

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 10, 2018

Mike White
Chris Chiozza
Keith Stone
Florida

Arkansas - 80, Florida - 72

MIKE WHITE: It wasn't our best effort. We're coming off the best stretch of performances that we've put together all year.

Tonight we took a step backward, unfortunately. We've got to find a way to get home and regroup and find our mojo, get back to playing the way that we were playing these last three weeks.

That said, I thought Arkansas was really good. I thought they were the aggressor from the tip. I thought they got the majority of loose balls, pounded us on the glass, and we really struggled to string together consecutive stops versus a terrific offensive team. In addition, I thought they defended us at a high level, especially with their matchup zone.

Q. Chris, can you talk about that run they had at the end of the half that kind of got the momentum going their way.

CHRIS CHIOZZA: They did a good job with their matchup zone in that first half late. We couldn't get any good looks. We didn't defend very well, and they just -- they made some shots and got out playing transition. We didn't get any stops for a couple minutes there, and they were on a nice little run.

Q. Keith, a little discouraging that you guys let some of the missed shots affect your defense. How do you account for maybe some of the breakdowns tonight?

KEITH STONE: We had a couple breakdowns, but still we should have fought like we do in past games. We should have tightened on defense. Just because we didn't make shots doesn't mean we shouldn't have played defense.

Q. For both players, how do you guys try to put this loss behind you with the NCAA Tournament



coming up this week?

CHRIS CHIOZZA: It's a new season after Sunday when they tell us who we're playing and where we're going. We're just going to try to refocus and try to get the edge back we had the last six games of the regular season. Just come out there and fight. No matter who we're playing, we're going to try to get back to what we do, and that's defend. Distribute the ball and get the shots.

KEITH STONE: We're just going to go back, watch film, see our mistakes, see what we need to work on.

Q. Chris, is it good -- I mean, you never want to lose a game, but when you lose a game in the SEC tournament, to have that feeling of it being one and done and going into the next week, when obviously your season could end.

CHRIS CHIOZZA: Like you said, it's never a good feeling to lose. I mean, hopefully, this gives us our edge back that we had. I don't really know what else to say about that one.

Q. Do you think that having such a long break between the end of the regular season and then getting the double bye, obviously, you want the double bye for the rest and everything, but do you think it actually hurt you guys to be off that long?

CHRIS CHIOZZA: I mean, it could be a good thing or a bad thing. We thought it would be better for us to rest up and get a couple guys back healthy.

But I think it worked for Arkansas better. They had a couple games here, and they were -- kind of had their mojo with them already, and they came out playing confident. You know, we just started off a little slow, and they got us from the beginning. We were just trying to fight the whole game to get back the way we wanted it to go.

KEITH STONE: It really don't make no difference how many days we got off. Some of us were ready to play. Some of us weren't. But we got to go back, watch film, because this happens a bunch. But we need to go back and see what we did wrong.

Q. Mike, during the first half, it felt like you guys were going to -- you could have had a much bigger lead than you had at that point. And then when

they go on that run, all the momentum kind of shifted over to them.

MIKE WHITE: Absolutely. I thought that we had a couple of opportunities there to spread a lead. We had a few open looks. We had a one-on-zero layup opportunity. It's crazy. We have struggled with making layups all year. I guarantee we shoot more layups in practice than any team in the country. It's obviously become mental at this point.

This is the last chapter. We're about to move into the last chapter, but we've got to figure out a way to -- and continue brainstorming as a staff to continue how we can finish out the rim better.

And then I thought, to Arkansas's credit, there was some stagnancy late first half to a lot of switching man and matchup zone to where we weren't getting a lot out of actions. We were holding the ball a little bit. We were standing a bit too much. Did a good job in the second half, but just couldn't find a way to get stops.

Q. That's the second straight game where Barford had just a really big game on you guys. What made him so tough again tonight? And what, if anything, if you look back, you could have done differently on him?

MIKE WHITE: Before watching it -- I watched the first half breakdowns at halftime with our staff. I watched all of their made field goals and our fouls. Before going back to watch the second half, off the top of my head, I don't know what to do -- I don't know what to do differently. He scored on whoever was guarding him. He scored off ball screens. He scored off step-back jumpers against our bigs.

I remember the first half, during offensive rebounding opportunity, step-back jumpers versus our guards. He got to the rim one-on-one versus our guards at will, finished at the rim. Got to the foul line, converted the foul line. Played like a First Team All League guard, both offensively and defensively. Two games this year he dominated us. He was fantastic. Hit timely shots.

Anton Beard hit a couple late clock timely shots to start the second half, and we were really trying to settle in defensively.

I thought we came out in the gate in the second half with more defensive presence and aggression. I told our guys at the first media, the second half, guys, we're playing harder. They've hit a couple daggers. Again, Beard hit two early second half that were huge back breakers for us, big shots for them. And then, obviously, we couldn't come up with enough stops in the second half led by Barford.

Gafford was terrific as well, 8 of 11, 16 and 12.

Q. Coach, how disappointing was it to have Hudson get himself in foul trouble in that first half?

MIKE WHITE: We like him out there on the floor, of course. I don't -- I don't know if he'd play a bunch more minutes, how much more effective he would have been. I'm not sure. I didn't -- we had four or five guys that weren't the same. They just weren't the same. Our intensity level wasn't as high as theirs was. They played with more aggression overall, with more fight.

When you look at our roster -- and this is all on me. I've got to figure out a way in postseason play to get us more prepared. We had a bunch of rest this week. I thought we were pretty sharp in a couple different workouts. But Chris was pretty good, and Keith Stone was fantastic for us. And after that, we just -- in terms of our personnel, we've got to be better. We've got to play with more energy. We've got to get stops.

You know, the matchup zone gave us issues, of course, but our biggest strength is getting out in transition and scoring off of stops and scoring off of some turnovers.

Credit Arkansas. They only had six turnovers. But we couldn't finish stops with rebounds. We had 14 offensive rebounds. We never were really able to get out for long stretches on the open floor and do some damage in transition offense.

Q. Coach, how encouraging was it to see Keith come out and play as well as he did? You know, he's been a little bit up and down this season. But he looked really good tonight, really productive. What can you say about that?

MIKE WHITE: I thought he was really good. Keith was really good. He gets 22 and 24 minutes. In my mind, I'm like, damn, he had a couple more opportunities at the rim. I wish he would have finished. He goes 8 of 10. That's a pretty good sign. 4 of 5 from three. He's still growing. He's still just a sophomore. We think he's got a chance to be a very good player. For him, it's about finding that consistency.