

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 15, 2019

Tony Benford Naz Reid Javonte Smart LSU

Florida-76, LSU-73

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by LSU. We will take some opening thoughts on the game from Coach Benford.

TONY BENFORD: First of all, I want to give Michael and his group credit. I thought Florida did a tremendous job. They showed a lot of resiliency throughout the game.

We came out and played, I thought my group came out and played with great energy. One of the things we wanted to do is play inside-outside, get the ball in the paint. We wanted to take advantage of our size. I thought we did that initially. The first half, I forget what it was, number of paint touches. We were very effective in the paint.

I thought in the second half, we came out a little sluggish. I give Mike and his group credit. They did a good job of executing on the offensive end. They hit some big shots. His guys I thought played really well and executed in the second half.

I'm really proud of our guys, what these guys have done this year. We're looking forward to seeing where we're going on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Javonte or Naz.

Q. Javonte, have to start with this. Do you have any knowledge of the offer that Will Wade was quoted as saying on the FBI wiretap? When did you find out you were going to play?

JAVONTE SMART: No, sir, I have nothing to do with that.

I found out this morning actually. Coach called me and told me I'd play.



Q. Javonte, what have the last few days been like for you? You're trying to get ready for a basketball game, you're not sure you're going to play, a lot of conversations going on not about basketball.

JAVONTE SMART: It's a lot on your mind. My family was behind me. My coaches and my teammates, they told me stay in there, stick in there, just keep faith in God. Always keep faith in God. He gave me the chance to come out here and help my guys. We failed today, but had a good game.

Q. Javonte, which coach told you that you were going to play? Did you feel comfortable when you got in? No nerves at all? You were ready to go?

JAVONTE SMART: Coach Benford told me this morning. When he told me, the team, I came out the elevator, the team welcomed me back. At practice the other day, we had a good practice. I was just ready to come out, help the team.

Q. Naz, the last possession when you scored a three coming out of the timeout, did you want the ball?

NAZ REID: Definitely. I felt like obviously I was shooting pretty well. I didn't want to lose the game. I was just very eager, just wanted to go out and do what we do best. I mean, unfortunately we lost.

Q. If you're going into the NCAA tournament with Coach Benford as your head coach, what can you do without Coach Wade?

JAVONTE SMART: We stay together. Coach Benford is a coach, we lost Coach Wade, but we're going to stay together, be a family. Hopefully win the whole thing.

NAZ REID: Coach Benford, he's another head coach. Going to be the same thing. I mean, we're not going to stop listening or applying the things that's been told to us. I mean, we're a basketball team. We respect him. We just want to win it all if we can.

Q. On Florida's last shot, did they just do a good job rotating the ball?

NAZ REID: Definitely. Keyontae was able to drive the ball in the paint, find Nembhard. He made the shot. He's a good player. Obviously good players are going to do things like that.

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

Q. 3:45 left, a sequence of fouls there. You get a technical. Explain what happened there.

TONY BENFORD: I forget who it was, set a pindown. Their guy kind of rose through, I think Naz kind of pushed through the screen, through the pindown defender. The ref blew his whistle, then the shot was after the whistle, I thought. Everybody around me said it was after the whistle. They counted the three. I was confused by that. Not count the shot, move on, take the ball out. I just questioned him about that.

Unfortunately I probably shouldn't have gotten the T looking back on it.

Q. I'm sure in retrospect you never wish you got a technical. 24 fouls on your team, 10 for Florida. Did that add to your frustration at that time?

TONY BENFORD: I can't get into that. We're not going to get any calls. I heard guys when there's an interim coach, you're not getting any calls. I thought they fouled, we fouled some. They got the calls, we didn't get the calls. It's part of the game.

Q. Did you sense any of that from the crowd or from people watching? You say interim head coach doesn't get that call. Was there any animosity directed at your team today?

TONY BENFORD: No. I mean, like we told our guys, I give Florida credit. Florida did a great job of executing in the second half. I mean, they played harder than we did in the second half, okay? We held them to 25 in the first half. They got 51 in the second half. I give Mike White and Florida...

They have a good team. I wish them the best of luck in the NCAA tournament. We have to go home, regroup, get ready for the NCAA tournament.

Q. Tremont almost losing the ball there with 22 seconds to go. What did you tell him to do in that situation?

TONY BENFORD: We were going to try to get a quick shot. We were down I think might have been three at that point. Told him to try to get to the rim, get a quick shot. We did finally get a timeout. Drew up a play, Naz hit a big shot for us.

Q. The big picture, the NCAA tournament, your body of work, what kind of seeding do you think you should get?

TONY BENFORD: That's a good question. I think it kind of depends on some of the other teams that are still playing out there, what they do today. You win the

SEC, regular season, I think we deserve a 2, at least. I think we've done enough work to deserve that.

You saw Saint Mary's beat Gonzaga the other night. We beat Saint Mary's on a neutral court. I think we deserve a 2 seed. These kids have gone through a lot this year, in arguably the best league in the country. We put ourselves in position where we hopefully can get a 2 seed.

Q. Personally for you, what has it been like wondering every 24 hours is Coach Wade going to be retained, fired?

TONY BENFORD: Good question. I just concentrate on the kids. That's what it gets down to. I have talked to coach. His main focus is about these kids. They've been through a lot this year with losing their brother like I've spoken about that, losing Wade. Now going through what we're going through now. These guys, they've had to grow up really fast.

They've had a lot of tremendous success this year. They've been a family, so to speak. These guys, I'm going to continue to keep the focus on these guys.

Q. What time did you find out you had Javonte? What do you tell him?

TONY BENFORD: This morning they said there was a possibility he could be available. Just told me to get him ready. I started to get him ready mentally this morning. We had our film session at 8:30 this morning. Javonte looks good, about 90%, 95%. You start preparing mentally you'll be ready to play.

I called him about 9:45, let him know he'd been cleared. He was really excited. His teammates were all on the bus, ran off the bus, were really excited he was going to be available.

He was leaving his room when I spoke with him.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.