

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday March 7, 2018

Mark Fox Yante Maten Rayshaun Hammonds Georgia

Georgia - 78, Vanderbilt - 62

MARK FOX: I thought our defense to start the game was terrific. We did not do a very good job when we played Vandy in Game 1. We are much more comfortable in our roles now, and I thought our defense in the first half was really important to us building a lead. And then we took great care of the basketball, which has been a little bit of an issue for our team. That allowed us to build a big lead and had a lot of guys contribute.

Certainly, when you can play from in front, it's a lot easier, and we were able to keep some guys fresh. Hopefully, we'll be ready for a big challenge tomorrow.

Q. Yante, this game in terms of being the opening of the tournament, to have pretty much a complete game from start to finish, I know they made a run in the beginning of the second half, how rewarding is that given the struggles that you guys have had to pick up some Ws down the stretch here?

YANTE MATEN: I mean, it was -- I think we played a really good game offensively and defensively. We had a couple burps in the second half, but overall, I think we played a really good -- we played really well today. We had a lot of people contributing.

Q. Rayshaun, it seems like you guys really had more success when you were playing a lot faster. You were able to feed off of Yante, who's obviously going to get his. How do you think you guys were able to play when the tempo was up a little bit more?

RAYSHAUN HAMMONDS: We just picked up our tempo. If we've got to play up tempo, we play up tempo. If we have to slow the game down, we would. It was just how they were playing us. With Yante



helping us out, that's good.

Q. Yante, when you guys played Mizzou earlier, you had a season low for points and field goals. What do you have to do differently offensively tomorrow when you face Missouri?

MARK FOX: Let me answer for him. He has no idea. We haven't talked for one second about Mizzou. So he has no idea. I hate to speak for you, stud, but he won't know until I tell him later.

Q. For both players, Michael Porter's going to play tomorrow. Cuonzo Martin announced that today. Have you guys ever seen him play? Are you familiar with him at all? Just your thoughts on, I guess it's his first game to play since the first of the season? Yante, will you take that first?

YANTE MATEN: I seen him at the Adidas camp in the summer. He's a really good player. Got up the floor quickly and got two stops. I think he's a really well rounded player.

RAYSHAUN HAMMONDS: I played against him at UBL, my 17 AAU. But just what Yante said basically.

Q. Yante, you got a lot of support, particularly from the freshmen tonight. Just what did you think of the way that they performed around you, and how much easier did it make the game for you tonight?

YANTE MATEN: I think the game of basketball gets easier when everyone makes shots because then I'm not sure who to look in on. The freshmen did a really, really great job coming in playing their role, helping our offense, and our defense as well. Everyone was locked in. So it really helped me out tremendously.

Q. Yante, just how important was it for you to do everything possible in your power to make sure that your career went on for at least one more game?

YANTE MATEN: I mean, it wasn't really everything in my power. It's a team game. So at the end of the day, I only go as far as my team goes. So we're a collective unit. We're just trying to play our best basketball, and I was trying to make my reads, and so was my team. We came out with the win because of it.

Q. Coach, I know it was mentioned to Yante about

the freshmen, but on a big stage like this, the freshmen have had an up and down season. What were your evaluations of how they kind of stepped up when it really mattered?

MARK FOX: Well, those three guys that played significant minutes -- Tashaun, Rayshaun, and Nic Claxton -- they're very talented young players, and we've played them a lot throughout the year. They've made real costly errors throughout the season, and it's allowed them to grow because of how they responded to it. I think, because they've continued to try to learn from mistakes and developed confidence from plays that they've completed, they're playing the game a little bit more maturely right now than they did maybe even two weeks ago, but certainly a month ago.

And I think their approach to trying to learn throughout the season has helped them, but certainly tonight all three of them were very impactful on the game.

Q. Michael Porter has played, I think, two minutes this season. Obviously, everyone saw him in the AAU circuit and summer circuit type thing. What is it like to prepare for a Missouri team that's going to throw him in for the first time since November?

MARK FOX: Well, the challenge is I'm not even sure what position they'll play him at. He's a very versatile player, and I'm thankful that the kid's gotten healthy because he was a terrific talent. Could be, obviously, a very highly picked kid one day when he goes to the draft. He'll be a top five selection. I remember watching him in high school, and he's as complete of a player as there was at that level. So we're not sure, as I think about it right now, where they would even play him because he has such great versatility.

So our preparation will have to be somewhat generic because, until we see what they're doing with him, we really don't know.

Q. Coach, the first time against Vanderbilt, you seemed displeased with the defensive effort that you all put forth. Just what do you think was the biggest difference tonight in that department?

MARK FOX: Our team was in a bad place when we went to Vanderbilt. We had a stretch where we didn't guard anybody, not just Vandy. We didn't guard Mississippi State. We didn't guard Vandy. We just didn't -- we weren't playing well at the time defensively. We've grown up a lot since then, and so I think really just the fact that we're, you know, just a little bit more seasoned and we understand our roles now a little better and we just certainly executed the plan much better than we did in Game 1 because, really, to be honest with you, it was the exact same thing we tried to do in the first game.

Q. Mark, it seems like a common denominator in really good games for you guys, this one, the Tennessee win is everyone besides Yante also having a good game. Is there anything to contribute to that? Is it effort? Is it matchup based? What happens when everyone is playing well?

MARK FOX: We had three freshmen play well tonight. They played a lot this season. Freshmen are going to be up and down. So that's part of it. Our premier players have been a little bit inconsistent, and that consistency certainly is something we've tried to overcome.

But tonight we had a lot of guys play well, and that's really important for us to have some of the guys chip in besides Yante because he's been pretty consistent all year. We knew tonight he was going to get double-teamed, and it's a good play for us when people trap him because we know where to -- he knows where to put the ball, and we know what to do against a post trap.

But you're right. We need guys to play well around him, and that was key for us tonight.

Q. Coach, what was Missouri able to do effectively against Yante in that first meeting? Few teams have been able to limit him to what he did in that game.

MARK FOX: I thought Mizzou did a really good job defending us in Game 1. We played a good first half, both teams very physical; and in the second half, they wore us down. Really, I thought their physicality in the second half got the better of us in Columbia.

Q. Just kind of following up, you mentioned the physicality wearing you all down. Did the emergence of those three freshmen you talked about against the physicality given the depth that you guys are starting to establish now?

MARK FOX: I hope it will help us. Again, they have to become consistent and playing in a way that contributes to winning. We've got to stay off the roller coaster, and hopefully we can do that.