

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday March 8, 2018

Mark Fox
Yante Maten
William Jackson
Georgia

Georgia - 62, Missouri - 60

MARK FOX: Certainly, a very hard fought game versus a terrific Mizzou team. This league has so many good teams in it this year that every game you play, you should expect a real battle, and that's what today was.

I felt like we got off to a very slow start but eventually found a rhythm defensively in the first half and built a lead and then were able to just kind of grind to the finish like two really good teams will make the game become that way.

Obviously, we feel good about the win and a chance to play tomorrow.

Q. Yante, what works for you guys? You guys went on a 16-0 run in that first half. Just what did you see worked offensively?

YANTE MATEN: I just think we were being patient, getting to our spots, playing the open man, and just executing and hitting shots. I think that's pretty much all that it took to get us on that run.

Q. Yante, at the beginning of the game, it seemed like it was an emotional environment in the arena. Michael Porter coming back. How different was that from what you guys normally are in?

YANTE MATEN: We didn't try to put any emotions in the game other than we're just going to come out and play our game. If it was an emotional game, we didn't feel that way. We just made sure we played our type of basketball.

Q. Yante, there were a couple plays and circumstances where it seemed like you were kind of taking the game into your own hands. One in particular was you made a shot off the rebound and draw the charge on the other end with about five minutes or so to go. Could you take me through some of the your thought processes in



those situations, like did you feel like you needed to make a play?

YANTE MATEN: I just -- I read the game. I knew he was probably going to hit me with a hard hit. So I just got ready to take a charge, just knowing personnel.

Q. Yante, sort of along those lines, was there definitely a sense that you wanted the ball in your hands down the stretch and that you all were going to sink or swim with you down the stretch with this one?

YANTE MATEN: I think it was more just what our offense provided. We just made a couple of plays, and I ended up getting open on a couple of them.

Q. Do you lead the run block for Yante? You kind of struggled the first time you played Missouri. Just what kind of tactical adjustments did you make to have a much better game this time around?

WILLIAM JACKSON: Just making sure I played as physical as they did. Waited for my shots. Read the game and was patient.

Q. William, for you, just Missouri tied the game at 39 there in the second half. You guys went straight on an 8-0 run. What does that say about where this team has come since that game at Mizzou arena?

WILLIAM JACKSON: We were really just going out there listening to what Coach Fox wanted us to run. Mainly we were just trying to go out there and play hard.

Q. For both guys, how well do you think you guys were playing for the game yesterday and today?

YANTE MATEN: I think we're playing really sound offense and defense. We're making sure we're not giving any easy -- we're trying to not give any easy layups or threes, and I think we're moving the ball really well on offense and getting everybody open shots.

WILLIAM JACKSON: I feel like the emphasis is to go out there and try to have fun and just win.

Q. Can you tell me with Tessaun, how you're guard guiding him for a freshman? Seems like you're getting good production at that position.

WILLIAM JACKSON: Throughout the season, he's getting better and better. He's a great player, great athlete, and I'm just excited to see how he does.

Q. Michael Porter took ten shots in the first half. Did it look to you like Missouri was playing the kind of offense they played all season with him in there as well, as opposed to Kevin Puryear or someone else at the four or three, whatever he was playing?

MARK FOX: I don't think they changed schemes drastically, maybe a small wrinkle here or there. In that kid's defense, it's awful hard to play your first couple college games. He didn't practice for most of the year, and then he had to come out and play in a high level game. You're probably not going to be real efficient. So I got a lot of respect for him even trying to do what he did today.

You know, he also played against the number one field goal percentage team in the league. So we've been pretty good at that end. That's going to be hard for a guy that hasn't played any games or hasn't had game rhythm experience to probably be super productive.

Q. Why are you guys so good defensively? What's gone into that to make it that way?

MARK FOX: We've always been good defensively. Until Yante got hurt last year, we were one of the better defensive teams last year. I think that we have a level of execution and mental attachment to the schemes that we try and play, and we have a variety of schemes that we can employ.

We weren't as good defensively earlier this year because we're playing so many freshmen. You look out there today, and we've got three freshmen on the court at one time. So we probably weren't as consistent defensively early in league play, but we kept getting better.

Obviously, we'll need to be very good defensively the rest of the tournament.

Q. Coach, obviously, there were a lot of close calls, and officiating was really tight in the game. Could you explain maybe your frustrations with that and what do you think kind of effect it had on the game as a whole?

MARK FOX: Actually, I thought the game was well officiated. There was a replay rule, and I just didn't understand the rule. So they just communicated to me the rule, which it's when you go to replay, they go to the monitor in Birmingham. It's really been an effective system. I just wanted an explanation for the rule.

Q. Mark, when you see the way the freshmen are playing, Tyree and all these guys kind of rounding

into form at this point, is it a mixture of excitement but also kind of like ruefulness that it took this long?

MARK FOX: You have to be fair to the student-athletes. Kentavious was, I think, the eighth pick in the draft, and as a freshman we could hardly play him. We had to keep sitting him down because he wasn't ready. It wasn't until midway through his sophomore year that he became a terrific player.

These guys are talented young guys, and they needed a chance to play and make mistakes and play through mistakes in order to grow. So, no, certainly you're frustrated because there's been some very costly ones, but that was a fair thing to do to those kids.

Q. The time-out after you scored your first basket, what was that for, and what was that?

MARK FOX: Well, we just needed to get in the right mental space. I felt like that we were off center from our mental and emotional center place that we needed to be in. I just wanted us to -- I wanted us to fight to get the first basket before I tried to bail them out. And then once we scored, I said, look, let's get back in the right frame of mind to play basketball. That was really the message during that time-out.

Q. Mark, Yante is obviously very consistent in his play. How valuable is that for any coach to know what he's going to get?

MARK FOX: He's been just a tremendous producer for us this year. And the reason is he's so versatile. He's been very patient with some inexperience around him, but there's a lot of places, he can shoot threes, he can get to the foul line, he can post up and go over both shoulders. He can go to a lot of places to score. It's hard to take it all away. It's obviously been a joy to coach him because he's a better person than he is a player.

Q. Mark, can you comment on the play of Nicolas Claxton. The guy gave you 7 points, 8 rebounds, 30 minutes of constant energy. How important is he for the success of your team?

MARK FOX: Nic has really come along throughout the year. He's got a really bright future. His versatility, I think, is a great complement to Derek and Yante. Derek got in some foul trouble, so Nic played a few more minutes than he normally may have. He's obviously become a very key part of our team.

Q. Mark, what was your message to Tashaun? I think he had a turnover, and you spent some time with him on the sideline. When he came out, obviously, he gave you a lot of quality minutes, but there's still, I guess, some young mistakes?

MARK FOX: He's growing up on the job. We have the

same point guard for three years in J.J., and Turtle's had to come in and try to fill those shoes, which is impossible to ask of one person. And Tashaun was probably too young to really help us earlier, and he's still learning, and he's still making mistakes. And he made one tonight during the game, and it was a great chance to teach him.

So he's very open to looking at it himself and saying I could have done this better or that better, and he's a competitor. So he gets a little fired up and just told him to take a deep breath and keep growing.

Q. Mark, how important is it going playing Kentucky tomorrow? You held them to 66 points the first time. To not let get out in transition and get them in that half-court game where your defense really thrives?

MARK FOX: I'm not sure we'll play that way. A couple years ago, we tried to play really fast, went to the platoon system and tried to just play super fast and get easy shots because their defense is so good. I'm not sure what we'll do. We've got more depth this year.

I think our team should hopefully recover today. Yesterday wasn't a very physical game at all. I thought we were very fresh today. I don't think today was something that will drain us too much. We came into the tournament very fresh. But getting stops will be important whether we play fast or slow.

Q. Just what do you think this win says about your team's maturity going down 10-0 and having the crowd with Missouri the way it was? What do you think of the way your team responded to all that?

MARK FOX: I'll tell you what, here's what I told my team. In life and in basketball, when the going gets tough, some people run for the hills, and other people try and climb them. And they were down 10-0, and they decided to try to climb back in it, and that's what they did.