

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday March 7, 2018

Frank Martin
Frank Booker
Chris Silva

South Carolina

South Carolina - 85, Mississippi - 84

FRANK MARTIN: Just that time of year where, whether I'm happy or sad or good mood, bad mood, it's all irrelevant. It's about surviving and advancing. Who you are as a team is already in place. The identity of your team is in place.

We didn't defend today. We weren't very good. When I say point guard play has to get better, it's not just offense and who to pass it to, it's being able to defend the guy with the ball, and we really struggled there today.

And then our rotations weren't good. We've got to talk about it tonight. We'll fix it tomorrow, and come out and play more to our identity tomorrow.

Q. Frank Booker, they were up about 53-48. You guys came out and hit, I think, three-point shots on three straight possessions. Could you talk about that sequence. What were you seeing from them defensively at that time?

FRANK BOOKER: I just felt like we moved the ball well, and we just got open shots, and we made them. I don't think we did anything special. We just moved the ball like we usually do and we made shots like we usually do.

Q. I was just wondering, for the players, what you guys remember about the first game against Arkansas and what do you think you have to do differently to win tomorrow. Just what do you think about the rematch?

CHRIS SILVA: Yeah, come out, like Coach said, we didn't play our identity today. So we've got to come out and just play our basketball, South Carolina basketball, guard the ball, and help each other on the court, like execute the offense and everything, and we'll be fine, I think.



FRANK BOOKER: I just feel like, if we play defense the way we played defense, make it tough on them and rebound the ball, we'll be fine. We'll get the ball inside and go through Chris, and get shooters open and get shooters shots, and we'll make shots.

Q. Chris, 20 free throws today. Obviously, that's not too much out of the norm, but I don't know if you ever had 20 in a game. A majority of that came in the second half. Just a simple matter of you getting inside and you keep drawing those doubles -- like anything different about this today in terms of how they defended you, than other teams?

CHRIS SILVA: I mean, they was doubling on me, but the guards was just doing a really good job trying to find me, trying to give me the ball. I was trying to finish.

Coach was on me all game asking me to make layups, easy layups, and I was trying to do that. But the guards was keeping on feeding me with the ball. That's it.

Q. This would be for Frank. I think you guys had 18 turnovers in Fayetteville. What do you remember about the pressure? How tough was that? And what do you have to do to clean that up?

FRANK BOOKER: Just take care of the ball and pass it to our teammates and not them. I just feel like, if we do that, we'll be fine because, if we give them transition buckets, easy buckets, it's going to be hard to actually play our defense in half-court.

Q. Frank, obviously, there's guys on this team with postseason experience, you being one of them. This was Justin's first time being in the postseason. He hits those two threes that was alluded to. What did you think of his play today? Did he kind of play beyond his years in that moment, that stretch there in the second half?

FRANK BOOKER: I'm very proud of him. He played his tail off. He hit those two threes and energized us and got us going, offensively and defensively. So do I think he outplayed? No, because he was doing this at the beginning of the year. It's a good time to finally get back to who Justin is, getting rebounds and making shots. That's who he is.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the two student-athletes. We'll continue on with questions for Coach Martin.

Q. Frank, could you talk about your team's three-point shooting. What did you think of the ball movement and passing, and what did you think of what you guys were seeing defensively from Ole Miss?

FRANK MARTIN: I misplayed that 2-3 zone the majority of the game. I thought our passing was good. I thought our execution against the zone was good. We just -- offensively, we've got a lot of young guys, and they don't understand yet how to screen and cut, the strength and the speed that you've got to do all those things. I don't care if we've played 30 games, Ole Miss' guys have played 130 games. So our guys aren't as revved up as some of the older guys that have played more college games or physically mature enough yet.

But them playing that zone, it allowed our guys to be a little more comfortable with their passes and stuff. I said before the year that this team -- I had multiple shooters on this team and had the chance to be the best shooting team that I've coached. We've showed that at times during the year. We've had multiple guys make -- like nine guys make multiple threes in games.

The problem is we're very inconsistent with our passing. Our passing is not as good as it needs to be. I thought we did -- we didn't defend anybody today, but I thought our passing was better today.

Q. Frank, you talked about defending the ball and the issues with that today. Obviously, tomorrow facing those two guards in Macon and Barford, you've seen that challenge before. A performance like today with you guys would make it even more difficult, obviously. You talked about addressing that tonight. Is that the main kind of key tomorrow, keeping those guys in front?

FRANK MARTIN: I'd say. Like ball screens didn't hurt us today. They hurt us on some, we call horns, ball screen action in the first half. But that was our big not making -- not taking care of his responsibility. We made the adjustment, and that went away. We just couldn't -- our point guards could not guard their point guards off the bounce. They didn't have to run off of it. They just drive us. We've got to be better there tomorrow, absolutely better.

Those two guys are dynamic. Those two guys are real good. Barford and Macon are real good. And they have the unique ability of being hard shot makers. So if you get them on a night where they've got it going. Not only are they going to go make the easy shots,

they're going to make the hard shots.

And then the big kid inside, he's ridiculous right now, how good that kid's playing. His name escapes me right now -- Gafford. We played them before. We went in their building. It was a six-point game with eight to go, or something like that. We were in the fight. It's not like we went in there and tried to hold on for dear life. No, we were in the fight. And there was a run there with about eight minutes to go that made it into a 12-point game or so, and we really never threatened again.

But we'll play more to our identity tomorrow. I hope it's good enough. I think our guys will play a lot better tomorrow, especially defensively.

Q. I think Arkansas outscored you all 26-11 off turnovers in that game. What do you guys have to do to clean that up?

FRANK MARTIN: I just said this on TV. Our turnovers were not against their press. Our turnovers were just passing the ball point to wing or wing to point. Those were our turnovers. Guys dribbling the ball -- Arkansas, Mike does an incredible job. If you dribble the ball to a bad place, they just attack you, and that's what we did. We struggled passing the ball point to wing, wing to point. So any time you turn it over point to wing, wing to point, it's a layup for them. It's a track meet. They're too good, too fast in all five spots. So it's going to be a layup, and that's what we did.

It wasn't they doubled us in the backcourt and we tried to throw out and they stole it. It was just simple basketball plays that we struggled with. We've got to be a lot better there.

I haven't seen that film since the day after that game. I'm going to go home and watch it in my hotel room, watch it tonight. I took a nap today. I never take naps. I was hoping it would be a long night. I'm getting old. If I don't take naps, I'll fall asleep by 10:00.

Q. Just how gritty of a performance was it tonight for Chris Silva, basically having to fight for each and every point he got both in the post and at the line?

FRANK MARTIN: Here's what's crazy. Chris was not -- I don't know what was wrong with him today. I haven't had a chance to ask him. He didn't have a lot of energy. I don't know if he didn't sleep well or didn't eat well. I don't know. Maybe he doesn't feel well. He's too good a kid. He doesn't tell you. He just goes out there and tries to do his best. He didn't have a lot of pop, a lot of life to how he played. He played strong, but he didn't have pop to deal with contact and get through contact and score.

He had two big-time blocks coming down the stretch there, and then he had the big offensive rebound off the free throw. Those are winning plays, and that's what he's about. On a bad night, he had 21 and 11. I think that's what I saw. That shows the growth. Even missing free throws early in the second half, he didn't hang his head. He eventually started making them.

I said this publicly at my press conference the other day. We coached him harder than any kid on our team this year because it's what he wants, and he wants to grow into a leader and he's making himself into a heck of a player. I'm glad he's on my team.

Q. Frank, I know in your career you've seen teams struggle to the end of the season. Were you surprised how Ole Miss continued to play hard throughout the game after some adversity?

FRANK MARTIN: I'm glad you asked me that. For Tony to keep those kids together and get them to continue to compete and play, that's a difficult place to be in. It's funny, I was kind of in a similar situation with A.K., as his assistant, when we kind of stayed behind at Cincinnati, and he had to manage that for a whole year, and I've never been around somebody that managed adversity the way he did that year at Cincinnati and kept everyone together.

Tony's been with him for a little bit. So I'm not surprised that -- Tony's been with him for four years now, if I'm not mistaken. I think those things have rubbed off on Tony, and he was able to keep those kids together in difficult circumstance. That's not an easy situation to be in. And it's that time of year. Everyone knows that next time you lose could be the last day you play this season, and those kids played with tremendous urgency and played well. Played well. Give them a lot of credit.