great guys in this league, and we're sitting there with an 11-7 record, and those are the guys that I really have to be concerned and focused on and challenge against on a weekly basis.

So we try to make sure that we put a great group of kids out there. We have one of the youngest teams in the league, but we don't go around and blowing our horn on what we can and can't do. We just have to perform at a certain level. I'm not sure all the talent that people talk about. I know what talent other teams have that are in our league, and we're excited to be in the top three of that.

So we don't get caught up with the critics. We just try to get caught up with how well we can execute night in and night out, and I think you look at our record, if you know much about our team, who we played without the early part of the season, it speaks for itself, our win-loss record.

But I think our guys have done a tremendous job of playing throughout the year.

Q. Obviously, you all were able to beat A&M in Baton Rouge. What do you think you all can take from that game and bring it into tomorrow just to kind of generate some of that same success and come out with a win?

COACH JONES: We've got to know that we played a very good A&M team in College Station. We had a setback. We played well enough at home to have success. So now we meet at a neutral site. We're very familiar with each other. We're going to have to really execute at a high level, both ends of the floor, offensively and defensively, and we're hopeful that we're the team that have the least amount of mistakes and play closer to flawless. And I think that's the team that will have a chance of having success tomorrow.