

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday March 8, 2017

Johnny Jones Skylar Mays Antonion Blakeney

Miss. State

Mississippi State -79, LSU-52

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with LSU. We'll ask Coach Jones for some general thoughts on the game and we'll take questions just for the two student-athletes and excuse them back to the locker room.

COACH JONES: I thought we got off to a great start in the game, I think it was 8-2. Played with rhythm offensively making shots, on the defensive end getting deflection, fast break opportunities and steals.

I thought they did a good job of settling in after the timeout, and they did a great job of punching back, and once they punched back early in the game, I didn't think we responded as well as we needed to.

But I thought we continued to play throughout there in the first half, and I thought they did a great job of making plays in the first half. But as the game played out, I think our 3-point shooting hurt us. The turnovers hurt us, and, unfortunately, we weren't able to recover, and, again, I thought they played extremely well down the stretch.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for either of the student-athletes.

Q Both players, just a case a lot of times you get the lead and you're trying so hard to push it out that it kind of speeds up a little bit too fast?

THE MODERATOR: Antonio.

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: I mean -- ask me again. I don't understand.

Q Just about when you get a lead or you're right there and then all of a sudden you're trying too hard to push the lead open that you might take the tempo up a bit



too fast and all of a sudden there's turnovers and things start falling apart.

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: When you get the lead you got to make easy plays. We were turning the ball over trying to make the hero play on making plays that were more forced. Definitely get the lead, try to make easy basketball plays.

THE MODERATOR: Same question for Skylar.

SKYLAR MAYS: Yeah. Piggybacking. We turned the ball over a lot, got away from what we were doing, what was getting us in good position and taking the lead and, you know, the game just got away from us.

Q Antonio, what was the difference down the stretch in the first half when they outscored you 13-0? I know you -- your team went cold. What did they do, push the tempo a little bit more?

ANTONIO BLAKENEY: Like you say, we went cold and didn't score the ball and it was 13-0. With them, they was turning us over and getting in transition, scoring easy points. Anybody can make those easy points we were giving them. You know, they scored a lot of points off us turning the ball over.

Q Skylar, y'all played pretty good defense, right out the gate. What was the key to that early stretch where y'all held them to I think around 10 points in the first 15 -- close to 15 minutes?

SKYLAR MAYS: Just playing hard, having that energy, playing inspired, you know, trusting each other and, you know, taking, you know, just -- you know, just trying to be aggressive.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for either of the student-athletes raise your hand. All right. If none, fellas, we'll excuse you. You can return to the locker room, thank you.

We'll continue on with questions for Coach Jones.

Q Johnny, the reports have been out there for 24 hours. What can you tell us what's going to happen?

COACH JONES: Can't tell you anything, really. I've

been putting all of our time and attention into these guys and trying to prepare and get ready for this game.

I'm like you, heard about it and read it, seen it on TV and told these guys that it wasn't about me, it's actually about them, and we'll prepare and do the things we've been doing and so they could have a great experience, and, unfortunately, came up short tonight.

But that's about the gist of it, and I'm sure I'll look forward to hopefully visiting with someone in the near future so I'll -- as I know, I'm sure you guys will know.

Q What went wrong with season, Johnny? What went wrong where you couldn't get back off the mat?

COACH JONES: A long, tough year for us. Unfortunately for these guys, they had to experience it and go through it. I think it's a combination of a lot of things from prior seasons. We've lost five guys in the NBA over the last four years and big turnover for us, very young basketball team and inexperienced, and I think we played experienced teams this year and did not respond the way we needed to, and after about Christmas time, I thought we had gotten off -- we lost our starting center and played the rest of the year with one starter from the previous year's people. When you're playing with that least amount of experienced guys in a league that I think is very good and challenging, unfortunately, those things happen to you and we've been on the mat and it's something that you don't enjoy.

It's not a place that we've been and you're talking about a group of guys that have been finishing in the Top 3 and getting double byes, and coming in and having to play on the first night I think kind of signifies to where we were.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Coach Jones?

Q Johnny, if you sit down and do have the conversation with Joe Alleva would that be a -- I won't say defense, when he asks you, what do you have to say about this year?

COACH JONES: I don't have any excuses about what happened this year. Shoot, I've got the keys, driving the bus. It was a tough year for us and I think people go through tough years and I think you can look at when I came in and the first four years where we were and how we're building the program and some great things were happening and on the court, off the court, you name it in games and just a year ago playing in the last game of the season for the conference championship on Kentucky's floor, and then to come to this because of the number of guys that we lost, it's tough and I think people who follow our program

closely see that, they know that and make decisions based on other things that they may be feeling but I don't have a litany of excuses for this season and I don't plan to utilize them.

I think these guys worked extremely hard that we had to try to fight their way out of the, unfortunately, slump that we're in and it just didn't happen for them.

I do credit them for fighting enough at the end of the season and they never quit and only two seniors on the team that didn't have an opportunity to play a lot, I thought they impacted our team in helping these guys continue to fight and try to battle their way through.

I can tell you this: They'll be better because of the experience they went through this year and what they had to because they had to play a lot of minutes and they went through a lot of wars and I'm sure this summer they'll work a lot harder so they don't experience this again.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Coach.

Q Johnny, you said a couple weeks ago you said that everything had been normal with Joe Alleva. Has anything changed since then? Have you talked to him at all?

COACH JONES: No, no, not about the job or anything like that. So, not any conversation about our season and I'm sure that will happen, hopefully, here in the near future.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions, please raise your hand. All right. Thank you very much.

COACH JONES: Thank you guys.