

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday March 9, 2017

Ben Howland I.J. Ready Quinndary Weatherspoon

Miss. State

Alabama - 75, Mississippi State - 55

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with Mississippi State. And we'll ask Coach Howland for some general thoughts on the game and take your questions just for the two student-athletes. And then we'll come back to Coach Howland to finish up. Coach, if you begin.

COACH HOWLAND: I thought that their defense really, really caused us problems offensively the entire game. We struggled to score. I thought our defense in the first half was, you know, decent at times but they kept getting it inside too much. We decided not to double the post and probably a mistake early on in the game.

When you look at the first half, they got to the foul line a lot and that's when, you know, the Achilles' heel. You look at the game tonight, they went to the line 26 times, we went there 6. So, you know, their ability to score in the paint and attack in the paint with the low post game was a problem for us all night. And, you know, we really, really were handled in the second half.

First half they made the 3 to stretch it from 9 to 12. I thought the second half we came out, really struggled to score early on, and they stretched that lead. And I was glad our guys, you know, made a comeback to at least cut the final score to 20.

But give Alabama credit. Alabama is very good. They're very physical. They're very, very physical. They have great size. They're the best defensive team in our league when you look at the percentages, the rebounding margin, and it really showed today. Their body, their strength is very, very impressive.

So, that will be a heck of a game between them and South Carolina, arguably the two most physical teams



in our league coming up tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take your questions for either I.J. or Q.

Q Quinndary, going forward to next year, what do you think has to change for this team, considering you guys had lost eight of the last ten to end the season?

QUINNDARY WEATHERSPOON: We got to play on both ends of the court. It really don't matter. We just -- we defend, the offense will take care of itself.

Q I.J., talk about the future of this program as you get ready to leave, how do you feel like you're leaving this program?

I.J. READY: The program is in great hands. I think this year I've done a pretty good job of trying to lead and set the foundation, you know. My first three years we had a losing season. This year I finished even. And next year, like I said before, I expect a 20-win season and I expect to see them in the NCAA Tournament. And great group coming back next year, they're going to work hard. Coach Howland make sure they work hard. Q do a great job being a leader, and I expect them to go further.

Q I.J., how do you explain the problems offensively for you guys today?

I.J. READY: We didn't make shots. Alabama did a great job running us off the 3-point line. We like to shoot jump shots. They kind of out-physicaled (sic) us. I think Coach Howland do a great job in the off-season kind of teaching the young guys how to get to the free throw line to help themselves out. I think that's the biggest thing. They shot 26 free throws, we shot 6. Majority of the time if the team shoot the more free throws win. They hit more free throws than we shot by 11.

Q Q, you said after the season was over, you would talk about your wrist and figure out if you're going to have surgery or not. How quickly do you have to make that decision?

QUINNDARY WEATHERSPOON: I don't know. I'd rather not talk about it.

THE MODERATOR: I.J., Q, we'll excuse you. You can return to the locker room. Thank you. We'll continue on with questions for Coach Howland. Raise your hand.

Q Ben, how much do you think the expectations for this team should be heightened for next year, considering what I.J. just said as well?

COACH HOWLAND: I think we'll definitely be improved. You look at who we have coming in up-front, those two -- you know -- you know, I think about Abdul who is already here. He's going to give us a big boost in the 5 spot. Garrison Brooks is an outstanding player. They're both physical, rebounding, you know, hard-nosed guys. Both those guys are going to be a huge addition, which is big for us. And then "Keshawn Fasell" is another big. We're going to get a lot bigger and stronger a year from now. And fortunately we've had a chance to work with Abdul since December where he's been allowed to practice. And so we already know that he's going to be a big, you know, help for us inside. And then obviously Weatherspoon. We're adding pieces and we have the bulk of our team coming back.

Q Ben, start of the second half you cut the lead to ten and then Alabama spurted off, went on 18-0 run. What happened during that stretch where you couldn't get the ball in the basket?

COACH HOWLAND: I thought when they started to get a little bigger lead that we took a bunch of quick shots and our quick shots just fuels the fire. And that's something that really, really snowballed on us tonight. Xav made a nice driving basket and cut it to 10. He came down and took a shot where he was off balance, it wasn't close. I thought that that just fueled them to be able to go on that run, which, you know, was obviously a big run.

Q Coach, I just wanted to get your observations. I know you played Alabama three times. What have they done to improve since you faced them the first time? And talk about Ingram's performance tonight and you guys really seemed to have a problem keeping him from the rim.

COACH HOWLAND: I thought Ingram was terrific tonight. He played well against us in all three games, and his size, you know, was a factor. He made shots.

I thought Corban Collins -- he was 3-25 in the last four games, I think I counted up going into this game. So he looked healthier and he was 4-6 from 3. He was a huge factor, including the one that gave momentum going into halftime but they improved. They have a

good, veteran group, blend of guys that -- and they're very physical. So I think they've improved throughout the season, you know, and they actually changed things offensively from the first two times we played them here later in the year. They went to some different things that they're running.

They did a nice job continuing to evolve.

Q How do you explain Kegler's performance the last couple games?

COACH HOWLAND: You know, he really struggled today. And I thought that, you know, first of all, we got to get him some more looks. I thought Tyson Carter played very well the last two days, and Mario had the two toughest games the of the year. Maybe it's fatigue because we played him a lot of minutes, asked him to do so much for us. He played 31 minutes tonight.

I thought he battled defensively for us. You know, ended up getting 5 rebounds but just struggled to put the ball in. He had the one shot on the baseline in the first half on out-of-bounds play where he was open. I thought it was rushed a little bit, but he's had overall a very good year for us. He ended up 5th in the league for rebounding for a freshman, and I think he was number 11 in scoring. He had a good overall year. He struggled here these two games in Nashville.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for Coach Howland?

Q Coach, your three previous stops, first two years kind of struggled and your third year you got to 20 wins at Pitt, UCLA, get to the NCAA Tournament. Do you see signs of that?

COACH HOWLAND: We're going to be a much improved team because of, number one, the nucleus that returns, it's gone through a season like this where they've really been right there in so many of the SEC games and faltered here down the stretch where we had a chance to win. So it's getting over that hump and also just what we're adding in terms of our biggest need is front line bolster, and I think we're doing that with a couple of the key recruits we have that are coming in next year.

THE MODERATOR: Time for maybe one more. Anyone? Thank you.

COACH HOWLAND: Thank you.