

NCAA Men's 1st and 2nd

Rounds: Orlando

Saturday, March 18, 2017

Orlando, Florida



Chris Mack

Trevon Bluiett

Tyrique Jones

Kaiser Gates

J.P. Macura

Xavier Musketeers

Xavier - 91, Florida State - 66

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mack, we'll ask for you to make an opening statement.

CHRIS MACK: I don't even know where to start. I'm so excited for the guys next to me and the guys in the locker room. They earned it. Our team's gone through a lot of adversity this year, and we stayed the course. We had a meeting at the beginning of the year, and we talked about how tough of a feeling it was in St. Louis in that locker room when we lost to Wisconsin. Instead of just saying "attack", when we broke huddles, we wanted to talk about attacking and finishing. Man, we finished today.

I'm really proud of this group. The biggest thing for us going into this game today was to be able to take care of the ball, not get Florida State out in transition where they're phenomenal, and try to keep them off the glass. We've been a pretty good rebounding team all year, but we never faced the size and athleticism we saw today. We really passed the test in those two areas, and it gave us a chance to win. I thought guys played really loose on offense, and I'm really happy for these guys.

Q. Tre, this was obviously the stage in the Tournament last year where you guys went out. How much of a factor, how much were you guys thinking about the Wisconsin game and kind of using that as a motivational tool here?

TREVON BLUIETT: I don't really think necessarily we were thinking about last year other than really we've just got to finish. Like we've been preaching all year, we attack and finish. So we definitely wanted to make it out of this round, but I don't think necessarily too many people were thinking about last year.

Q. To both Tyrique and Kaiser, you guys combined to score 27 points, 17 more than your season average. Did you see something that you could exploit against Florida State, or did it just unfold like that tonight?

TYRIQUE JONES: From the jump, I just wanted to be aggressive. If I could finish around the rim, I finished. That was basically it.

KAISER GATES: Yeah, I was trying to move a lot more without the ball than I usually do. We harped a lot on that in practice, and my guys found me in open spots, and I took my open shots.

Q. For J.P., a little bit coming off of what Chris was talking about, could you just talk about the last several weeks and maybe the last month or so, just kind of overcoming the adversity you guys have undergone and just kind of the Big East Tournament run and whatnot. I think you guys are 5-1 in elimination games right now.

J.P. MACURA: That's one of the reasons I love this team because all the way down the line everybody's tough. Everybody loves to win and play hard, and I think that we showed that this past month. I'm just excited for everybody in this program that we're moving forward.

We've really got to lock in the details going forward and just continue to play hard.

Q. Tre, this question is for you: Finally got off to a good start in the first half, right? Was there a difference in your approach tonight, or was it just a matter of seeing shots fall early?

TREVON BLUIETT: I would say probably just a matter of seeing shots fall early. I didn't really do anything different, just playing hard, playing to win, and just trying to find the holes in the defense. Just kind of letting the shots come to me and just following the game plan.

Q. Question for you, Tre: Was it 21 points in the second half tonight and then 18 on Thursday? Is there something about the second half in this building that gets you going?

TREVON BLUIETT: You know, I don't know. That's funny that you say that, but the past couple of weeks,

that's kind of what's been happening. You know, I really don't know what to say to that. I just keep playing despite first half. You got to flip to the next page and just worry about winning.

Q. At one point you guys outscored their bench 21-2. For Trevon and J.P., how important is it for those guys to come off the bench and provide you that boost?

J.P. MACURA: That's the great thing about this team is we've got a lot of guys that can play, and if somebody's not stepping up, another person is.

TREVON BLUIETT: Yeah, to piggy-back off J.P., we've got everybody on the team that's a playmaker. They come in, and they affect the game in some type of way. So to be able to have that type of depth coming off the bench will really allow -- with the many players we have, is kind of critical for us.

Q. For Coach Mack, what did Florida State do well? Obviously, you blew them out tonight, but they were third in the ACC Tournament. They finished second in the regular season. Obviously they picked up a lot of wins. What did they do well as a team? What can you give them credit for?

CHRIS MACK: I don't think they played very well, to be quite honest. I think we had a lot to do with that. I think our zones affected them. Just watching them on tape over the last couple days, what was very scary to me and our staff and we tried to convey to our team was their ability to get out in transition. We just felt like we had to somehow figure out a way to box them in the half-court by not turning the ball over.

We had, I don't want to say a season low, but probably one of our season lows with nine turnovers. Not taking tough contested layups that can get blocked. Trying to get multiple paint touches.

So they didn't play their best, and I thought our guys played really loose and together and followed the game plan. There's a belief within this team that we can play with anybody when we play together and we're tough-minded, and we were today.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to let the student-athletes go back to the locker room.

Q. Chris, you called a time-out with about 90 seconds left in the game there. Was there any kind of special message you wanted to deliver?

CHRIS MACK: No. I was trying to substitute our walk-ons. That's why I was giving this signal. That's what I told the Florida State coaching staff. I know the arena boomed. I didn't mean any disrespect by it. Usually, you're allowed to substitute. They said that was the

first time out of the half called, and I didn't realize that. It automatically becomes a TV time-out.

Q. Is this the team you thought you had all along, even through the down moments?

CHRIS MACK: No. I mean, we should have had Myles Davis. We should have had Edmond Sumner. We had a kid get homesick over the summer. I told them out in the real world life is going to hand you lemons, and you can pout about it and figure out how to make lemonade. Our guys, despite all the adversity they've been hit with and the social media that tells them how bad they are and how poor they are, they stayed with it, and they believed in themselves and our coaching staff. It's a credit to them, and I'm just really proud of them.

Q. Chris, I know you talked about addressing the Wisconsin game last year with the guys. For the guys that were a part of that, do you feel like tonight put that to bed a little bit as you move forward?

CHRIS MACK: I hope so. I don't think they'll ever forget the finality that comes with losing your last game in the NCAA Tournament. I've been to 17 NCAA Tournaments as a player, assistant coach, and head coach, maybe more, and it's a hard deal to take off that uniform for the last time or address your team for the last time.

But that was the worst locker room that I'd ever been in. We had a special year, and it ended quite suddenly. I think our guys that were a part of that team really remember that. I think there's some desperation we play with because of that feeling.

Q. Coach, just how pleased are you with your defense? That zone defense held them 4-of-21 from three, and really negated their athleticism quite a bit.

CHRIS MACK: It's good for Florida State. It's not a panacea. It's not going to work every time we put it out there. But I thought it gave us the best shot to win, to try to be able to take the ball and make them stand rather than cut, get them going downhill. So it was effective for us.

We still have to get better in our man defense. We still have to get better in our zone defense. The further along you go in this tournament, the tougher teams you play.

Q. Coach, I know seeds can be misleading sometimes. This is your fourth Sweet 16 with Xavier, as a 6, as a 10, as a 6, as an 11 seed. Can it be easier sometimes when you have a team that can use being disrespected or underestimated as motivation?

CHRIS MACK: I don't think it's ever easier because you're going to play tougher teams given their regular season outcomes. But I think having a chip-on-your-shoulder mentality usually helps in sports and competitive situations. So if it's working, count us as 11 seed.

Q. Coach, could you have expected this? And like what did you see from your players today that really surprised you?

CHRIS MACK: No, I couldn't have expected it. I joke with our staff. It's the first time I put walk-ons in the game in about three months. So, no, I couldn't have expected it.

Florida State is a terrific team. They did not play their best today. That was one of the most complete games we played, and I thought our guys gained confidence, especially early in the game, by not turning the ball over, which has really plagued us, being able to handle their pressure and get some back doors, I think gave our kids confidence.

Q. Chris, even under your best-case scenario, could you imagine holding FSU to two fast-break points for 40 minutes?

CHRIS MACK: I felt they had more than that. I don't necessarily buy into that. I know we turned the ball over, and they got to the free-throw line a few times. Maybe they don't categorize them as fast-break points.

We needed to put them in the half-court as much as we could. We probably did the best job we could have given their personnel, the fact we only play seven guys, eight guys at times. So, yeah, to do that is one of the reasons that we're sitting up here with a win.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much. Congratulations.

CHRIS MACK: Thank you.