

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with Texas A&M.

COACH KENNEDY: Obviously, I'm thrilled with the effort that we played with, especially on the defensive end. I thought we did a really good job of being physical and walling up and forcing them to take some tough shots. Our bench came in and offensively did a really good job of moving the ball and played really unselfish and hit -- we started making shots, and we were due to start making shots because we hadn't shot the ball well. And we still can do better.

We were playing against a team that's really young and had a lot of pressure on them. You could see that our experience and our leadership was a big reason why we were able to win the game the way we did.

Q. Tonny, you all were struggling early offensively. Did you go in the game feeling like you had to do something to get the offense going?

TONNY TROCHA-MORELOS: Well, when Coach put me in the game, I just tried to play hard. I mean, I know we struggle on the offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, but I didn't focus on it. I just focused on playing hard and tried to do the right thing, and that's what I did.

Q. Tonny, the sequence with about 13 and a half minutes left when you started it with that dunk and there were a couple more after that, how much fun was that for you guys with that little dunkfest you had for a while?

TONNY TROCHA-MORELOS: It was. It was so much fun that I got a technical foul. [Laughter].

I think the bench and everybody enjoyed the dunk as much as I did, but we just focused on keep playing hard and get the win.

Q. For Alex, it looks like this was the fewest points allowed in a major conference game this year. How good does that feel? The previous low had been 40. Is that a nice moment or just an indication of what this defense can do?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I think it's just a testament to -- like Tonny's saying, how hard we play. When we play hard and we've got five guys that are working for the same goal, it's amazing what our team is capable of.

I mean, you just saw it. It's coming together at the end of the year. We played a good Florida team yesterday. Kind of banged up, didn't respond well the first five minutes of this game, but after the first media time-out, I think we just hunkered down and started getting defensive rebounds and getting stops, and that helped our offense out too.

Q. Alex, could you have ever seen this coming? When you all got on the bench at the end, not just for a minute or two, but for the last eight or nine minutes, what was that like, just sitting there and having fun with the other guys on the bench?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, you don't envision beating someone by 40 in the semifinal game before you try and go to the championship, but that's just how the game played out. They kind of withered down as we got stronger, and the score resulted in that. But it's huge for us to be able to just kind of get some other guys in and let them get more experience in a high-intensity game and let some of the guys that play more minutes get some rest because whoever we play tomorrow is going to be ready and it's going to be a competitive game.

Q. Coach, A&M announced a contract extension before the game, and then you followed it up with a big win like that. I'm just curious what's going through your mind today.

COACH KENNEDY: I'm just thankful. I love Texas A&M, and it's been a journey, and I'm just proud for these guys and to get the opportunity to keep coaching and coach them for a long time. But that's about it from that standpoint.

Obviously, it means a lot to me, but it means a lot to me that Alex Caruso, who's been through the grind, and you see his maturity and character. And Tonny Trocha, who's a team guy behind the scenes, and what they were able to do today didn't happen overnight. So I'm excited for those guys.

Q. Billy, can you speak to the play of your bench in this tournament? And how much of a luxury is it in a tournament like this where you're playing days in a row? And, of course, the one to come where you can lean on those guys and also rest your starters?

COACH JONES: It's huge. You know, last year we didn't have the depth of the bench, and it cost us at the end of the year. So these guys have been doing it all year. It started with the battle of Atlantis. It started with our first four games of the year, where Tony Trocha started the first four games because Jalyn Jones didn't play in the first four games. So these guys have been developed and ready throughout the year, and I'm really proud of them.

But they're not freshmen. They're not freshmen anymore. Even Tavario Miller, all those guys, came in and have had good experience and played all year, and it's helped us for sure.

Q. Coach, staying with the theme of the bench, in the first half, it seemed like you took some of the starters out to like maybe sit them down and let them watch the game a little bit because things weren't going well. And some of the combinations you had out there were a little different than what we've seen all year with the four subs and Anthony Collins, and things like that.

COACH JONES: Yeah, I wanted to go to those guys early. One, they've been playing extremely well. Tony yesterday had 9 points and 7 rebounds in 13 minutes. Admon Gilder was huge. And D.J. should have played more minutes. So I wanted to get those guys in after the first four or five minutes, and they really settled us down. They moved the ball. They're not hunting for shots. They did a good job of staying within our system and scoring the ball.

Q. It's been a while since this program has played for a conference tournament title. How nice is it to have this position and continue the streak that you all are on?

COACH KENNEDY: It's awesome. To have the opportunity to play in this environment and at this stage. Again, I'm just really pleased for our guys. It's great for our young guys to gain in experience so we can progress on next season, and it's great for our seniors who have put in the time and have bought in, and I want them to absorb it and enjoy it.

Obviously, we came here to win it, but I want them to embrace the whole experience, and it will be something they remember the rest of their lives.

Q. Coach, can you address what you did defensively? Because in the first half, not only did they not make shots, they weren't even getting good looks a lot of the times, and the shot clock wound down like three times.

COACH KENNEDY: Yeah, I mean, we didn't do anything abnormal. That's the same way we played them at home. Coach Kyle Keller did a tremendous job with the scout preparing our team. We just, that's kind of what we do.

When we're locked in defensively like that and you look at D.J. Hogg, who's 6'8", Tony Trocha, who's 6'10", and Tyler Davis, who's 6'10", that's a heck of a front line. And that length with Caruso at the one or Collins at the one, a senior, is pretty good for us. And Admon Gilder at the two, 6'3".

So we're blessed. We've got good depth. We've got good talent. And we've got good kids. That's what you saw in that win, all of those things were a product of that.

Q. You just mentioned all the height. Is that a key to stopping Simmons maybe, or slowing him down at least?

COACH KENNEDY: It definitely helps in slowing him down, but that kid has had so much pressure on him from the beginning. You know, I felt sorry for him because nobody can live up to what he's been lifted up for. I mean, he's 19 years old.

So we played really good. They had a bunch of freshmen on the court who had never been in an SEC semifinal tournament. We've got veterans, fifth-year seniors, who have been through it and who have led our guys. So it was a perfect storm for us in this situation.