

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday March 9, 2017

Bruce Pearl Mustapha Heron Auburn

Missouri - 86, Auburn - 83

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue with Auburn. We'll ask Coach Pearl for some general thoughts on the game and take your questions just for Mustapha and excuse him back to the locker room and finish with Coach Pearl. Coach, would you begin.

COACH PEARL: We're obviously very disappointed. We felt like we were a couple wins away from getting into the NIT and continuing to play. I give Missouri credit. Those kids obviously battled and congratulations to Kim and his team.

You know, we had plenty of opportunities to make both offensive plays or shots or free throws, and we had opportunities to get defensive stops and stay with shooters and things along those lines, and then we just didn't.

I thought about fouling at the end of regulation, but there was so much time left, 17 seconds, that I decided to let it go ahead and play it on through. And of course, they did miss their first attempt but got the offensive rebound and knocked down the 3 to send it into overtime.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Mustapha. If you'll raise your hand and we'll get a floor mike to you.

Q. Can you talk about what you think the difference in the game was, Mustapha?

MUSTAPHA HERON: I think the difference in the game was just, you know, getting stops, making the right plays defensively. I blame myself for a lot of that. I didn't think I came through late on down the stretch on either end of the floor. So it's just something I'm working on for next year.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Mustapha, raise your hand, please. Any others? Take one on the far right.



Q. Mustapha, what's gone wrong in these last eight games, you guys losing six of your last eight? What's been the difference from this stretch you had down the season losing six of your last eight?
MUSTAPHA HERON: I think the difference has been defense, rebounding. I think that's what it's been all season between us winning and losing.

THE MODERATOR: Do you have another question on the right side?

Q. Mustapha, what has led to teams being able to come back and not finish off teams where you have them where you want them in double-digit lead?
MUSTAPHA HERON: Defense and rebounds. That's it right there.

THE MODERATOR: All right. You can return to the locker room. We'll continue with questions for Coach Pearl.

Q. Bruce, you mentioned defensive stops all year long. Has there ever been a point, especially with these young kids, where you felt like they're getting it? Or is it just this is --
COACH PEARL: That they're what?

Q. They're getting it. The light has turned on and they're getting it and -- or is this just been what it is all year?
COACH PEARL: You know, it's been -- it's been an issue. And I think -- the questions are good, but the answer is the same in a sense that we're scoring enough to win and the second leading scoring team in the SEC, but we're one of the worst defensive teams in the league. And part of it is the effort and energy, and part of it is the execution of a game plan.

And so, you know, tonight, listen, give Puryear credit. He's 5 for 9 from the 3. I'm not sure he's got 5 total on the year. So, give him credit. Give that kid credit for stepping up and putting that team on his back.

We were in pretty good foul trouble, and I didn't have anybody foul out. But we're in pretty good foul trouble for a lot of game. Austin Wiley only played 16 minutes, and there were definitely times -- our turnovers were a factor, especially late, where we didn't come away with baskets or opportunities to get to the free throw line.

Q. Bruce, I was just wondering, you got a grad student point guard, game is on the line. You didn't play him. Your freshman had some problems.

COACH PEARL: Yeah, coach's decision. My call.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions? Raise your hand.

Q. Bruce, Missouri statistically is one of the worst 3-point shooting teams in the country. Did you think they could make four 3s and tie and win the game?

COACH PEARL: I don't have Puryear's stats in front of me. I think the percentages show 5 for 9 is probably a career, you know, for him. We knew Vanleer could really shoot it. I thought there were times we left him and he made some really tough shots. You know, obviously Missouri is playing for Coach Anderson and they're playing relaxed. We had pressure on us. We're trying to win a couple games to go to the NIT. And so I think the pressure bothered us a little bit.

Q. Bruce, I know this is immediate, but you said keep playing. So, will you investigate a CBI?

COACH PEARL: Let's talk about that next week.

Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for Coach Pearl? Raise your hand. All right. Thank you.

COACH PEARL: Thanks.