

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 9, 2018

Rick Barnes Grant Williams Lamonte Turner Tennessee

Tennessee - 62, Mississippi State - 59

RICK BARNES: First and foremost, we hope and pray that Nick Weatherspoon is okay. I haven't heard. As a team, we're really praying for him and hope that he's okay.

As far as the game, I think Mississippi State, Ben had his team ready to play. And it was a game where at times we thought we could get control of it, but give them credit for their hard determination and making plays and staying in it and really got it down to where they got a great look to actually take the lead. We were fortunate. I think the credit really goes to them.

Q. Grant, what do you call upon to be competitive and keep playing after you see a player being taken off on a stretcher?

GRANT WILLIAMS: Typically, you understand the other team is going to come out pretty aggressive. You pray for them, and you have a moment where you have to take a step back, but it's still a game. You still have to compete. That's what you have to understand. You have to talk to your team and let them know we've got a 20-minute game left. We've got to try to get this win.

Q. Lamonte, when you get the chance late in the game to make a big play, just how comfortable do you feel in that role now? And for Grant, are you at all surprised when he steps up in that role these days?

LAMONTE TURNER: Well, I got to give credit to my team. Coach Barnes always put me in a good position, you know, calling the play or put me in the right position. I just try to do what he asks me and be aggressive. Being in that position, I'm comfortable taking shots. If I'm able to make them, then that's good too.

GRANT WILLIAMS: We understand Lamonte is really good end of games, and he's been that way throughout



the year. He's proven himself. We don't have an issue with that. We encourage it because there's times where guys aren't playing well, and we know Lamonte is able to make that shot no matter how he's playing.

Q. Coach, obviously, 33 percent is not ideal, but given the time, it's March, are you at least happy your team is able to win a game this ugly?

RICK BARNES: Yeah. We won some ugly games this year. The fact that we were able to defend, I mean, you look and they shot, they ended up shooting 35 percent, but the rebounding was the difference for us. I don't think we've outrebounded someone like that all year. We had 22 offensive rebounds, and that was the difference. We were chasing balls down, and we needed it.

Again, I think their interior defense bothered Grant. I think he was struggling with that. We had some looks early that we didn't knock down, and we were sloppy. You look at, 17 turnovers by guys that can't turn it over.

Q. Coach, you just mentioned the rebounds, but coming off that game a week ago against Mississippi State, I think you only out rebounded them in Starkville by 10. Did you see that as something you should attack a little bit more? What do you credit as the difference?

RICK BARNES: I think we shot it better down there. We had more opportunities tonight to go get some. We did miss some shots around the rim, but I think that speaks to their inside defense. There were some plays there where Lamonte, James Daniel, even, went and got four. Derrick Walker's minutes were really big. Those four offensive rebounds came at a time when we were staggering a little bit and were looking for some offense.

We know that our biggest Achilles heel all year has been rebounding. We talked about it a lot, not so much offensively where we want to go get it, but trying to do it on the defensive end.

Earlier in the game, I know they first two they got, they scored. Grant gave up one and Admiral gave up one. I think the fact we missed a lot of shots gave us a lot of opportunity to go run them down.

Q. The play where Nick Weatherspoon got hurt,

there was about 10, 12 seconds or so that elapsed between when he fell and kind of like the back and forth between when he got hurt again. Is that something where the refs absolutely should have stopped the play, or is that just something that happens in basketball where it's just bang-bang?

RICK BARNES: I think it's hard. I'll be honest with you, I didn't realize it, you know, because you're locked in. Again, I think, if someone's hurt and they're seriously hurt, yeah, I would think the game should be stopped. I do. But I think it's hard for them to do that. I think by rule they're supposed to play it and see. But once the team doesn't have an advantage, you're supposed to stop it right away.

If I remember right, when he went down, we came down, and they stole the ball. So, again, it's one of those bang-bang plays. But I think, if it would have been settled, they definitely would have stopped it is what they would do.

Q. Rick, you guys are co-champs regular season. You're in the NCAA. What do you hope motivates your guys in this event to go after it?

RICK BARNES: Well, again, there's a championship to be won. This is a great experience for these guys. We've been in a situation, what, three years ago we played in the play-in game. I think we were able to win two games. There's something to be said about having a game under your belt before you play. We never had a double bye. That was a new experience for us. After the game Saturday, first time since Christmas, our guys have had two days off back to back.

We came back and tried to have a good workout on Tuesday, but you're in a situation where you really want to give them those days to get their legs back under them. And then you say how can we stay sharp and keep those fresh legs? To be honest with you, our team hasn't been a great team after even a day off. That day off has been a tough one all year long. But we felt we had to do that.

Then we got here, and I think we'd all like to have more time in this building, but you don't get it. That's the way it is this time of year.

Hopefully, we'll be better tomorrow. The fact is we know we're getting ready to play the winner of this game. A team that -- Arkansas beat us for the first game in the regular season, and Florida they're playing great basketball right now. We know how hard that game was at our place. So right now just the fact that we're able to move on and get a shot at that should be enough in itself to be excited about.

Q. Coach, you guys came into the tournament

second in the conference in free-throw percentage and missed 11 tonight. How tough was it watching from your standpoint down the stretch knowing that your guys can usually make those free throws?

RICK BARNES: Pretty painful. It is. But it's part of the game. You can analyze it all you want. Our guys, like you said, have been pretty good at it. And there's nights when Grant Williams makes most of those shots he missed tonight, but that's part of the game. You're going to miss some shots. We defended pretty well.

That three they had was a great look for them. It was a great look. We didn't -- and it was my fault. I didn't have them set up for the press. We threw that ball away. We can't do that. We haven't been a team that's done that.

Again, 17 for 28 with key guys that normally make those just makes it tougher on you.

Q. When Nick Weatherspoon gets hurt there and your players are kind of caught up in the moment, what are you telling your players to get their head back into the basketball game after such a frustrating moment?

RICK BARNES: Well, it's tough. To be honest with you, we went through it a year ago down at Ole Miss. We were in a game like that where one of their players had to be carried off the court and had a big lead and ended up getting beat. Our guys, they went over and knelt and prayed. You never want to see that happen, but they realized too that it's going to be a basketball game. They know it. And they have respect for Mississippi State, and you know that they're going to continue to play, and they did.

You just hate to see it. I mean, you could feel it in the whole building, just the tension with it, and you hate to see it. But they were able to get locked back in. We had some chances to really get control of the game, but poor offense kept us from doing that. Just some bad turnovers. And, again, we just pray that he's okay.